

Taking Responsibility for Student Learning

Ask a school faculty if they believe kids can learn, and the answer will likely be a unified and confident yes.

But then some educators will start to qualify their response with if's: "Yes, all kids can learn . . . if the students want to learn . . .if the parents are supportive. . .if our school had more resources . . . if the district, state and national policymakers would stop hampering our efforts." Too often, the "if's" are all conditions beyond the school's control, conditions that ultimately release the educators from responsibility for their students learning.

There is no question factors outside of the schools control impact student learning, and it is understandable why educators feel like victims due to these parental, societal, economic, and political realities. In light of these factors, is it fair for educators to hold themselves responsible for student learning? Frankly, yes! If a student attends a school from kindergarten through high school and still cannot read, who should be held accountable? Was it the child's responsibility- are children expected to teach themselves to read? Was it the parent's responsibility – are parents expected to be credentialed teachers?

Some blame the schools lack of resources. However, there are schools with extremely limited resources operating under similar state, provincial, and national regulation that have successfully taught their students to read. As a profession, we have almost four decades of effective schools research by Ron Edmonds, Larry Lezotte, Wilber Brookover, Michael Rutter, and others that prove conclusively that all children can learn when provided effective teaching. In *What Works in Schools*, Robert Marzano (2003) state that an analysis of research conducted over a thirty-five year period demonstrates that highly effective schools produce results that almost entirely overcome the effects of student background. In spite of this overwhelming evidence, some schools continue to act on effective beliefs—beliefs that are in direct conflict with the facts.

Our purpose is neither to blame not to challenge motives or integrity of educators. Yet until we are willing to examine and acknowledge that our

traditional assumptions and beliefs about our work are outdated and detrimental to the challenges we face today, we will never get better results for our students. This honest conversation begins when an organization asks itself, **are we here to teach, or are we here to ensure that our students learn?**

Many teachers believe it is their job to provide their students the opportunity to learn. This teacher-focused philosophy is best captured by the common school mantra “It is the teacher’s job to teach, and the student job to learn.” A **teacher-focused view** believes that its responsibility for student learning ends once the child has been given the opportunity to learn the first time. But a **learning-focused teacher** understands that the school was not built so that teacher has a place to teach; it was built so that the children of the community have a place to learn.