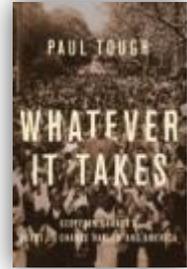




Whatever It Takes: Geoffrey Canada's Quest to Change Harlem and America **by Paul Tough**



Whatever It Takes traces the birth and evolution of the Harlem Children's Zone, an innovative project to lift children out of economic and educational poverty in one of America's most challenging urban environments. The goal of the Children's Zone is to put every child in Harlem on the path to college graduation through programs from Baby College (where expecting parents learn basic skills for raising successful children) to the Promise Academy elementary school program to tutoring and after-school programs for high school students. The book also follows the life of the charismatic Geoffrey Canada, a Harlem native who created and continues to oversee the Children's Zone and dreams of giving every child in his home community the tools they need to succeed just like the kids "downtown."

Discussion Questions

1. How replicable is the Harlem Children's Zone model? Can such a program work without a leader like Geoffrey Canada?
2. Canada runs his schools like a business: focused on efficiency, incentives, and results. Does this model make sense? Why or why not?
3. Can the "conveyer belt" model help solve the others issues facing children in Harlem (such as gun/gang violence, drug use and poverty)?
4. How does the HCZ model (a business-like, public/private partnership with a focus on test scores) fit into broader education reform? Does this model fit *your* notions of reform?
5. Canada seems to have all the resources he needs to create and implement the Children's Zone. What can be done when this is *not* the case?
6. Is it possible to get to 'escape velocity' with a piecemeal approach to education reform and urban development?
7. How does this educational model relate to our concerns over separate of church and state and school vouchers?
8. The book balances two strategies to lifting kids out of poverty: the superhero and conveyer belt strategies. How do these sometimes conflicting mentalities compare/contrast to our ideals of *tikkun olam*?
9. The Children's Zone is a community-based and community-specific model for reform. How does this relate to the community organizing work being done in many of our congregations?
10. After reading this book, do you believe there is a role for individuals in education reform? Why or why not? What is that role?

TAKE ACTION!

- **Get involved!** Start a congregation-wide effort to take action on local education issues – from building school libraries to advocating for free lunch programs. Visit the RAC's Program Bank for great ideas: <http://resources.rj.org/rac/eduassis>
- **Sign up** for the RAC's Legislative Action Center Advocacy Alerts and stay informed of pressing legislative issues related to education, church-state issues and more! <http://action.rac.org/signup>
- **Adopt-a-Classroom:** Support area teachers and students by providing financial and moral support. www.adoptaclassroom.org



Additional Resources

- Learn more about the **Harlem Children's Zone**: www.hcz.org.
- **Fighting Poverty with Faith:** An interfaith campaign, led by the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, to lift all Americans out of poverty: <http://fightingpovertywithfaith.com>
- **Read President Obama's plan** to fight poverty in America: <http://www.barackobama.com/pdf/issues/FactSheetPoverty.pdf>
- **Half in Ten:** A campaign convened by the Center for American Progress, the Leadership Conference, and the Coalition on Human Needs working to cut poverty in half in ten years. <http://halfinten.org>