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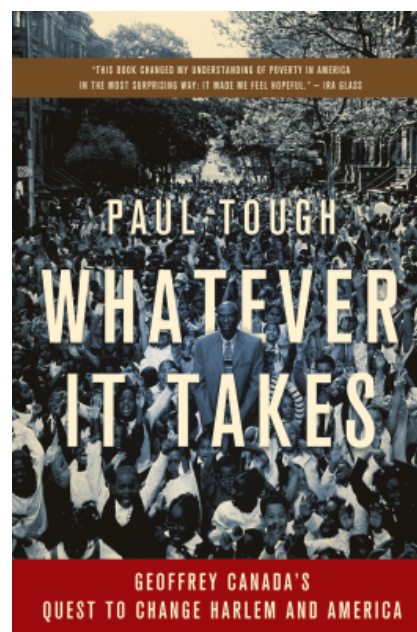
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Tough, Paul (2008). *Whatever It Takes: Geoffrey Canada's Quest to Change Harlem and America*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

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Whatever It Takes is perhaps the most vivid description of child poverty in urban America in recent years. To his credit, Paul Tough does not sensationalize poverty but gives it its proper place in discussing how it impacts the lives of children growing up in Harlem. Though Tough has been a voice on issues of educational import to our nation (Tough 2004, 2006, 2007, 2008a, 2008b, 2009), it is in this book that one gets to understand the depth and breadth of his knowledge and the man who is the centerpiece of his treatise. In *Whatever It Takes*, Tough candidly writes about the fact that poverty is a political issue, a social issue, a personal issue, an ideological issue, and a national issue. Chronicling the work of Geoffrey Canada, the man whose dream is to rebuild Harlem by educating its children to insure



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the neighborhood's future, Tough allows the reader to glean an understanding of the motives behind one man's efforts to save a neighborhood and a nation. In order to save the families of Harlem and the neighborhood itself, Canada has an ambitious plan to insure that each child who enrolls in the Promise Academy—one of several Harlem School Zone institutions designed to support academics—will graduate from high school, attend and graduate from college and return to Harlem to continue the life-changing efforts they themselves have received.



Geoffrey Canada & Paul Tough

Through this chronicle, Tough tells of Canada's beliefs that through early intervention and committed educators, poverty does not have to be an anathema; that by providing parents with the necessary parenting skills and students with the kinds of educational experiences that middle class parents provide their children, one can raise oneself from poverty and become a major part of the solution to eliminating poverty locally and nationally. If indeed the Harlem Children's Zone with its Promise Academy Schools and early intervention programming is able to create the changes Canada proposes, it will be the first successful, comprehensive enterprise of its kind. The educational services provided will make it possible for thousands of urban poor to gain an education and become contributing citizens of their country.

Few would doubt the importance of such work, and it is the tenacity of both Tough and Canada that have to be acknowledged. In remaining faithful to their prospective goals, each attempts to shed light on the most important issues facing schools of this era: Why is it not possible for minority children to receive a quality education? Why do race and class determine the quality of education one receives? And finally, what roles do parents need to play in their child's education? These are the issues under investigation in *Whatever It Takes*. To what degree the Harlem Children's Zone tackles these issues is what *Whatever It Takes* endeavors to explain through chronicling the work of Canada. In addition, it attempts to examine the effectiveness of the programs by documenting the impact

the programs have on changing the lives of the children and families who enroll in and graduate from Promise Academy, and as they enter and graduate from post-secondary institutions.

Whatever It Takes breaks up Tough's report of Canada's vision into 11 chapters. Chapter 1, titled "The Lottery," gives the audience a bit of personal history about Canada, background about the Harlem Children's Zone, and the non-profit's board members who support Canada's mission to improve the lives of Harlem's poor, while also transforming the neighborhood. In order to understand Canada's mission, Tough has to understand Canada's thinking. Canada hopes to inculcate an atmosphere of excellence, by impressing upon both the parents whose children enter and those who do not gain entrance that demands will be made and expectations will be high, because Promise Academy's goal of educating all its students is a formidable one.

In Chapter 2 titled "Unequal Childhoods," Tough provides an extensive review of the literature on the issues of poverty and achievement. He discusses at length the work of many of the thinkers who have influenced the discussion and the policy around poverty. Tough acknowledges that Annette Lareau's work provides the most comprehensive look at poverty using a systematic approach. In her 1992 research that looks at the role of culture in determining parenting practices, her study's findings indicated that parenting practices were a good indication of later life success as defined by educational attainment and social mobility. In addition, her research showed that parents from the different socio-economic classes engaged in culturally specific practices. It is Lareau's extensive research and advancements in neuroscience that give credibility to Canada's claims for understanding and explaining achievement, and in establishing the basic tenets of Canada's thinking about education and the role of parenting in a child's cognitive development.

In Chapter 3, "Baby College," Tough offers an in depth description of its intentions, its participants, its curriculum, its challenges, its successes, and also discusses the lack of

evidence to support anecdotal claims of Baby College making a difference in the lives of children raised in poverty. What Baby College attempts to do is put into practice the work of brain development with the expertise of pediatrician, T. Berry Brazelton, to develop a curriculum that would serve as the cornerstone curriculum for Promise Academy parents and a bridge out of poverty. Drawing on Canada's experience as a parent and historical evidence of the success of similar programs, Tough details the experiences, feelings, and concerns of parents who attend, dropout of, and complete the most important parenting task that will impact their child's life. By completing the program, it is the hope that parents will acquire the needed skills and that the Baby College curriculum will become the panacea that supports the major premise of the Harlem Children's Zone. In Canada's view, if you educate the community, it will transform; so block by block, child by child, and family by family, Canada intends to draw a safety net around Harlem so tight so as to not lose a single child, and to infuse the community with the hope and promise of transformation.

Canada calls the process of this transformation "Contamination." In Chapter 4, Tough does a wonderful job of weaving the racial history of our country with Canada's coming of age. Tough narrates the story meticulously, sharing comments, photos, and a personal history of how Canada emerges from poverty to how Canada envisions his emergence and that of Harlem's. Canada believes that if you make contagious the ideas, habits, and behaviors that are operating in middle class families around the country and draw on the research findings of Lareau's work and the innovations of neuroscience, he can transform Harlem's youth; and consequently, this contamination will spread and ultimately transform Harlem itself. Canada states that he is a product of the contamination even though it was accidental, but if, as Canada asserts, contamination is intentional, transformation is inevitable. It is this intentional thinking and doing that drives every adjustment, every move, every waking moment, and every decision Canada makes to bring about real observable and quantifiable change to the

ninety-seven blocks that comprise the Harlem Children's Zone.

The Promise Academy Schools and complementary programs of the Harlem Children's Zone are testing grounds upon which Canada's contamination theory must prove itself viable. In the age of accountability, there is no more accepted means than through state-mandated high-stakes standardized testing. Tough, in Chapter 5 titled "Battle Mode," discusses the philosophical difference between faculty and Canada when it comes to teaching and learning. Canada subscribes to measuring learning by the passing state standardized tests. Tough highlights these differences as they play out between Canada and the middle school principal, both of whom are Harvard School of Education graduates. At odds with how the teaching should occur, Tough makes the distinction perfectly clear when he opens the chapter with a teacher whose demeanor is that of a drill sergeant's and whose job is to raise test scores in math. One is correct in assuming Canada values the bottom line, and the principal values relationships. Perhaps at no other point yet in the book is Tough's title more revealing than in Canada's rationale for proceeding with test preparation as he does. More, more, more is his battle cry; and students, exhausted from the constant preparation, begin to drop out, show slow improvement, and for some, even lose ground. This chapter demonstrates above all else that a one-prong approach is not sufficient to address the myriad of economic and social issues that accompany our children to school. When the test results get published and the performance of Promise Academy shows some, but not enough improvement, Canada has to rethink how to run its middle school.

Tough, in Chapter 6 titled "Bad Apples," positions the audience so as to gain insights into the decision-making process Canada undertakes to maintain control of his dream for Promise Academy and the Harlem Children's Zone. With conflict between administration and his school board brewing, Canada is placed in a position of powerlessness and faces the imminent possibility of losing control of his school to KIPP, a charter school working with poor, urban youth.

Speaking candidly and openly with Tough, Canada disagrees with the “quarantine approach” KIPP schools employ in educating poor children, a view Canada believes KIPP schools adhere to by allowing students to self-select.

To add to the problem of disappointing tests results is the paradigm war that wages between Canada and his middle school principal who believes that as well-intentioned as Canada’s mission is, it is impossible to realize the kinds of gains in achievement needed to insure 100% of the student population be college ready and eventually become, college graduates. However, it is Canada’s thinking that no matter what a child’s circumstances or behavior, she /he is capable of learning. Unfortunately, there are those students who are opposed to learning, and it is their behavior that is negatively impacting the majority of the middle school students’ standardized test performance. Because the middle school students’ inability to show adequate improvement, the middle school principal is fired and a new KIPP trained principal is hired whose job is to whip all the “bad apples” into shape. Canada discovers that he has 12 to 18 month to replicate the results charter schools working with similar student populations experience.

With Canada receiving an ultimatum from the board and with the question of control looming over him, Tough continues his chronicle of the challenges Promise Academy faces in light of the firing of the middle school principal and its expected fallout, staff resignations. With the arrival of the new middle school principal, Tough, in Chapter 7, “Last Chance,” makes a point of re-articulating the concerns of the previous middle school principal as the new principal assumes his duties and responsibilities. Immediately incorporating KIPP style practices, such as calling student who have been labeled trouble-makers for a meeting and sending communiqués to their parents, expecting certain of behaviors from his students, the new principal puts both parents and students on notice that there will be changes, and that unless students and parents shape up, they will be shipped out, acknowledging that parents in addition to students have a role to play in each child’s success. But in spite of all the preparation, Tough notes that one ingredient

is missing in the grand plan, that of caring relationships. Though Canada's efforts in Harlem display a tremendous amount of care and concern, it is primarily experienced outside of the formal classroom. And as the next round of middle school testing arrives, Canada realizes this is indeed his "last chance" to save the Promise Academy Middle School.

In another telling conversation with Tough, Canada acknowledges that perhaps starting with a middle school class was not the brightest of ideas, but he explains his reasons for doing so even though the test results are not what he'd hoped. Canada states, for example, that he did not want to leave middle school students without an opportunity to be supported, acknowledging that if you don't invest in middle school students now, it's too late in high school. Also, Canada wanted to part with the practices that have been typical of how charter schools conduct themselves by starting out with certain grade levels and adding additional grades as students are promoted. However, in the next chapter titled "The Conveyor Belt," Tough describes the logic and hope for the Harlem Children's Zone process that Canada, from his previous work, has been theorizing about for decades.

In Chapter 8, Tough explains the notions behind Canada's 'conveyor belt' theory. What the conveyor belt permits is a systematic way of intervening early in a child's life to improve the probability of Harlem children being prepared for learning upon entering kindergarten. Baby College, Gems, and other programs are all intended to give every newborn baby the best possible opportunity to be successful. Canada is of the opinion that this is the only way to make the kinds of drastic changes Harlem children and families need to improve the prospects of their community and to close the achievement gap forever. Tough contextualizes Canada's theory within the framework of compelling research findings by Nobel Laureates and experts in the field to make a case for Canada's ideas. If Canada's claims are correct, then indeed, what will it require of leadership and faculty to make them a reality? According to Canada, it will require a sustained effort, an investment in

financial and human resources, and faculty and administrative “buy-in”.

Another notion of Canada’s which is essential to understanding the logic grounding Promise Academy is addressed in Chapter 9, “Escape Velocity.” Canada relays a story to Tough to illustrate his point about the pull of gravity, relating his story to poverty and its seemingly endemic nature. Canada asks: Up to what point would the velocity of an object have to get before it could break free from the Earth’s gravitational pull? The elementary school principal, realizing soon that Canada will direct his attention to him and the elementary school, sets out on an ambitious project to see exactly what would happen if accelerated preparation for high-stakes testing for the third graders started a year early.

The elementary school principal, drawing on his previous experience with and knowledge of testing, reasons that if you give students exposure to the test material and re-create testing conditions, then students will be sufficiently prepared and less impaired by the test content and conditions to perform well. Consequently, following a regimen of teaching, testing, supporting students individually, and retesting them, the third graders begin their journey to prove that “escape velocity” is possible. Though 100% of the third graders do not pass the state standardized tests, enough do to show that accelerated efforts can yield positive results, demonstrating that acceleration can overcome the pull of poverty, unpreparedness, and skepticism.

Though the elementary school test scores are impressive and the middle school test scores show improvement, Tough writes in Chapter 10 of Canada’s decision to discontinue the high school, leaving families and students in the lurch. In “Graduation,” Tough deftly captures the emotional timbre of the students and their families and Canada upon announcing his decision. With discontent from the board growing, Canada acquiesces to their wishes, allowing KIPP leadership to be installed. Canada conveys to Tough that though he is distraught and disappointed, all is not lost.

In an effort to secure places for Promise Academy Middle School students, Tough reports that all resources are brought to bear to make sure each student gets placed in their preferred high school. And even though test scores show improvement, parents and students are left to ponder just how much improvement is enough. The Promise Academy Middle School students graduate and enter the public high school classrooms of New York City. Canada shares his concerns with Tough that unless sustained efforts are made, these students could possibly be drawn back by the pull of poverty into a life of hopelessness and lack of opportunity.

In the final chapter which plays on the book's title "What would it take?," Tough revisits Baby College graduates to see just how that experience is informing their parenting practices. Tough shares the hopes of Cheryl and Victor, teen-age parents who recently gave birth to a son, Victor, Jr. Both tell of how they are using the information they learned from Baby College to raise him. Both feel that Baby College has given their son a better chance for success than they had. Reading, visits to the library and cultural/recreational experience are common-place experiences for Victor, Jr., and though their lives are nowhere near perfect, they do possess the hope that transformation is possible.

The Harlem Children's Zone is amassing the kind of data about both its programs and students that will give it considerable influence in discussions on education and poverty. With the various services that the Harlem Children Zone provides, Canada has hopes of systematically improving the lives of Harlem's youth. Tough in this final installment examines up close the growing influence and preeminence of Canada as an educational advocate and pragmatist. Realizing that the Harlem Children's Zone won't be able to service all of the families of Harlem, Canada has also created after-school programs to address this reality based on his work at Rheedlen. And though Harlem is showing signs of the "contamination" that Canada expects his programs and services to deliver, heroic measures in the form of TRUCE are still required if poverty and the achievement gap are to be eliminated. Tough communicates

Canada's understanding and aspirations of the need for commitment by government and the private sector to change the lives of Victor, Victor Jr., and millions of children. What is needed, Tough explains, is the collective will to do what should be done.

Whatever It Takes is a well-crafted examination of the history, research, politics, and the policies implemented to address the ever-growing disparity in this country between children living in poverty and children living in wealth. One can understand clearly the reasoning behind the practices that undergird the Harlem Children's Zone, but for all the things that are being done right and the intentional nature by which they are being executed, this reviewer has major concerns about the all out focus on improving test scores when so much research points to questions about their validity and reliability when measuring learning.

With our government's recent foray into education with the No Child Left Behind Act (2002) and its focus on high-stakes testing, educators spend less time teaching curriculum and more time testing and teaching to the test, leaving little time for meaningful learning (A Nation at Risk (ANAR) 1983; Kohn 2000; Ravitch 2010) which *Whatever It Takes* indicates. This practice negatively impacts students because student scores become more highly valued than learning (Berliner 2008; Kohn 2000). Continuing, Kohn (2000) states in *The Case Against Standardized Testing: Raising the Scores, Ruining the Schools*, "[t]ests have lately become a mechanism by which public officials, [or for that matter, private investors] can impose their will on schools, and they are doing so with a vengeance" (p. 2). In addition, Kohn contends that these results send the message that our children, schools and teachers are failing. Moreover, Kohn maintains that standardized tests are not objective and can never be objective simply because an individual or a group of individuals determine their content based on their own biases and preferences. By casting schools in such an unfavorable light, Kohn goes on to say that this paves "the way for the privatization of education" (p. 2). It is with this backdrop in place that NCLB received such enormous support for passage.

One cannot help but read Kohn's (2000) *The Case Against Standardized Testing: Raising the Scores, Ruining the Schools* and come away with great concerns about how our schools are being run like businesses. With business becoming more and more involved in how education is being provided in terms of high-stakes testing and advancing a business model, one must wonder if public education is indeed public anymore, especially when it comes to charter school education which our current Secretary of Education seems to wholeheartedly endorse (A Blueprint for Reform: The Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act 2010). Proponents of NCLB see site-based management, school choice, high-stakes testing, and merit pay as tools for improving the quality of teaching and learning that occurs in our schools. What proponents do not see is that doing so creates a different kind of ghettoization of education in this country in the guise of choice which promotes charter education over public schools and accountability, which measures learning via standardized test scores.

In an article by David Berliner (2008) entitled "Why Rising Test Scores May Not Equal Increased Learning," many of the concerns this reviewer has regarding the focus on testing are highlighted. Berliner points to the increased findings of schools cheating to improve outcomes as a worrisome problem, serving as a caveat to the total embrace of testing as a valid or reliable measure of learning. Another point Berliner makes is that because test creation is an expensive undertaking, companies that supply them do not create new test regularly; consequently, these tests are susceptible to yielding results based not on a student's knowledge but to a student's familiarity with the test. And a final issue, which this reviewer feels is the most important, is that when schools place testing at the center of curriculum, there is a natural narrowing of that curriculum in the service of improved test scores. Research shows that students are not learning more, but are being taught less (ANAR; Berliner 2008; Kohn 2000; Ravitch 2010). So the question for our nation remains: What's the point of testing? Is it to improve learning for our most fragile student populations,

or is it about our moral compass as a nation? Both are worthy of our complete investment of time and resources, if what we want as a nation is a betterment of life for all. Clearly, Canada's work is textured with various other curricular exposures, but if test scores are to be the sole measure of improvement, they are problematic. To add to this reviewer's consternation is the fact that most children from impoverished background rarely return once they leave their roots. This primary variable, which assumes that contamination will take place because Harlem Promise Academy graduates will return, makes problematic any definitive claim of the community's ability to transform itself.

There is no doubt in my mind that Canada believes the Harlem Children's Zone can be the answer for educating children in poverty, and as an educator, I applaud his ingenuity and perseverance. However, Canada makes an assumption that has yet to be realized which is that individual, institutional, and societal racism will end when poverty is eradicated. From the premise that Canada is purporting, it is my understanding that Canada claims that an education will guarantee you social mobility. Although there is clearly a correlation between educational attainment and economic opportunity, in our current economic times such guarantees are erroneous and irresponsible.

Unfortunately, there are no guarantees that opportunities will exist; nor are there guarantees that each and every child who graduates from Promise Academy will attend college, graduate and return to Harlem. My experience with students who have gained an education is that few, if any, return to their homes to begin their careers and build their lives. It will take more than the efforts of one man and one plan to make educational attainment and equal access to opportunities possible. The question now is: What are federal, state, and local governments willing to do? Tough in *Whatever It Takes* provides one possible blueprint for action.

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