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# Introduction

## Learning: The Center of the Educational Universe

This is a book about learning and the journey of one teacher, Bonnie Dawkins, who sought to make an intentional change in her teaching through implementing the Let Me Learn (LML) System in her classroom. Bonnie’s experiences and those of her students recounted in this book are taken from a research base (Dawkins, 2008), as are the theory and processes of *Let Me Learn* (C. Johnston, 1996). However, this book translates those research bases into an educator friendly style avoiding the feel of an “academic” text while providing references for those who wish to dig more deeply.

## Theme and Context

Why the focus on learning? In the context of current education in the United States, learning is *assumed* central to the enterprise. Assumed is the operative word. By comparison to curriculum, teaching, standards, and assessment—all of which stress content—the *process* of learning is little addressed and little understood. The typical title for the academic departments that prepare teachers remains: curriculum and instruction. Attempts to raise scores on high-stakes state tests typically emphasize content and teaching techniques: not learning, not student learning, and not teacher learning.

The authors of this book make learning explicit and central, rather than assumed, because improving our schools and their outcomes will not occur without concentrated focus on what is the under-attended foundation of all educative efforts.

## Bonnie's Experience of Change (Bob's Perspective)

School is starting. For Bonnie it brings great anticipation; she begins a huge personal project, a year focused on how she learns and students learn, a year for changing herself and her teaching practice. She intends to implement LML with fidelity, to become keenly learning-centered amid a school culture focused on teaching subject content, not learning. In most chapters, this final section pays central attention to Bonnie rather than her students. It attends to the internal experience of a successful veteran teacher implementing LML.

In this first analysis, I want to focus on the effect of school culture. Throughout the book, the culture of the classroom is the analytical lens used to understand Bonnie's engagement in change. Culture experienced in classrooms has been amazingly stable for decades (Lortie, 1975). Its large function is to preserve social stability. But in providing stability, culture becomes a great change resistor. Further, culture's most powerful change resistant element is invisible, tacit assumptions, assumptions we cannot easily verbalize, yet they dwell deep within us at a subconscious level and guide our observable actions (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004).

When Bonnie works to implement LML, she struggles against tacit cultural assumptions. She struggles with herself because existing culture is in her, and to change, she must work against herself to replace old assumptions with new ones. For example, "The teacher works always to be in charge and control," is a primary school culture assumption. But a primary assumption of LML is "The teacher works to have learners take responsibility and control for their own learning." The assumptions are clearly antithetical. As Bonnie works to change, she feels the tug-of-war of assumptions, internal tension, and struggle because real change always entails a degree of wrestling and awkwardness. You will see the previous example and others played out in this section in future chapters.

Bonnie and you will share this journey if you elect to implement the LML Process. There is tension. To hide this is dishonest. To include it runs the risk of turning you away. But for those who persist in the pursuit, transparency provides a touchstone to let you know you are not crazy; you are not lost. This is part of the journey.

Bonnie does make it—and well. "I learned more that year than in all prior years combined. It was the turning point in my professional practice. I became the teacher I aspired to be."

In reading further, ask yourself, *What is it about LML that supported Bonnie's change and success?*