
Foreword

The relatively recent attention in educational research to the *micropolitics* of schools—to which the authors have made a major contribution—has opened up new possibilities for exploring what Hoyle (1986) refers to as “the dark side of organizational life” in schools and school districts (p. 87). Rational approaches to organizational life tend to overlook micropolitics altogether or treat it as an inevitable but minor aspect of school life. In this book, Blase and Blase take up a dimension of the underside of organizational life that is not only ignored, but, as they convincingly argue, is often responsible for poor schools. Just as abusive teachers cannot preside over a caring and rigorous classroom, abusive principals cannot foster the kind of caring learning communities schools require to be successful. Furthermore, as the authors point out, an abusive principal is more likely to foster abusive teachers. Principals’ abuse has a ripple effect that impacts not only teachers, but their colleagues and students as well as their relationships with friends and family.

However, as important as the implications of this book are for school improvement and student achievement, its most powerful contribution is its thick description of the behaviors abusive principals engage in and the multiple ways abuse affects individual teachers. Anyone who has experienced an abusive organizational environment will find this book cathartic. While many of us have learned to recognize the signs of abuse in marriages and families, with the exception of sexual abuse, workplace abuse has gone largely unexamined. This book will help teachers identify those behaviors that they may have come to tolerate because they have failed to view them as abusive, and this book will help school administrators recognize their own potentially destructive behaviors.

Perhaps more disturbing to some of these teachers than the abuse they received from their principals was the silence or lack of support by their colleagues and in some cases their families. Moreover, some abused teachers felt like scapegoats who were being blamed for larger problems the principal was either incapable of or unwilling to address. This problem of teacher scapegoating has interesting implications for current school reform. Some have half-jokingly referred to current teacher accountability systems that rely on high-stakes testing, scripted curricula, and increased surveillance and work intensification as “teacher abuse.” They point to the tendency to make teachers scapegoats for poor student performance in low-income areas.

The current reform discourse of “no excuses” not only implies that teachers are not doing their jobs, but also shuts down needed discussion of the neglect of our inner cities which have been gutted of jobs and the economic and social capital needed for communities and families to prosper. Thus, teachers and public schools are blamed for social and economic policies that have left our society more divided by race and class than at any time since the Gilded Age of the 1920s. One cannot help but wonder if this climate of blame and finger pointing will not embolden these abusive principals to justify their abuse as “tough love” defense of disenfranchised students.

While we would all agree that consistently bad teaching should not be tolerated by administrators, the data Blase and Blase present suggest that it is most often the good teachers that incur the wrath of abusive principals. Press reports bear out the fact that it is not uncommon for particularly creative and dynamic teachers and principals to end up the target of irate administrators and school boards. According to Argyris and Schön (1974), organizations have a way of protecting mediocrity and being threatened by professionals who rock the boat by standing out. They characterize organizations as displaying *dynamic conservatism*, a tendency to maintain a stable state which defends them against change. Whether the cause is conservative organizations, professional jealousy, or something else, Blase and Blase have done a major service in calling attention to a phenomenon that is robbing education of many of its brightest and most competent teachers.

The implications of this book for research are significant. Blase and Blase have opened a door to a plethora of new questions about the causes and manifestations of mistreatment and possible ways to break the cycle. But the implications for both administrator and teacher preparation are even more exciting: How do we better prepare teachers for this dark side of the micropolitics of school life? How do we help them identify the various gradations of principal mistreatment and the forms it can take? How can teachers, both as individuals and in group solidarity, fight back when confronted with the kinds of mistreatment the authors document? How do we identify the characteristics of principals with a tendency toward abuse before we credential them? How do we raise the consciousness of principals about what constitutes abuse and mistreatment of teachers? How do leaders foster school cultures in which abusive behavior is not tolerated?

Unfortunately, many teachers will identify with the abused teachers in this book. The first step to eliminating teacher abuse is to get folks talking about it and show abused teachers they are not alone. This book represents the beginning of a much needed conversation about teacher abuse. The result will be that the dark side of organizational life will be opened up to scrutiny, making it harder for abusive administrators to take cover there.

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