

The Captain Queegs in our schools

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For obvious reasons, the worst, most deplorable, and most vicious kinds of bullying to happen in our schools, never get a mention in official anti-bullying protocols and policies.

The unmentionables are the episodes of adult bullying, committed by some principals upon their teachers, and by some teachers upon their students.

It is seldom physical bullying. It takes the more insidious form instead, of emotional attacks, leading to psychiatric devastation of the victims. These forms of school bullying are not given much space in either the professional publications or the teaching industry research reports, but are becoming increasingly common-place in compensation cases brought before the courts.

Adult bullies in our schools display, to various degrees, the negative role model made famous by the novelist Hermann Wouk, in his portrayal of the mad Captain Queeg in *The Caine Mutiny*.

If a Captain Queeg-type ascends to the principalship of a school, his or her subordinate staff can expect outbursts of some, or all, of: dysfunctionality, inconsistency, defensive insularity, self-righteousness, vindictiveness, cowardice, negativity, and a lack of both empathy and sympathy, leaving a trail of psychiatric basket cases behind them, as they move from one posting to another, with either small or major mutinies in their wake.

It's all a matter of power attraction and power misuse.

The worst principals, teachers, police officers and politicians are usually organisational misfits, who were attracted to the position by the opportunities for the use of power. The Captain Queegs among our school principals operate in breach of both the Codes of Conduct and the Australian Professional Standards. They are



guilty, in their workplace, of bullying, in their lack of dignity and respect accorded to their colleagues and students, of maladministration and misconduct.

They use as their weapons of personal denigration, the techniques of public humiliation, procedural injustice, unreasonable applications of rules, bias, scapegoating, victimisations, threats and intimidation.

Most Queeg-like principals have a small coterie of sycophantic subordinate hangers-on, who transfer their leaders' negative managerial role behaviour to their own classroom interactions and thereby become feared teacher bullies of their own students.

Another group performing daily Queeg impersonations in our schools, are the teacher bullies.

Teachers and school administrators are in positions of authorised power over their students. 'Teacher bullying' occurs either when teachers and administrators misuse their position and that power, to belittle, stigmatise, scapegoat; or persistently treat individual students, or groups of students, unfairly; or fail to appropriately intervene in known bullying by students.

When teacher bullies single out student victims for sarcasm, ridicule, isolation, contempt, ignoring, shunning, label-

ling, or unjust punishment, their actions, from a position of power, form a kind of superior 'role model', authenticating and apparently justifying questionable treatment of their victims, in the minds of other student onlookers. The usual result is that of 'mobbing', where other students join the teacher's attack on the bullying victim, and with the teacher's apparently semi-official imprimatur, begin to copy the bully teacher's denigration and humiliation of the victim child. Teacher bullying of students is antithetical to the whole concept of professionalism.

Teacher bullying, followed and supported by student mobbing of the victim, usually results in the 'labelling' of the victim, whose negatively-affected reputation then goes before him or her, into new classes or other local schools, and new social settings. The 'label', like the proverbial mud, tends to stick to the victim. Labelling sets the basis for a self-fulfilling prophecy, where the 'Pygmalion principle' results in the victim's living down, rather than up, to the expectations others hold of him or her.

Labelling and its associated stigmatisation and scapegoating usually result in massive diminution of a student's self-concept, together with feelings of shame and feelings of worthlessness, often associated with 'school phobia'.