

Across the world, educators are more and more finding themselves involved in bullying and not just through their students, but rather actively bullying others or being a victim of it. What do we, as administrators and adults, do when the bullying taking place is among the adults in the school/district? I remember starting out as a teacher and being quite shocked by the cliques, hierarchies, and power structures within staffs of schools.

I recently had a heart-felt discussion with a teacher that has gone through a very difficult experience. This teacher had to write the story with her identity hidden because of the effect it could have on her career and day-to-day life. She has asked that instead of wasting time trying to determine the author, consider that this could be taking place in our schools and begin to reflect upon how we can work to prevent this. Here is her story:

*I was labeled a favorite of my principal's after a week of student teaching. My mentor teacher loved me and wanted to share with my principal. He took an interest in me, saw something he liked, and therefore made sure to stop by frequently. I don't know why, perhaps it was that I was older, not so ditzy as the other student teachers, or just worked extra hours. Whatever it was, the label stuck and I should have run away then. Instead I worked extra hours, applying for and finally getting a job at the same school, so proud to be a member of this school.*

*The year I got hired at my school my mentor moved away. I was eager, ready to learn, and most of all ready to form a team. Unfortunately I was the third wheel to a two-some that had been together for some years and had gone through some pretty heavy-duty stuff. They switched classes, they knew each other like the back of their hand, and I was the puppy always trailing behind, hoping they would throw me a bone. After a while, I decided to go on my own, after all, my students were waiting for me to teach them and not having a team was not going to be a good enough excuse to fail my kids. So I forged on, challenging myself and hoping that one day my team would come around. That year I was by myself through difficult parent situations and difficult student situations. I ate lunch in my classroom because no one sat with me in the staff lounge. It wasn't that they didn't like me, they just didn't have time for me. Instead other teachers were busy pointing out how I was a favorite since the principal spent so much time in my room. They didn't realize that the reason he was in there was because I invited him just so I had someone to help me that first year. Later in the year I was pulled into my principal's office to be reprimanded for having said "Have a nice weekend" in the hallways. I was told that someone had complained about me since I should be thankful I had a job and not look forward to the weekend so much. In fact, it was later included in my formal observation that I should know my place more. Stunned, I asked who it was, but was refused an answer. I left that conversation wondering who would want to get me into trouble over something so trivial well knowing that it could have been anyone.*

*Now is a good time for an admission; I am outspoken. I have an opinion and when the right time occurs I am not afraid to share it. I have also been told I have a gift of connecting with students and that meant that my parents and students really liked me. My principal really liked me and started to tell others the cool stuff he thought I was doing. I guess he shared too many stories without highlighting others and so the favorite label continued and finally people found whatever reason they could to hate me.*

*I heard the rumors about how I was hired for my looks, I heard how I was the favorite and was therefore given easy classes, extra things for my room, and basically had a free pass. I cried about it, got angry, tried to discourage him from coming to me as a confidante. It didn't help. He stopped coming but the rumors continued. The whispers as I walked by in the hallway, the icy stares, the unreturned hello's. The social isolation would have made any mean girl proud. So I got really quiet and tried to keep to myself, finding a couple of people I could trust, continuously trying to reach out to my team, hoping that someone would take pity on me. Few did, after all, I had done it to myself.*

*Once more I ended up in the principal's office; this time a teacher had turned me in for disagreeing with a veteran teacher in a small meeting. I was written up for being disrespectful and not knowing my place. Again I asked who had come to the principal and was given no answer. It was not in my best interest to know and I should be happy that there were not more severe consequences. It was even put in my formal observation for the year, my permanent record, and I had to submit an apology to the teacher, who by the way, was not the one who had complained about me. Instead I was told to keep my mouth shut, know my place, and try to get people to like me. The ignorance of my principal that he, in fact, had anything to do with the fact that people despised me was more than I could take. I started to contemplate moving but decided that I wanted to stay to try to make a difference, to change the attitude, rather than to let them run me out.*

*This year I knew was going to be a challenge. One powerful teacher, in particular, had become the ring leader of my hate group. She complained about me to anyone that would listen, including my fledgling team, parents, and, of course, the principal. For some reason she had power and people listened. I knew that some of my more unorthodox ideas such as limiting grades and homework were really going to upset people, particularly some veteran teachers who already disliked me, she being one of them. And yet, I knew I had to keep growing as a teacher whether people hated me or not because after all how bad could it get? I would always have my principal or so I thought, instead I didn't. He left me alone because he was told by senior teachers that they knew I was his favorite and how hurtful it was to them. So instead I became isolated, fending for myself. Thank goodness for a couple of good friends, my husband, and Twitter or I would have lost it.*

*Throughout this process I have been forced to look in the mirror again and again. Am I those things that people claim? Am I a person not to be trusted because the principal is my confidante, because I am his favorite? Will my students fail because of me? Will they not be prepared for the rest of their school years because of what I did to them? I have had to reflect and tear myself apart as I wonder; did I do this to myself? Sure, there have been days I have not been proud of, days where I should have kept my opinion to myself, or tread more lightly. Yet there has also been so many days where I did not deserve the treatment I was given, where even after extra effort, people just did not care, did not believe, did not want their minds changed. I also question myself; is this all in my head? Have I created the awkwardness, the silence, the people passing by my door rather than coming in? Then I realize that it did happen, that the rumors were spread, those hushed conversations, those scoldings really did happen. Perhaps I could have done more but I guess I will never know if it would have changed anything. I know I have not been a perfect team member, I know I have made mistakes, but I have also tried to do my*

*best. I have been open, eager, welcoming, and ready to share. And yet somehow all of this was not enough.*

*So what has this year been like? Like the worst high school experience, the only thing missing has been being locked in a locker or having my car keyed. All year I have fought comments about how awful I am as a teacher and how dare I challenge what veteran teachers are doing. I have been told that other teachers worry about my students since I am not teaching right or even preparing them well. I have been told that I need to know my place over and over and that no one likes me. I have been told that no one wants to be on my team and that I am giving the school a bad name. I have been called selfish, delusional, and ineffective. I have been called a bad teacher. So this year I have cried, vented to close friends and just tried to rise above it. I know what is best for my kids. I know that I am good teacher. And yet, I am worn down.*

*It is funny; I have lied so many times about how supportive my school is of me, that I sometimes start to believe it. My principal was supportive, in secret, my special ed teacher and ELL teacher were, but that is really it. Some teachers have not cared, which was a welcome relief or just outright told me how they feel. The powerful teacher told me that she is genuinely worried for my students since she does not feel they will be successful next year and that I shouldn't be allowed to teach. At least this time she said it to my face rather than behind my back.*

*So a couple of weeks ago, I did the unthinkable, I applied for a transfer to another school. After tempers flared and the end of the year got even more divisive due to a new batch of rumours, I thought, enough. I don't want to be the scapegoat anymore. I don't want to be in a place where success is not celebrated. Where challenges are not desired. This is not me. I love teaching and I want to teach for many years to come, but I cannot go to work in a place where I am not welcomed. Where I am blamed for things I have nothing to do with, where people feel they have a free pass to tell me how they really feel about me and my teaching style without even knowing anything. So I am leaving, and my heart is lighter, and yet I feel like a coward. I feel like I should stay and fight for change like I have been the last 3 years. Like I shouldn't rock the boat. But I can't stay, it will devour me if I do. When I pressed send on that email letting my employee coordinator know that I wanted to transfer, I felt the biggest weight lift. And then I felt tears. These years of being hated, of not knowing who to trust or who to confide in has taken their toll. It will be a long time before I try to have a close relationship with my principal, in fear of being labeled, I will have a hard time trusting teammates. Too many times the accusations came from the team I was supposed to have and the protection did not come from my leader.*

*So there you have it, one teacher's story, which has been changed to protect the identity. So I wonder; why do we do this to each other? Why do we put others down in order to feel good about ourselves as teachers? Why must there always be someone to bully? I fear for who will become the next favorite....*

I recently wrote how we need to support those that are trying new things and new methods in education (see: [\*Leading With Our Linchpins\*](#)). As educational leaders, how do we support those teachers/support staff that are different and/or are trying new things? How do we flatten the hierarchy that often exists between experienced and new teachers? How do we deal with this

when it is another administrator? I would love to hear your thoughts on how to help ease the bullying that can often occur within the adults in a school. *A big thank you to the teacher that shared her story.*

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