

Foreword

By Linda Lambert, author of *Building Leadership Capacity* (ASCD). She is a former Professor and Director of the Center for Educational Leadership at California State University, Harywood (CSUH).

Today's educators live in a time of "choosing urgency." We choose urgency over reason and knowledge; we choose urgency over what we know is best for children. These choices are often served up pre-packaged, on one-size-fits-all plates. Curriculum is narrowed, especially for poor, urban children. Test content becomes the curriculum. Decontextualized memorization replaces thoughtful instruction. Short-term jumps in standardized test scores mask the lack of true learning, until two years down the road, when scores level out and then begin to decline.

Why make such choices? Political pressure on state legislatures? The tenure of school boards and superintendents? A Deep lack of understanding of what constitutes learning accountability? A last-ditch fight for the survival of public schooling? Perhaps all of the above. Educators are being held "accountable," but we are not holding ourselves "responsible." Accountability conjures up an "outside in" process, and responsibility is more likely an "inside out" process. Like knowledge, when responsibility is generated from within, from the learner and the community, it is collective and it attends to *real* learning and *real* evidence rather than fleeting numbers.

In this book Anne Conzemius and Jan O'Neill blaze a path to educational responsibility – to *shared* responsibility for student learning. Shared responsibility, the authors tell us, occurs when school staffs identify what they mean by "success" and understand that to achieve success is to truly make a difference in children's lives. Staff members learn through change, thereby committing themselves to the outcomes. And this learning takes place as the result of common *focus*, *collaboration*, and *reflection*; leadership becomes a matter of shared responsibility because leadership is purposeful learning together in a community.

Fortunately for educators, Conzemius and O'Neill do more than tell us about the journey toward shared responsibility for student learning: In this remarkable little book, they show us how it is done, and thus provide a guiding beacon of sanity through the dark sea of turbulent accountability schemes. Their conceptual framework for building shared responsibility creates a dynamic complexity among three critical elements: focus, collaboration, and reflection. The authors use stories, examples, tools, and strategies to help us understand the work at a deep level and to encourage us to leverage the examples and tools into substantive knowledge.

Many educators today report feeling overwhelmed. Our world is fragmented by too many demands and initiatives and little clarity about what's important. We are being asked to do it all. *Focus* is the way of thinking that brings core values, mission, and vision to life and keeps them as the centerpiece of our professional lives. Focus helps us brush away the less meaningful in pursuit of the meaningful, the irrelevant in pursuit of the most relevant.

The authors describe *reflection* as "the use of data for improvement," and they tell us it can and should become a habit of mind. What does this really mean? When we habitually reflect, both personally and in collaboration with others, we internalize the essential questions of professional practice. Reflection enables us to test our assumptions and create distance from the urgent in order

to discover the important. Such habits require the democratization of data – it must be discovered, brought to the open, and shared for all to consider.

Focus and reflection are upheld by *collaboration*. "Without collaboration," the authors insist, "our knowledge goes unleveraged, our data unused." Further, they point out that the collaboration is skillful work and is situated in interdependent relationships. "It is about creating an environment – through structures, systems, processes, and policies – where everyone contributes skills, knowledge, and experience to continuously improve student learning." The puzzled observer is quick to realize that this kind of work does not come naturally to educators. Prepared to teach children, we have not found it easy to translate our good instructional skills into leadership skills with adults. Once again, the authors describe the work to be done, provide rich examples, and sketch the evolution of collaborative groups.

They also address "SMART goals," those improvement-minded outcomes we focus on, reflect in, and collaborate about. SMART goals are sensible, specific, doable, and based on data and best professional judgment. Success with SMART goals leads to teacher efficacy and student learning. What's more, these goals stimulate our appetite for success – a yearning best satisfied by experience with success itself.

There is a robust movement underway to separate leadership from leader – to recast leadership as a broad cultural concept distinguished from role, position, and the discrete set of skills of an individual. This view of leadership allows those who have abdicated natural leadership roles to see themselves and their values reflected in a process that encompasses purpose, learning, and responsibility. The most frequently asked question I hear about leadership capacity is this: "We know what our schools look like now, and we know how we want them to look, but how do we get there?" Conzemius and O'Neill show us a promising path.

No tribute is more honoring than to have talented authors take your work to a new level of complexity and application. The authors have accomplished that deed by showing persuasively that enhanced leadership capacity is the outcome of the shared responsibility framework. The educators whose voices we hear in this book have accepted responsibility for student learning, and in

doing so, they have discovered that they are leaders.

Building Shared Responsibility for Student Learning is broad and it is deep. It begins with a rich conceptual framework, then expands to tell the stories and share the examples of real schools as they do the work of building shared responsibility. Throughout, the authors present graphic tools, artifacts, assessments, and exercises that enable us to walk away with a profound and comprehensive understanding of what it means to build shared responsibility. Through an artful weaving of significant research, the felt voices of educators, and practical examples and tools, Anne Conzemius and Jan O'Neill have brought together in a new way the best of what is known today.

Wisdom in the field of education is a commodity in great demand and short supply. I am optimistic that when educators read this wise book, fewer districts will choose the current road of urgency, and more will realize that we have in ourselves the power to find the Holy Grail all educators and communities seek: deep learning for all children within a sensible time frame.

