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INCENTIVES TO ALLEVIATE TEACHER FRUSTRATIONS: INROADS TO BETTER WORK PRODUCTION FOR TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS

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This article first looks at how teachers' apt work is contrasted with that of teacher-perceived inept administrative work habits. Second, a distinction is made between teacher official and pragmatic work zones. More teacher autonomy was achieved through completing administrative duties within the pragmatic zone. This acted as a constant source of teacher struggle and frustration, yet concurrently this was also a possible source of liberation. Conclusions suggest that both teacher and administrators first open communication lines by airing the core of the problem that bothers them, and second, create united normative platforms on "issues." This would help to alleviate teacher-related frustrations.

There has *not* been a plethora of educational literature that documents teacher anxieties and conflicts at their workplace - the school - that has to do with teacher *autonomy, control* and *social transformation*. Only recently, has there begun to emerge literature about teachers that depicts a fundamental shift in the way they think about the above issues. It is no surprise then, that studies such as Andy Hargreaves' (1984) on teacher extremist talk, Richard Altenbaugh's (1987) historical "look-back" on former Pittsburgh high school teachers, which documented their frustrations and anxieties with higher level authorities, Dennis Carlson's work (1987) on teacher collective trade union movements, Robert V. Bullough, Jr. and Andrew Gitlin's (1985) study on teacher transformative thinking, my own recently completed project (Kanpol, 1987) which depicted teachers as fed-up with simply "surviving" in a teacher "tension" filled environment, and theoretical works by Michael Apple (1986), Henry Giroux (1988), Svi Shapiro (1988) and myself (1988)

represent a growing body of literature which seriously considers teachers lives at the workplace as problematic, and, subject to heavy criticism and critique.

Much has been said about teacher merit pay. There has been endless, if at times fruitless debate about teacher accountability. We know that teacher burn-out is a real phenomena. In general, it has been documented by more than one of the above authors, that teachers complain about administrative ineptness, that indeed it seems useless to be held accountable for anything, if some school administrators are perceived by teachers not to do their job efficiently. It may just be that teacher burn-out has something inherently to do with the politics of school life or with facets of a teacher's day outside of the classroom. My intent in this article though, is *not* to undermine any school administration. In my explorations of teacher work lives at an urban middle school (anonymously called Hillview), what I saw and heard as an ethnographic researcher, were caring, emotional and serious profes-

sional educators. Additionally, however, both individually and as a group, eight grade teachers typified themselves as “frustrated,” and blamed the administration in large part for their personal miseries at the school site. This article will first concentrate on a few of these teacher-related frustrations. Second, I hope to provide both administrators and teachers with “incentives” that I believe are necessary and vital for both teacher and administrator lives to be more tolerable and “just,” and which, I believe, will add in some small way to the literature on the teaching profession.

Teacher Frustrations:

This study (Kanpol, 1987) was conducted in an urban school setting in the Winter of 1986. Four teachers were followed for 3 weeks each, lasting up to four months. They were questioned formally before and after observations.

Teacher occupational frustrations in my own study had to do with a perceived inept administration as apposed to apt teacher work, official policies and teacher pragmatic routines.

Administration Work as Inept

One way teachers distinguished themselves from the administration at Hillview was through the tasks, actions and duties each group (teachers and administrators) engaged in. One eighth grade teacher commented: “He’s (the principal) ready to retire, he’s just putting in his years.” Another teacher admitted that “there is no real counseling at this school.” Yet another teacher complained that the “principal doesn’t even know what is going on in our classes.” According to these eighth grade teachers, teacher evaluation was sporadic and not completed in the “professional manner” that was expected. Discipline problems were rarely handled as teachers described, in a “quick and efficient” manner. Eighth

grade teachers found team meetings a waste of time - “trite, mundane, busy work, unproductive, not the real problems we face everyday.” The eighth grade teachers complained that nothing at their school was really “under control” and that they (administrators) were “not doing their jobs.” In general, the eighth grade team did not think that “there’s a whole lot of leadership” at Hillview. This prompted teachers to take certain actions.

Teacher Work as Apt

The eighth grade teachers executed different tasks than the administration. They judged these tasks to be not only more important than administrative tasks, but harder, more laborious, active and not passive. Teacher tasks were thought to be more serious and more needed than the tasks executed by the administration. This is in part what defined common sense knowledge for this teacher group.

Things that teachers did, such as physically filling the pop machine, carrying computer handouts, volunteering for more work in the form of extracurricular activities such as the organization of intramural sports (which ultimately involved one teacher at Hillview taking care of fifty students wanting to play basketball, with only one basketball and many bleachers to physically move so as to obtain playing room), storing candy sale boxes one on top of the other for the school dance, etc., all took on physical qualities.

Other activities, such as taking over the scheduling, the designation of incoming students to different eighth grade classes, replacing other teachers who took their classes on a field trip, and the organization and execution of field trips, are what helped define apt teacher work as apposed to lesser thought about administration work habits. The above teacher work traits, so differently completed than a teacher perceived inept administration, acted as one source of frustration. Other occupational frustrations had

to do with official policies that acted as constraining forces in teacher lives. This claim will be argued in the following section.

Official versus Pragmatic Zones of Schooling

Occupational frustrations, I believe, had something inherently to do with what I shall term the *official* and *pragmatic* zones of schooling. In the *official* zones of schools, certain teacher behavior is expected by authorities. Guidelines for this behavior are clearly stated in teacher handbooks, teacher contracts and a set, "handed down from above" curriculum. The *pragmatic* zone involves instances in the school day where teachers may act with what is best for them in order to complete work, thus depicting an informal and oppositional stance, routinely acted out and repeatedly observed.

Teachers in my own study, and in other studies cited here, predominantly lived their school work day in the pragmatic, oppositional zone. So, for instance, certain curriculum materials were manipulated to suit teacher needs. For example, teaching eighth grade reading material to children who didn't have the reading skills of third grade was an "impossible" task and had to be dealt with pragmatically - read third grade literature. Thus, in Ms. A's class, eighth grade students talked about "time, characterization and place" concerning "Sylvester and the Magic Pebble," and not the regular eighth officially designated curriculum. In addition, certain discipline problems combined with teacher preferences over what it was they wanted to teach to the official curriculum were seen. Mr. X, for example, would use his students' discipline problems as an excuse to leave the class and test the administration authority and discipline policy over a certain problem child. At the same time, his students were completing meaningless exercises - merely copying notes or answering questions directly out of a text-

book!

Teachers also adjusted their curriculum by either having parties or completing administrative type tasks - like the organization of candy slip sales for the upcoming school dance - while students read for enjoyment, in most cases, material unrelated to the official curriculum. During period 0, commonly called S.O.A.R. period (an acronym for Special Opportunities to Achieve Results) teachers was supposed to be as they analyzed and described it, "baby sitters" for their students, while students had the free time to read. Mr. X commented on S.O.A.R.:

None of the students like it, me neither. I don't think it is effective. The kids don't know how to study. Most of it is a waste of time. There is no study. There is no academic achievement.

The above thoughts were shared by other eighth grade teachers as well. This prompted Mr. X and Ms. W, for instance, to leave class for up to 15 minutes at a time and not to "babysit" their students, or even allowed Ms. A to use the S.O.A.R. period as a time to catch up on student test taking that they may have missed earlier in the week.

For pragmatic purposes, teachers found it impossible to follow all rules. Thus, standing the door at 7:35 every day was thought to be functionless. One eighth grade teacher commented: "We all agreed that standing outside the door at 7:35 am was useless, so we just do not do it all the time." Using the official required quota of xerox copies was also a rule that was bent. Most teachers admitted that they over used the teacher allotted quota. Ms. A said she did this for practical purposes as sometimes she needed a quick amount of copies for the next class as she was running "short of time." Ms. W said that she was "Miss Queen Ditto," and while realizing that there were limitations on the use of xerox copies, she admitted that, "I

occasionally break rules, we all do." After all, commented another eighth grade teacher: "When I close the door I can do anything I want - break rules if I want to. No one comes in to check on us."

Further Implication of the Move from the Official to Pragmatic Zone

The move from the official to pragmatic zones (while not exhausted here at all) represented a fundamental tension for teachers in this study - that had to do with them controlling their own day. This allowed teachers more autonomy to act as they wished concerning curricular implementations. This tension also had serious repercussions for other studies mentioned in this paper - such as how the teachers whom Hargreaves followed and questioned deemed it important to talk and think about the administration they were serving under. Furthermore, the *move* in zones also instigated and represented a fundamental *shift* in teacher thinking, that has directly to do with the type of social transformation elaborated on by Shapiro (1988), Giroux (1988) and myself (1988) - a transformative consciousness denoting emancipatory critique.

An example of this emancipatory critique had to do, for instance, with the way Ms. Y (a social studies teacher) adjusted her official curriculum. The movie "Mask" was shown in Ms. Y's class, as a reward and supplementary curriculum material to the "current issue" discussion in class on the topic of "prejudice." While the movie was playing, Ms. Y concerned herself with the sexual assault case at the school that had the eighth grade team buzzing and infuriated. She wrote a letter of complaint on the team's behalf, to the principal and the area supervisor:

"It is hard for us to understand that we were not informed of the incident ... we feel it necessary that we are informed of such events when

they occur - not two months later."

In all, Ms. Y was concerned with "sexism." She called the principal a "sexist," evident she said, by his non-verbal and sexist remarks to female teachers. Ms. Y acted on the sexist issue involving students in the school, by writing letters of complaint within official teaching time blocks. Both Ms. Y and Ms. A were "torn" by the sexual assault issue. Their anguish was evident in a team meeting, where they both shed tears over the thoughts of their two girl students recently attacked by a male student in the same grade and school.

In the pragmatic curriculum zone, Ms. Y clearly and critically questioned the prevailing ideology that had to do with sexism. She tried to subvert the dominant ideology of *sexism* by calling her students "women" and "men," and grant them equal rights irrespective of their race or sex. Her questions and follow-up discussion on "Mask" and the prejudicial effects in society were enlightening. The discussion had the potential to be socially transformative! Commented a student in reply to the teacher's (Ms. Y) question:

Ms. Y: Is anyone prejudiced here?

Student: I guess, well we all have a few prejudices, I mean, um, do we like everything, um and everyone in this school?

Ms. Y made it obvious that her pragmatic curriculum would necessarily have to do with social concerns. She was determined to change student thinking about race and sex. Unfortunately, she was also frustrated with school policies over issues of the same nature. This prompted her to call the attention of the principal in a team meeting, and comment:

I am sick and tired of all the tension at this school. I'm thinking of a transfer.

This “tension,” I believe, had just as much to do with official and pragmatic curricular choices as it did with “social issue” frustrations. It also had to do with the type of administrator who ran the school and other school official policies as well. Indeed, then, occupational frustrations, it seems, existed on various levels.

Tips to Alleviate Occupational Frustrations

It seems to me, that teachers in my study in particular, were caught in a tension between the official and pragmatic world they encountered daily. This prompted them to manipulate their school day, resulting in more teacher control and autonomy. Additionally, a tension existed at the level of consciousness, depicted in the main by Ms. Y’s and Ms. A’s frustrations and anxieties concerning the rights of teachers and students not to be sexually and racially discriminated against.

For administrators, the tensions described here have serious moral and ethical repercussions. What do administrators learn by all this? What incentives are needed to alleviate teacher occupational frustrations that will in the long run, harmonize a tension filled workplace for teachers and administrators? There are *no* single answers to these questions. I do believe, however, that both teachers and administrators must mutually agree on certain “social” policies, such as race and sex, for communication lines to open up. This must necessarily involve devoting *time* during the school day, or after, where teachers and administrators meet head-on and take a *normative* stand on issues that teachers such as Ms. Y and Ms. A felt justified in struggling for.

This normative stance may involve teachers and administrators creating united platforms on issues on race and gender for instance, and in particular, sharing a unified “democratic” vision. Only in this way can “team” consciousness be raised - the com-

mitment to certain morals and values having to do with a struggle for *citizenship*. Concurrently, the pragmatic role of the curriculum must be debated over at length. It must become an avenue for a language of communication between teachers and administrators. It has the potential to become the language of critique and possibility - the hope that teachers and administrators can critically confront, evaluate and critique the “tension” filled social world that they exist in at school.

These “confrontations” between teachers and administrators would entail open dialogue about a vision seen for teacher work, student achievement and administrator functions. This necessarily includes an understanding on what levels the curriculum can operate, and what should be attempted both realistically and pragmatically to make a larger vision workable. It seems to me, that a moral, consensual and democratic stance on what “we are to do” with the official and pragmatic concerns at the school site is critical if teachers and administrators are to reach some sort of middle ground for understanding and/or mutual compliance.

With the above in mind, a clearer path would be set by teachers and administrators to enhance work production. Both sides would better understand their own frustrations, and mutually help alleviate them by simple dialogue and critique. Openness, the ability to share, confront and critique become the tools needed to aid two opposing sides on the hierarchical ladder (teachers and administrators) and better understand what it is they feel a “tension” about. Only then, will fruitful banter, policy making and policy implementation help to alleviate some of the occupational frustrations teachers face everyday. In short, let us hope that teachers in particular and school administrators (be they the principal, vice-principal, superintendent or counselor) can create “air time” as a teacher incentive in order to voice

“frustrations” in their “tensions” filled environment.

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*Executive Secretary
and wife
Jack R. Evans
(Refers to page 404)*



*Executive Secretary
C. Everett H. Koop
(Refers to Front Cover)*

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