

LEADING
With
Teacher Emotions
IN MIND

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CHAPTER ONE

Teacher Emotions, School Reform and Student Learning

A Leadership Perspective

THE PROBLEM

You know, I really love being a teacher . . . wouldn't want to do anything else. Nothing beats the feeling you get when one of your kids finally "gets" something, or you meet a kid years later and she tells you what an influence you had on her life. But does it have to be such a struggle to actually teach? I mean, really, take this week—I had to collect money being raised by the school for a local charity, fill in forms about a student who had just arrived (that makes 32 in my class, by the way). I was on playground duty morning and afternoon every day. And the principal told us we had to spend at least three hours preparing kids for exams next week. They have basically very little to do with the curriculum we are teaching this term. Which seems a bit ironic because it is the new curriculum the superintendent has been beating the drums about for the past year (which, by the way, I don't think is as good as the old one). We had parent interviews two nights, which did away with time for marking kids' assignments, so I guess this weekend is shot. Tell you the truth, I'm a bit stressed

out. Being a teacher is supposed to be about the kids, but sometimes it just feels that no one is willing to help you do that the best way you know how. It could depress you if you let it—which I try not to.

The negative emotions expressed by this otherwise optimistic teacher—let’s call him Patrick—are hardly atypical or difficult to appreciate. Yet critics routinely dismiss teacher complaints about their working conditions and the emotions associated with them as “just excuses” for not getting on with the task of shaping up our public schools. Reformers typically look past these “distractions”, alleging that teachers really need to focus on hard capacities (skills) to deliver the reformers’ latest amazing new classroom innovation. (Data walls today—tomorrow, who knows?) And many school administrators have been interpreting teachers’ cries for attention to their working conditions as simply irrational “resistance to change” for as long as we (the authors) have been listening—which is a pretty long time.

We beg to differ. We argue that teacher emotions, rather than being excuses, distractions and knee-jerk resistance, are a potent and largely untapped resource, which educational leaders need to understand better if they are to be directly and intentionally helpful to their teaching colleagues in the shared task of improving student learning.

Let’s speculate a bit further about those sources of Patrick’s sentiments that could not be fully captured in the short quotation. If he is our “everyteacher”, the following picture of his working conditions would not be at all far-fetched:

- Thirty or more students, including a large handful struggling to learn the language of instruction and a similar number with some form of physical or mental disability
- Very limited access to instructional technology and almost no IT support for the technology that is available
- Expectations of some parents to have a very strong influence on his work—and other parents with no expectations of any sort about the school or their children
- A sharp new principal (the third in the last six years) with a strong need to put her own imprint on the school and very little inclination to listen to individual staff members’ concerns

Emotionally Responsible Leadership

Transformational leadership shines a spotlight on the affective world of organisational members—teacher emotions, in the case of this book—on the basis that this inner world plays a critical role in making teachers’ work meaningful. In his foundational work, Burns (1978) argued that transforming leadership “occurs when one or more persons *engage* with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality” (p. 20). They do this, as Bennis and Nanus (1985) explained, by “developing a vision for the organization, developing commitments and trust among workers, and facilitating organizational learning” (p. 403). Through their dispositions and corresponding behaviours, Bass (1985) added, transforming leaders

convert followers to disciples; they develop followers into leaders. They elevate the concerns of followers on Maslow’s (1954) need hierarchy from needs for safety and security to needs for achievement and self-actualisation, increase their awareness and consciousness of what is really important, and move them to go beyond their own self-interest for the good of the larger entities to which they belong. The transforming leader provides followers with a cause around which they can rally. (p. 467)

In contrast to Burns’s (1978) original view, Bass claimed that transformational leadership does not substitute for transactional leadership, appealing mostly to rational processes and individual self-interest. He suggested that the best leaders are both transformational and transactional, arguing that transformational approaches can augment the effects of transactional behaviors. In any case, the role of leader, from a transformational perspective, is to help make events meaningful for colleagues (Yukl, 1989). Chapters 7 and 8 offer a more detailed account of those transformational school leadership practices that make powerful positive contributions to the emotional lives of teachers.

More About the Book’s Purpose

A significant slice of the educational literature concerned with teacher emotions seems primarily to serve the purpose of heightening our understanding and appreciation of the inevitably emotional

What Can Leaders Do About It?

As in the case of individual teacher efficacy, collective efficacy is believed to arise from four sources (Bandura, 1997). The first and most important of these sources is teachers' prior experiences of success or mastery. A school's past successes and failures is likely to have a significant effect on teachers' feelings of collective efficacy in approaching new challenges. In his study of 452 teachers from 47 urban primary schools, Goddard (2001) found significant effects of mastery experiences on teacher collective efficacy. Indeed, feelings of mastery arising from past successful experiences explained about two-thirds of the variation across schools in collective teacher efficacy. Furthermore, collective mastery experiences far outweighed the effects of students' prior achievement and such student characteristics as socioeconomic status, race and ethnicity.

Bandura (1997) has argued that mastery experiences for groups of teachers are a function of a number of working conditions, including the following:

- Significant participation in school decision making
- Feedback on the group's performance
- Clear and explicit goals for judging the group's success
- "Strong" leadership, which creates a sense of common purpose or vision for the school

A second source of collective teacher efficacy is vicarious experiences. Such experiences may include, for example, the observation of other groups of teachers successfully engaged in addressing issues considered salient to one's school. Social persuasion is a third source of teacher efficacy. Colleagues or those in leadership roles may persuade a group of teachers that they have the capacities to address new challenges successfully (Beatty, 2000b).

Leaders can create support structures and reward systems that promote the use of study groups among teachers in their schools. They can also make sure that they communicate the learnings from these groups to the whole faculty by having groups share their work and inviting others to develop their own study groups. In so doing, such leaders effect a shift in culture toward learning together and integrating the personal professional and organisational self, which not only increases teachers' self-efficacy (Beatty, 2000b) but also