

## Foreword

I have come to believe that in certain fields the “bad apple” rate is very low. Of course, “bad” physicians and “bad” teachers exist. But almost everyone who goes into these fields has a purpose that is somehow related to “doing good work.” They enter each of these professions to make a difference; to help make the world a little bit better. Aspiring physicians and teachers hold, sometimes quite deeply, moral convictions about the worth of the work in which they want to engage. Thus, the “bad apple” rate in these professions is likely to be low. To find these “bad” practitioners, the medical and educational professions, along with state and federal legislators, have set up elaborate, but ultimately destructive, programs designed to find and eliminate those few harmful or incompetent professionals. Such programs often are supported by the public, glad to be protected from incompetent medical and educational personnel, but these same programs can seriously demoralize the vast majority of knowledgeable, experienced, committed, expert professionals in each of these fields. It turns out, as education professor Doris Santoro aptly argues in this important new book, when teachers cannot enact the values that motivate and sustain their work, demoralization is a common response.

In *Demoralized: Why Teachers Leave the Profession They Love and How They Can Stay*, Santoro does a terrific job, in fact, of turning the spotlight on this underreported and underappreciated phenomenon of demoralization. Distinguishing it from *burnout*, a word used to describe many forms of teacher dissatisfaction, she categorizes its common sources and, in doing so, lends legitimacy to this problem, opening the door to new ways to think about how to deal with it.

For educators, demoralization is a natural accompaniment to being told to fix the lives of children born into poverty. That is not easy to do. However, Santoro shows us that demoralization also occurs in our nation's well-funded and well-regarded public schools. Demoralization among teachers is a natural response to unfair evaluation systems that hold teachers accountable for standardized test scores influenced to a far greater extent by family and neighborhood, than by schooling. Demoralization among teachers also occurs as a function of being denigrated, sometimes vilified, by too many uninformed politicians and journalists. In particular, the voices of political leaders are heard, and teachers are required to adhere to the laws they pass. But the voices raised by experienced and admired classroom teachers, as responses to the laws that are made, are neither heard nor respected.

The international movement to intensify the work of the profession—to achieve more with less resources—is another source of demoralization among teachers, across nations. And demoralization also occurs among teachers when they have to cope with being squeezed economically in a society that may be paying too little in taxes to properly pay many of its public servants.

These and a dozen other contemporary sources of demoralization among experienced teachers described in this book are leading to their exiting from the profession in substantial numbers. Of course, when that happens, the knowledge they gained to be suc-

cessful in their educational career is lost with them. This is true because reasonable estimates suggest that teachers' grow in their ability to influence student achievement for seven to ten years. Moreover, the total costs to replace an experienced teacher may be quite high, easily \$15,000 in many of our nations' school districts. Furthermore, there is evidence that higher rates of teacher turnover negatively affect student achievement. So demoralization among America's teaching corps has serious educational and fiscal consequences. Santoro provides critical insights into the lives of those teachers who feel such demoralization and offers a compelling case for why their concerns are legitimate and should be taken seriously by district leaders, union leaders, and policy makers. They are not burning out—they are disturbed not to be contributing to education in the ways that they had hoped. In fact, Santoro argues that many of the teachers who leave the profession after years of successful and personally rewarding teaching may be more like conscientious objectors than they are like failing teachers. They leave teaching because they have ethical concerns about the work they are doing. They cannot practice the profession as they intended. As one teachers says: "We have been taken away from (the sources) of our reward." And as might be expected, they do not all live easily with that sadness.

Our nation seems not to know how contemporary educational policy, and the leadership of schools that carries out those policies, is demoralizing so many of our nation's teachers. The teachers who speak in this book believe that they are witnessing the loss of their profession, and they feel powerless to stem its disappearance. Santoro captures the teachers' despair; they mourn and express many of the symptoms associated with grief of a loved one.

However, after many deeply troubling stories of teachers' disillusionment over not being able to do good work, we learn that all but one of the experienced teachers in Santoro's book stay.

Thankfully, for those who persist, a way forward is found. They find a way to recommit to the dreams they held. They find ways to believe that they can still “do good” in education. Santoro analyzes their strategies and offers a framework that other teachers can use. Re-moralization, as Santoro asserts, does take place. And when that happens, teachers find ways to lead meaningful lives for themselves, and once again, help our nation, as well. Our nation is lucky to have these fine educators still working to make the world a bit better.

I found something quite interesting in the persuasive and engrossing stories recounted and analyzed in this book. It was a realization that these expressions of dissatisfaction with the teaching profession were not those of an ordinary group of complainers, as every profession has. Rather, the dissatisfaction expressed by these teachers is coming from deep commitments to the moral and ethical principles that define our remarkable system of public education. I found in the contemporary concerns of these teachers echoes of Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, and Horace Mann. These were not ordinary complainers at all! And it left me thinking that to ignore the concerns of these teachers—the concerns of such committed and exemplary professional educators—really would make us a nation at risk.

So what can readers expect from this insightful book? Readers will gain insight into the contemporary shortage of classroom teachers that we are experiencing and the role that current educational policies play in driving away experienced, talented teachers. They can expect to “hear” the authentic voices of teachers who want to do well, and who are frequently blocked from doing so. They will be privy to remarkably insightful analyses of these lamentations along with strategies for counteracting demoralization collected by one of the most astute scholars in our research community. And they will also learn about the remarkably empowering effects that

reframing and distinguishing some forms of teacher dissatisfaction as demoralization, rather than burnout, can have on teachers and those who care about strengthening rather than harming the profession. School leaders and policy makers will need to reconsider the levers that they use to address teacher shortage and retention problems. They damage the profession and our schools by targeting all teachers as “bad apples” and by neglecting to take a deeper look at the sources of teacher dissatisfaction.

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