Teaching and Betrayal [1]

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ABSTRACT Increasing attention is being paid to the importance of trust in organizations generally, and schools in particular, as an essential ingredient of improvement and effectiveness. The role of trust in leadership and in leaders’ interactions with subordinates has been especially emphasized. In a study of the emotions of teaching that included data concerning teachers’ recollections of emotionally positive and negative interactions with their colleagues, teachers made almost no explicit references to trust as a source of positive emotion among their colleagues. In other words, in their lateral relations with colleagues, trust was absent or taken for granted. However, what teachers did report as one of the strongest sources of negative emotion with their colleagues was evidence of the opposite of trust—betrayal. The present paper draws on this interview-based study with 50 Canadian teachers in 15 elementary and secondary schools to examine the nature and effects of betrayal among colleagues in teaching. It documents three forms of betrayal: competence, contract, and communication betrayal. Betrayal in teaching is significant not only in a moral sense, but also because its consequence is to lead to teachers to avoid conflict and interaction with each other, and thereby insulate themselves from the opportunities for learning and constructive disagreement. The paper concludes by arguing that if schools are going to become stronger professional learning communities, they must seek not only to establish trust in teaching, but also to avoid the causes of pervasive betrayal.

Introduction

Michael Huberman, who was taken too soon from our professional community, has left many important legacies to the field of educational research, including systematic approaches to qualitative data analysis, some of the most important studies of educational change and innovation, and the most thorough work ever completed on teachers’ lives and careers. In addition, Michael Huberman has also made important contributions to understanding the demands and the difficulties of creating professional collaboration among teachers and their colleagues—the artisan-like nature of teaching making it hard for teachers to share their craft (Huberman, 1990).

Huberman’s work forms a significant part of a wide body of research on the nature, necessity and difficulty of professional collaboration in teaching. Teacher collaboration, or what has more recently been termed professional learning community, has been linked to increased satisfaction in teaching (Nias, 1989), stronger senses of teaching efficacy—teachers’ beliefs that they can make a
difference (Ashton & Webb, 1986)—increased moral support and lessened feelings of guilt and inadequacy (A. Hargreaves, 1994), lowered stress levels (Troiman & Woods, 2000), enhanced capacity for coping with change (Little, 1984, 1990) and, most importantly, improvements in student achievement (Rosenholtz, 1989; Newman & Wehlage, 1995; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001).

There are important debates about the kinds of collaboration that are more or less effective, however. Researchers variously argue that collaboration can be comfortable and self-serving (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996), a refuge for teachers who put the loyalties of friendship before the duties of professionalism (Lima, 2001), a process lacking in the intellectual rigor of a true ‘Collegium’ (D. Hargreaves, 1994; Fielding, 1999), an arrangement that can be overly controlled or ‘contrived’ (A. Hargreaves, 1994), or one that has recently taken the form of evangelical cults of large-scale performance training in literacy and other educational reforms (A. Hargreaves, in press).

One of the challenges facing educators who try to build collaborative relations among their teachers is the difficulty that teachers encounter in dealing with conflict (Hargreaves, 2002). Teachers typically avoid conflict by establishing norms of politeness and non-interference (Little, 1990), or by clustering together only with like-minded colleagues who share their ideas and beliefs (Fullan, 2001; Hargreaves, 2002). This reduces teachers’ capacity to work through differences and learn from disagreement.

Facing conflict and airing disagreement within a profession involves significant risks. People worry that working relationships will deteriorate, that bonds of friendship or connections will be irretrievably broken, that people will no longer be willing to depend on each other. Risks of difference and conflict escalate in societies and organizations of increasing diversity, complexity and uncertainty that experience rapid change. In these circumstances, one of the factors that can mitigate the risk of conflict, or make the risk worth taking, is the existence of deep trust among workers of an organization. People are usually more prepared to engage in argument or disagreement with close friends or immediate family since they know that the enduring ties between them will withstand temporary differences. Organizations are the same. Conflict will more likely be risked where underlying trust already exists. Trust, then, is a vital ingredient of productive professional collaboration.

Effective organizations depend and thrive on trust (Lane & Bachmann, 1998; Toole, 2000). In intimate relationships and organizational interactions alike, trust amounts to people being able to rely and depend on each other so that their world and relationships have coherence and continuity (Giddens, 1991, pp. 38, 66). Trust involves believing that others will act in a reasonably predictable way, according to agreed or assumed expectations, even, and especially, when they are absent (Nias et al., 1989).

In the past, trust was based in and grew out of traditional relationships of village ties, family loyalty and religious obligation. It was taken for granted in the familiarity and mutual dependence of tradition and routine in tightly bounded communities of village life. In today’s more complex societies and organizations,
however, trust cannot be presumed. It must be built and won. Such ‘active trust’ involves mutual reliance among people who may be removed from each other in time and space, and therefore unable to build intimate, personal friendships, long-standing connections, or emotional understanding with many of those around them (Giddens, 1990; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996; Sachs, 2000).

Active trust that enables people to cope with the absence of others originates in infancy (Érickson, 1950; Winnicott, 1965). Here, infants develop ‘basic trust’ if they experience and learn that their parents or caretakers will treat them consistently and also return after absences. In this sense, Saltzberger-Wittenberg et al. (1983) show that many of teachers’ relationships with those around them, including their colleagues, replay the emotional relationships that teachers experienced with their own families in childhood.

From this foundation of basic trust, people learn to open themselves to others and to trust in the future. They learn to trust others and to trust themselves—becoming both trusting and trustworthy. Trust, in this respect, involves risk—to depend on others, and overcome anxiety about the future in order to gain new experiences and achievements. It involves a leap into the unknown (Giddens, 1991, p. 41). Trusting in others’ integrity, competence and goodwill is the cornerstone of effective relationships in complex organizations, including schools. But this requires more than the ‘personal trust’ that occurs in close and intimate partnerships and friendships, where it is rooted in people’s intense and long-standing personal knowledge of each other. Trust in complex organizations is more abstract than the trust experienced in intimate relationships—and, except where workplace friendships occur, it does not offer the same personal rewards of affiliation and acceptance (Giddens, 1991, p. 136). Yet, committing to active trust as a deliberate obligation to colleagues who cannot always be intimately known or understood is essential to professional effectiveness in organizations that rely on the interdependence of tasks and people.

In these circumstances, ‘professional trust’, as I call it, still rests on and reaffirms fundamental social bonds between people (Hargreaves, in press). However, these bonds are not based in deep personal knowledge, but in explicit or implicit norms, principles or understandings of how to work together and what to expect of each other as fellow professionals or as members of the same organization. Trust here is a process, not a state—something that people work towards as a matter of principle and of professional commitment, even if they have little personal relationship with the people in whom their trust is invested. Trust, in other words, helps people move towards creating a measure of shared emotional and intellectual understanding in a larger or complex professional community, instead of presuming that understanding.

Active trust is neither blind nor unconditional. From time to time, it is tested, reaffirmed or validated by evidence in the relationship about whether trust is warranted. In the personal trust of close friendships and intimate relationships, this testing occurs in the intensity of everyday interaction that checks faithfulness, loyalty, willingness to share chores, to sacrifice oneself to the other, etc. In the professional trust of complex organizations, however, trust must be affirmed more
through visible public evidence of competence and commitment—in performance data, personnel evaluations, public meetings, accountability processes, etc. This kind of trust challenges and creates discomfort for those who hold more conventional views of professional autonomy that resist the idea of external scrutiny (Giddens, 1991).

One of the difficulties facing organizations and societies today is a pervasive collapse of trust (Fukuyama, 2000). Personal trust is eroded by the destructive and disembedding effects of rapid change and the fragmenting of people’s time on local culture and local life. Trust towards professionals is weakened by the increased availability and circulation of information that challenges expert opinions—including the judgements of teachers (Giddens, 1991). More than this, trust in organizations and their leadership has been destroyed by years of downsizing and restructuring, the replacement of secure employment by contracted labor (Elliott & Atkinson, 1999), and the collapse of savings and secure pensions in the wake of stock market volatility.

The knowledge society is generating great creativity and new opportunities: but it is also replacing the long-term loyalties of group life with the short-term commitments and ‘turnstile-world of transient teamwork’ (Sennett, 1998). The trust and understanding embedded in local cultures of knowledge and experience is replaced by a web of accountability established through imposed contracts and performance standards. The result is a low-trust, audit-based society in which vertical trust of leaders toward their followers and vice versa is disappearing (Giddens, 1991; Power, 1994; Castells, 1997; Troman & Woods, 2000). Professional cultures have increasingly given way to performance contracts. Not surprisingly, a rapidly emerging literature on trust in organizations addresses the problem, to leadership and management, of how to re-establish vertical trust in organizations (Kramer & Tyler, 1996). In education, too, interest in trust is emerging largely from a leadership perspective (for example, Leithwood et al., 1999; Beatty, 2001).

However, in schools and organizations generally, lateral trust among colleagues is as important as vertical trust within the institutional hierarchy. Among teachers, while both personal and professional trust are important in building strong professional communities, they are not always honoured equally, nor are they usually treated in a compatible way. Because many schools still operate according to principles of classroom autonomy and norms of professional politeness, trust in colleagues’ commitment or competence tends not to be actively renewed, but to be pushed out of awareness until crises or difficulties draw attention to it. Teachers therefore become aware of trust issues either in emotionally intense relationships with colleagues who are also friends, or when there is a collapse of trust in their professional relationships and existing presumptions of trust fall apart. Thus, while Nias et al. (1989) discussed the importance of trust among English primary school teachers, this trust was inferred from rather than directly discussed in their teacher interview data. Similarly, the data that will be discussed in the present paper indicate that, among teachers, issues of trust surface less when trust is honoured than when it is breached. It is ‘difficulties’ of trust that are more evident in our data of collegial interactions. Difficulties of trust arise when the social
bonds between people in organizations are tested or broken (Giddens, 1991), leading either to an ‘empty absence of trust’ where ‘there is no foundation for it’ or to more active forms of mutual suspicion and betrayal (Sennett, 1998, pp. 141–142). The present paper therefore focuses on and seeks to understand the existence and effects of betrayal in teaching.

**The Study**

The data on which the paper is based are drawn from a study of the emotions of teaching and educational change that comprised interviews with 50 teachers in a range of elementary and secondary schools in the province of Ontario, Canada. The sample was distributed across 15 varied schools of different levels and sizes, and serving different kinds of communities (urban, rural, suburban). In each school, we asked principals to identify a sample of up to four teachers that included the oldest and youngest teachers in the school, was gender mixed, contained teachers with different orientations to change, represented a range of subject specializations (within secondary schools), and (where possible) included at least one teacher from an ethnocultural minority.

The interviews lasted for 1–1.5 hours and concentrated on eliciting teachers’ reports of their emotional relationships to their work, their professional development and educational change. A substantial part of the interview drew on methodological procedures used by Hochschild (1983) in her key text on the sociology of emotion, *The Managed Heart: the commercialization of human feeling*. It asked teachers to describe particular episodes of positive and negative emotion with students, colleagues, administrators and parents.

The present paper concentrates on one aspect of teachers’ reports about 49 significant negative emotional episodes involving interactions with colleagues. While one-time interviews have limitations as ways of getting others to access and disclose their own emotions (and we therefore complemented our methodology with longer-term discussion groups), they do surface new topics and themes in previously unexplored areas, and they enable initial patterns and variations in teachers’ emotions to be identified across different school contexts and different kinds of teachers. Also, while reliance on critical episodes cannot verify overall frequencies of emotional reactions and experiences, they do highlight what teachers find emotionally significant and compelling in their work.

The interviews were analysed inductively with the assistance of the computer program Folio Views. Data were extracted electronically, then marked, coded and grouped into increasingly larger themes, ensuring that all identified pieces of data were accounted for and included in the framework.

**Defining Betrayal**

Betrayal is ‘the intentional or unintentional breach of trust or the perception of such a breach’ (Reina & Reina, 1999, p. 33). Most betrayals in organizations are not dramatic, as in the case of embezzlement, corporate espionage, stealing col-
leagues’ ideas or irresponsibly disregarding project deadlines. As Reina & Reina (1999) show, most cases of betrayal in organizations are minor. Broken promises, missed appointments, gossiping, time-wasting and self-servingness—these are the stuff of minor betrayals, and most are unintentional products of being over-worked rather than conscious acts of deception. Yet, as acts of distrust accumulate and people feel repeatedly let down, minor betrayals can create crises of trust in the organization generally.

Reina & Reina (1999) describe three kinds of trust and betrayal in the workplace—those relating to contractual, competence and communication trust. After teachers’ dislike of conflict, which is discussed elsewhere (Hargreaves, 2002), the remainder of our data on teachers’ experiences of negative emotion with colleagues falls into three broad categories. ‘Contractual trust’ refers to people’s ability to meet their obligations, complete their contracts and keep their promises. ‘Competence trust’ involves trusting and having regard for one’s own and others’ capability, knowledge, skills and judgement, as expressed in effective delegation and the provision of professional growth opportunities. ‘Communication trust’ concerns the quality, clarity and openness of communication among colleagues in terms of disclosing information, telling the truth, admitting mistakes, keeping confidences and refraining from gossip (Reina & Reina, 1999, p. 81).

Contractual Betrayal

In the area of ‘contractual trust’ (six citations), the implicit contract of teaching is that the job extends well beyond scheduled school hours, and should involve dedication, hard work and even self-sacrifice for everyone. The image as well as the reality of hard work is important for maintaining public respect for an increasingly embattled profession. Teachers who do not pull their weight, and who ‘teach the same thing … (and) are gone by three’, ‘drag down the profession’ and their colleagues with it. One teacher who felt that ‘teachers are almost always on display to the public’ disapproved of a colleague who held a ‘physically very demanding’ outside job and was always coming to school tired, as a result.

Often, when teachers do not meet professional expectations for work rate, the effects are more than symbolic and rebound on the workload and reputation of their colleagues around them. For example, not getting involved in the teacher’s union and then complaining about its policies can make school representatives of the union ‘extremely angry’. Self-serving teachers, such as a department head who manipulated the timetable so he could avoid teaching the most difficult students, can create not only distrust among colleagues, but also rampant suspicion and ‘paranoia’ about ‘hidden agendas’.

When perceived shortfalls of commitment from colleagues directly affect one’s own classroom teaching, intense feelings of betrayal can reverberate across all three areas of trust—contractual, communication and competence—leading to breakdowns in communication and accusations of incompetence. For example, one female secondary teacher was paired up to teach a course with ‘a house-
wife ... type’ who thought teaching was ‘kind of for fun’ and ‘really didn’t have any long-term work experience’.

As a consequence, I think her self-concept was really inflated. And, when she had to work with me, there were a lot of things that she didn’t know how to do, and ... her writing skills in terms of developing curriculum and even in verbal communication, she was very limited. And, she was basically very intimidated by me and so she felt unskilled compared to what I could bring to our partnership, and instead of feeling affirmed by what she could do, she felt degraded by what she couldn’t do. And, you know, compared to her ... I had never taken time off to have children. I have always been completely independent financially; I’ve always had an involvement with society in a way that she never directly had. And so, I just think that she felt that while she was spending her life involved in certain activities, I was spending my life really getting skilled at this job ... She was unwilling to participate in developing curriculum, in talking to me, and she really removed herself from the relationship to the point where I had to get the department head back involved ... I never really felt good about her anymore, you know. I never really felt that I could have confidence in her because I was really coping with an immature personality.

Competence Betrayal

If contractual distrust exposes the distance and difference between the moral purposes that teachers invest in their work, ‘competence distrust’ highlights differences in professional respect and regard. Five citations of negative emotion dealt with distrust in the area of competence. Criticizing others’ incompetence carries connotations of blame, and teachers are therefore sometimes hesitant to do this. For instance, a teacher who saw a colleague having difficulty managing her students at a public performance was reluctant to be seen to be ‘stepping on her toes’. As we saw in the last example of contractual mistrust, attributions of incompetence to a colleague may also be related to other dissatisfactions. Thus, one teacher described how someone, who was ‘supposed to be a mentor’ for her in terms of her formal responsibility, had been preferred to her in a competition for promotion and was now her superior. Angry at being passed over in this way, this teacher regarded her rival as a ‘non-entity’ she had ‘little respect for’ who was ‘not capable of everything he said he was’, but was now in a position to evaluate her teaching. In effect, this teacher’s mentor had become her tormentor (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2000). The incompetence she attributed to him was also a proxy for the moral and political differences that stood between them.

When one’s own competence is at stake, shame and self-blame become the dominant emotions. Criticisms about excessive noise in his classroom led one younger male secondary teacher to feel confusion and to shut out the shame of incompetence by closing his classroom door. Another teacher was assigned a new
team partner who became so critical of his practice and their inability to get along and ‘a whole bunch of things that were negative about how I conduct myself ... at a meeting’ that he came ‘close to having a nervous breakdown over it’.

The shame and blame that accompany attributions of incompetence threaten the basic social bonds of human interaction (Scheff, 1994) and can seriously damage collegial relationships among teachers. While drawing attention to problems of competence is essential for professional improvement and need not lead to unwarranted shame or blame, insensitive or unwarranted communication of competence problems is emotionally and professionally damaging.

Communication Betrayal

Eleven citations of negative emotion concerning teachers’ relations with colleagues involved problems of ‘communication trust’. Four of these involved instances of gossiping about colleagues or communicating negative information or opinions about them in unacceptable ways. Gossip is a strategy people use to achieve status, importance and access to information in cultures or organizations where they do not have access to official channels of involvement and decision-making. Gossip implies purity in its perpetrator compared with the disparaged individual who is its target. While gossip can be an indicator of powerlessness in an individual or an organization, it can have disastrous effects on trust among members of the organization because it breaches confidences, twists the truth and discloses information in secretive and suspect ways (Reina & Reina, 1999).

Teachers in our study expressed disapproval of gossiping in general, of ‘people who take news back when you talk to them about anything’, or of ‘unprofessional’ colleagues who ‘have been verbally negative about the staff and students at our school’. Malicious or mischievous gossip can be viewed as particularly disturbing when it is perpetrated by colleagues who had once been treated as figures of respect:

One of my former teachers ... talked about a workshop he had gone to a couple of years before where the subject was climatology, and basically all the teachers involved in the workshop were geography teachers and he was a math teacher. The person presenting was also a geography teacher. He made a mistake with a math graph or doing something that wasn’t mathematically right. He just kind of mentioned it (and) I threw up my hand and laid into him ...

Disapproving of this use of gossip to gain personal advantage through collegial rivalry, this teacher ‘thought it was cruel because he was doing it to show up the presenter and also because he had a smug look on his face like, “Hah, you may be the presenter, but I know more about this than you do” ’.

While gossip involves furtive circulation of information and opinion, shame entails the public exposure of people’s actual or imputed failings, weaknesses and transgressions in front of others (Taylor, 1985). Whereas guilt involves recrimination and regret for wrong actions or failures to act, shame casts aspersions on and
Teaching and Betrayal

raises questions about fundamental aspects of people’s self and identity (Scheff, 1994; Giddens, 1991). Shame makes people feel naked, exposed, transparent and vulnerable in front of others. The pain of shame and humiliation is especially severe when the others who witness it are one’s most highly valued associates (e.g. colleagues), one’s prestigious and powerful superiors (e.g. school administrators), or those from whom one normally commands deference or respect (e.g. students). Shame prejudices the basic social bonds that hold people together.

In education, feelings of shame and associated senses of hopelessness and helplessness among teachers have been reported in vertical contexts of intrusive, high-stakes inspection and accountability processes (Jeffrey & Woods, 1996) and authoritarian leadership styles (Blase & Anderson, 1995; Beatty, 2001). Shame can also occur in lateral relationships among teachers and their colleagues. When it does, it can provoke intensely negative emotions among them. Four instances of negative emotion among colleagues in our sample concerned such moments of shame. One involved being confronted and criticized in front of students.

What we argued about is so silly. We were sharing a classroom first semester, and I had three Math classes, and she had one English class, and it was in the afternoon so we flipped periods. One day, half of my class was in the classroom, and she confronts me. And it’s very rude, and her tone of voice is just unpleasant. And she demands to know why there is never any chalk in the classroom. It wasn’t what she said. It was the way she spoke to me. So I was wondering what she was saying. And she said that every time she comes in here—she was kind of on this rampage. So I’m like, ‘Okay, well let’s hold on. Do you think I’m hiding the chalk? Or do you think I’m taking the chalk away when I go?’ It was just one of those really bizarre incidents. And the kids—what bugged me most is that she was very confrontational in front of our students. And we try very hard to teach our kids how to deal with each other in a positive way. And it was terrible because she walked out of the room, and the kids were like, ‘Miss, we’ll go get her. We’ll box her out for you’.

A second case involved being criticized in front of other colleagues.

I was supposed to do something as an offshoot of one of our divisional meetings. I had forgotten to initiate this clipboard that we are going to have on the yard. We were going to note down the children, the incident, and how it was resolved just to get a bit of a tab on yard behaviour. I didn’t do it. We had a meeting. We discussed it. We decided we would wait until the staff meeting and then we would discuss how the other divisions were doing in their use of this clipboard for behaviour management. Things kind of catch my eye and I just go off on tangents. I just happened to see a copy of the clipboard thing that was being used in another classroom so I decided that I would get some of my own stats for the staff meeting. I initiated it on my own and carried it out one day. This teacher went livid. ‘Don’t I ever listen? We decided …’ I really don’t react
well to really authoritarian people because I am used to doing things on
the spur of the moment ... I don’t like the red-tape bureaucracy where
you have to get an okay to do everything. This person is a very
authoritarian person. That’s where we locked horns ... It wasn’t just a
personal thing; it was a put-down in front of a number of other
colleagues.

In a third case, a Special Education teacher experienced great shame not by being
criticized in public, but because a new and ‘administratively placed’ team-
teaching partner who was unhappy with their working relationship brought very
personal aspects of the teacher’s identity into the open and stigmatized them—
leading the teacher to experience not only a loss of status and regard, but also to
feel that his identity had been fundamentally ‘spoiled’ (Goffman, 1963).

We had no idea whether or not our personalities or educational philosop-
phies or how we look at kids mesh at all. She was coming with very little
junior level experience, knowing what junior level kids were like, how
you ran a junior classroom and at the beginning it was incredibly hard
to mesh how we’re going to work together and I think I probably came
pretty close to having a nervous breakdown over it. I was told a whole
bunch of things that were very negative about how I conduct myself at
a meeting, that it was not proper decorum to do this. I invaded her space.
I guess her personal space was much closer than other people’s personal
space. I just, I found it very hard to work with this person, and I think
the straw that broke the camel’s back, she said to me once, ‘Maybe we’re
having trouble because you are Special Ed. (by background as a
learner) ... well, you can’t make connections and maybe that’s because
you don’t understand what’s going on and you don’t know how to do
things.’ And I was really, really floored. I was terribly upset and I was
very surprised at the fact that so many, many years later, somebody
could still say to me, ‘You’re stupid. You’re retarded, you know’.

In the fourth case, a fellow Family Studies teacher’s alleged inadequacies regard-
ing mishandling of the organization of the staff Christmas party were officially
reported to the principal! This teacher, with 15 years experience of teaching in her
school, was outraged at being reported to a brand new principal.

And then I got to school (after a long illness) and I really wasn’t aware
that there was a friction in this committee already. So I walked in there
not being the one in charge anymore because I didn’t know what they
were doing. So, I just wanted somebody to get something going. And this
was about I guess, October. I just knew we should have our meetings so
we can have some direction for this. And one of the ... Well, it started
with a teacher and the conflict ended with the principal. But one of the
teachers I went to said, ‘what are we gonna do; like, we should have a
meeting or something?’ And she says, ‘you’re not the boss’. And I
thought, ‘oh my God!’ And how did this happen? And every time I went
to her, she’d say, ‘you’re not the boss’. And she said that like four times and I thought I know but I just have to know what we’re doing. I’m Family Studies. I’m the one that’s doing most of the work, so I have to know. And nobody was doing it. So this went on and on. So, finally one of the teachers complained to the principal who I never even sat down with. And I have had just a deplorable time trying to work with this teacher. This is like around November. So, he called me in and said, ‘you’ve been charged with being ...’ I don’t know all those terrible words.

The effects of betrayal through experiences of shaming on teachers are always emotionally disturbing, and sometimes traumatic. The teacher who had been shamed in front of her students described how she:

had a lot of trouble calming down ... I had to really mask my emotions because my emotions at that point were really intense. My face was really red and I was just feeling, ‘how dare you come in here and be so mean?’.

The teacher whose ‘special education’ past and identity had been surfaced and treated as their ‘master characteristic’, that overshadowed everything else about them (Goffman, 1963), felt ‘devastation’, ‘rejected’, ‘personally attacked’, ‘no good as a person’ and shed ‘huge tears to anybody who was willing to listen to me’. The experienced teacher who had been reported to the brand new principal ‘was humiliated, and I couldn’t take control of that situation, so he knew I was really embarrassed, humiliated all year long. My self-esteem was really ... I couldn’t do anything’.

The remaining three examples of breakdown in or absence of communication trust also elicited strongly negative emotional reactions among teachers. One example was a matter of poor judgement. Here, a teacher described how a colleague had ‘overreacted’ after not being chosen for a promotion against an equally well qualified candidate. ‘He verbally abused the board for it. He went to the union ... and was basically out for blood.’ This, the teacher thought, was ‘very unprofessional’, and really made her ‘feel negative; because I felt like you are in a profession where understanding is part of your everyday job and you can’t even figure this out in your personal life’.

In a second instance, the miscommunication may have been accidental in its origins—but was still profoundly negative in its consequences. Thus, a teacher who unintentionally missed a meeting:

had been there for about half an hour because that’s how long the meeting took, and he became very upset saying that he hadn’t been called or didn’t know and that it had started and ... sort of blew up and stormed out of the room.

Miscommunication can also be the result of deliberate deception, as in the third case of an assistant department head who described his department head as ‘self-serving’, someone who ‘doesn’t give you the luxury of speaking’, and
someone with whom ‘most … interactions—are negative because there is absolutely a sense of distrust there’. This department head was seen as manipulating the timetable for his own benefit and pursuing hidden agendas so that his colleagues felt constant ‘paranoia’ and ‘have to evaluate everything that is said … for face value and then to sort out the fact and the fiction’.

**Betrayal and Belonging**

After intense or repeated experiences of betrayal, teachers tend to withdraw to their own classrooms, stay away from difficult colleagues, avoid interaction with them, and distance themselves psychologically from what they are experiencing. Betrayal creates negatively experienced conflict. The danger is that teachers then avoid any kind of conflict, or the interactions that might lead to it, altogether. In this respect, intense or repeated betrayals break the bonds of professional interaction and social belonging that make professional community possible.

My strategy is to avoid (him) because I’ve realized that we don’t see eye to eye in terms of social communication.

We are still not warm and friendly again.

I learned … that there were certain things that I just had to back off on as I wasn’t going to be able to get through, I wasn’t going to be able to change this person.

I realized that when you have a situation out of control, don’t let it affect your self-esteem. It’s just a situation that’s out of control. And when she comes here next year, I’m not going to let it affect me ever again.

Since that time, relations with that teacher haven’t been very good … I hate that feeling of two people who are supposed to be working together … not being able to do that … where that wall goes up between two teachers, it makes it really difficult to deal with the kids … There’s not much of a chance that the two of us are going to be able to sit down and work out a solution (for kids) in a collegial manner when he’s feeling so angry … It really bothers me professionally that now it hampers what we can do for the kids.

**Conclusion**

Sustainable school improvement that stimulates real and lasting gains in student achievement depends on teachers being able to work together in strong professional communities (Newmann et al., 2000). Strong professional communities depend on teachers’ capacity to blend commitment with doubt and a shared passion for improving learning and achievement, along with healthy disagreement about and inquiry into the best ways to do it. Strong professional communities risk and sometimes relish conflict. Trust is the emotional catalyst that makes this unique chemistry possible. Betrayal is the agent that destroys it.
Teachers who feel betrayed by their colleagues rarely take the Othello-like path of retribution and revenge. Rather, they seem to deal with betrayal by evading interaction with those who have betrayed them, or who might betray them in the future. Fewer interactions mean fewer opportunities for professional learning and lessened chances of school improvement. Betrayal is the emotional enemy of improvement.

Teachers in the present study expressed three broad kinds of betrayal. Contractual betrayal occurred where colleagues did not meet the usual expectations for the job—they had a poor work rate, they let their colleagues down by not pulling their weight, they taught the minimum, watched the clock, or they did not revise their courses, they complained about the organization without getting involved in taking responsibility for change, or they promoted changes that benefited themselves rather than the good of all.

Communication betrayal occurred when there was malicious or mischievous gossip, miscommunication or misunderstanding, self-servingness disguised as promotion of the general good, and shaming criticisms of one’s competence in front of colleagues, superiors or students.

Interestingly, competence betrayal was often a proxy for the other two forms: self-imputations of incompetence arising from feelings of being shamed and blamed by others, and imputations of incompetence to others being bound up with criticisms of their self-servingness or contractual shortcomings.

If betrayal bedevils improvement, it is important to understand more about the organizational conditions and policy strategies that give rise to feelings of inequity in workload and professional dedication, that spread misunderstanding, gossip and self-servingness, and that give rise to insensitive attributions of incompetence. As we deepen such understanding, we might learn not only how to create more active professional trust in schools, but also how to avoid the recurring and corrosive effects of betrayal.

Note


References


