

Short on power, long
on responsibility by
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Teachers mold the minds of the young, the future leaders and citizens who would determine the fate of the country and the world. At a crucial stage in their development individuals are entrusted to the care and education of these professionals who were trained to ensure that the young grow up well in all aspects. However, in spite the exposure to proper education, communities still produce deviants and semi-literate grown-ups. The question is: who is to blame for this? The concern has become more pronounced today more than ever after evaluation tests among elementary and high school students show that more and more Americans are becoming functionally illiterate and the overall averages on basic aptitude tests like English, Science and Math are becoming lower than in previous years.

It has become easy to point a finger at the quality of the teachers and their teaching as the main reason for this decline. But should they really take the blame? Ingersoll's article " Short on Power, Long on Responsibility" (2007) posits the opinion that maybe it is unfair and simplistic to put the blame on teachers. The author identifies the report Nation at Risk released in 1983 as that which focused the spotlight on teachers as the cause for the poor performance of students in schools today. The teacher factor is also identified as contributory to other social problems like teenage pregnancy, crime and juvenile delinquency, and a decline of morals and culture among youngsters.

Those who hold the view that teachers are the cause of the problems exhibited by students believe that schools do not hold teachers accountable enough. Teachers do whatever they want behind the closed doors of their classrooms. They lack the necessary knowledge, preparation and

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competence to teach. The solution to the problem, therefore, is to improve aspects related to the teaching ability of the teacher like conducting more rigorous teacher and school evaluations, standardized curriculum, more teacher training, and stringent teacher selection processes.

However, Ingersoll says that although teachers do have responsibilities to fulfill, the very prescriptions enumerated above will not actually do much to solve the illness in the educational system today. " The accountability perspectives often overlook how schools themselves contribute to the teacher quality problem (Ingersoll, 2007). " The truth is, according to the article, the main contributory factor to the problems is the fact that teachers do not have control over key decisions in the school and this, in turn, do not allow him to fulfill the very responsibilities that would have made the difference. There is an imbalance between the amounts of responsibilities that teachers are expected to handle and the power by which they can perform them. For instance, teachers do not usually have control over the formulation of behavioral and disciplinary policies.

When they want to remove a disruptive student from class, they have to mind their administrators and sometimes undergo paperwork for this simple request. Their personal strengths and weaknesses are not considered in assigning of teaching loads. They cannot complain about class size or the subjects they are requested to teach by the principal or coordinator, they cannot evaluate their administrators, and they have to follow the rules imposed by the administrators even when it comes to punishing students who were caught cheating. They do not choose the textbooks or help design the curriculum. They also shell out money for materials because the school

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would not have a budget for this. Ingersoll compares teachers to “ men and women in the middle...caught between the contradictory demands and needs of two groups (2007).

They have to teach, discipline and control students but at the same time, they have to follow guidelines set by their administrators which usually conflicts with their classroom needs. When teachers are the usual suspects for anything wrong with the educational system, here is an article which takes a look at the other side of the finger-pointing happening today. It is important to give voice to this differing but plausible argument because for a long time, the actual concern of teacher are being disregarded in favor of the administrators who have always been talking in their behalf. Administrators may be former teachers but they are usually lost in the nature and the demands of their new positions that they tend to forget how it is like to actually hold and control a class. Furthermore, new policies in education have favored the students more, so much so that it has become difficult to teach them and ask them to learn. They are being given so much leeway and coddled to the point that some teachers have felt helpless, demoralized and unable to assert their authority in the classroom.

A concern that could arise if teachers were given more power to control the operations of a school congruent to the amount of responsibilities appropriated to them is the contention that they may abuse this authority. Yet, the truth is that, teachers are more sincere and dedicated towards performing well and ensuring the good education of their learners than they are being given credit for. They are not the incompetent and cruel

tormentors that popular media project them to be. They are not enemies of
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students. Disciplining kids today has just become harder because young people are being encouraged to complain and assert every right they have in the name of democracy while teachers are not being given the same level of power to impose upon their assertive students.

Teaching is a job that does not compensate adequately the efforts required to perform the job effectively therefore those who choose to engage in this profession are not there so much for the money. This is what most critics fail to see.