

Corruption and Abuse of Power in Educational Administration

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Corruption and abuse of power in educational administration in K–12 and higher education institutions are important, though neglected, research topics. As such, they might rightfully be termed our profession's "dirty little secrets." This article begins to uncover the range, if not the depth, of such corruption and abuse of power. It represents an initial ethnology of the topic. Examples are taken from several countries, most notably Mexico, China, and the United States, and discussion revolves around the relation between corruption and hierarchical, pyramidal bureaucracies.

KEY WORDS: corruption; educational administration; school culture.

Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

(Lord Acton, 1887, Letter to Bishop Creighton)

The well-known quote above by Lord Acton suggests a relationship between power and corruption.¹ In this article we explore the manifestations of corruption in educational administration, both K–12 and in tertiary education, and the dynamic interrelationships between these two factors—corruption and abuse of power, among others. We explore each concept, problematizing the definitions, our definitions, of each term. Since large-scale data on the individual phenomena and on their interrelationships are unavailable, we rely on what little formalized research exists, on newspaper accounts, on anecdotes, and on our personal experiences to develop our thesis. The analysis we offer is informed by a cross-cultural and intracultural comparison. In short, this article represents the first blush of an ethnology of corruption and abuse of power in educational administration.

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CORRUPTION

Definitions of corruption are problematic. Agreed-on definitions are rare, and definitions of corruption run the gamut from being too broad as to be rendered relatively useless to being too narrow and thus be applicable to only limited, rare, well-defined cases. Discussion of the issue seems to be entirely absent in the literature on educational administration. Fortunately for us, other domains and professions deal with the issue of corruption on a more regular basis. From the literature on police corruption we have this definition, a relatively simple one: corruption is “the misuse of public power for private and personal benefit” (Palmer [1992] as cited in Sayed and Bruce, 1998b). This simple definition, according to Sayed and Bruce, provides a good starting point, as it identifies three critical elements in a consideration of corruption: what was done, how, and by whom. The authors develop a much more strict definition of corruption as it relates to police: “any illegal conduct or misconduct involving the use of occupational power for personal, group or organizational gain” (Sayed and Bruce, 1998b, p. 9). And while this particular definition has advantages over the simpler one (for example, the addition of group and organizational gain—which will be beneficial in the discussion of corruption in educational administration), its drawback for our purposes is the insistence on the illegality of the corruption. Group and organizational benefit or gain were added to the simpler definition of corruption to allow for individuals of a given profession (police) or organization to act in concert to benefit individually and collectively through the abuse of power and position.

As Sayed and Bruce (1998b) admit, there are several approaches to the discussion and definition of corruption, one being the distinction between formal (legal) and social approaches. Social approaches to the definition of corruption permit a much broader conception, allowing, for example, moral considerations to be applied to distinguish corrupt from noncorrupt acts. Sayed and Bruce recognize that the legal definitions of corruption often are too narrow.

A broader social approach to the definition of corruption, according to Sayed and Bruce (1998b), reflects “what is commonly meant by corruption, it places the emphasis on morality and has its roots in classical conceptions of corruption which sought not so much to identify behaviour, but to judge the overall political health of a society and its institutions” (p. 3). For purposes of the present analysis, then, what we intend by the term corruption is any use of power or position through discrete acts or behavior(s) that benefit an individual, group, or organization. Our definition must allow for states of corruption, that is, the accrual of such acts over time as to constitute a state, climate, or culture of corruption. The gains or benefits derived through corruption can be other than financial. Our definition must also allow for a normative judgment or assessment of corruption, one that is not based on strict legal interpretation but that

draws from more widely held, commonplace conceptions of corruption as the deviation of a person, organization, or group from its purposes, such as when self-interest influences decisions by administrators.

Consideration of well-documented, well-known acts should help define/refine what constitutes corruption. The examples that follow—some of which come from domains other than education and some of which are drawn from other countries—may permit us, as theorists of educational administration and practitioners, to perceive our actions, the actions of others, and even the actions of educational organizations in which we work in a different light. Consideration of the examples that follow and refinement of the notion of corruption promises to affect our practice, we hope, for the better.

EXAMPLES/EXEMPLARS

Mexico

When speaking of corruption, perhaps the most notorious instance that comes to mind is that of the Mexico City police. The Chief of Police of Mexico City is quoted as saying, “For as long as I can remember, this is a police that has harmed everyone who lives in this city and this country with some act of corruption or inefficiency or inability” (Althaus, 2000, p. 1). Mexican President Vicente Fox has termed corruption “the evil of all evils” (p. 2). Corruption in Mexico is not limited to the police, however. It permeates all sectors and levels of society. In fact, corruption is so endemic in Mexico that reference is made to a “culture of corruption” (p. 3) that both sustains it and is its outcome. Public service in Mexico has been seen simply as to way to wealth, that is, “public administration was a way to riches” (Jose Alberto Garibaldi, quoted in Althaus, p. 4). Corruption of the sort that pervades Mexican society is compounded, even made possible, by pyramidal hierarchical structures, such as is found in most modern bureaucracies (Figure 1).

In Mexican Education

The former brother-in-law of one of the authors received a degree as an orthodontist from the university in a major Mexican city. (Notice we used the term “received,” as the only manner in which he could be said to have “earned” his degree is by having been a major, steadfast supporter of the president of the student association, a powerful force in state-level politics.) As the political fortunes of this former brother-in-law’s *patrón* (loosely, patron, mentor; literally, boss) rose, so did the former brother-in-law’s. In short order, he was *appointed* as the head of the university-affiliated preparatory school. The author’s ex-wife and all of her brothers and sisters, except one, were named as faculty



FIG. 1. Corruption among Mexico City police.

at the preparatory school. The author and his then-wife lived in Oregon (USA) at the time. Needless to say, she never saw a paycheck from her “tenure” on the faculty of this school. After a short stint as head of this preparatory school, this “orthodontist” became Vice-Rector of the university and also received an advanced law degree. Last we knew, he and his wife were living in a big house on the outskirts of the city, surrounded by high walls and protected by bodyguards, where, he boasted, he entertained army generals in his bid to register his previously unregistered (and illegal) firearms.

China

Recently, an explosion at a school in the village of Fang Lin in Jiangxi Province in China revealed a particularly insidious instance of corruption in that country (August, 2001). Though news of the event was sketchy at best, and officially repudiated by the Chinese Communist Party media, the blast killed “at least 41 people, most of them children” (p. 1).² The *New York Times* quoted a parent of one of the children as saying, “the explosion was caused by gunpowder that students were filling firecrackers with” (Smith, 2001, p. 1). According to *Newsday*, “The use of schoolchildren in cottage industries is common in poor areas in rural China, and a southern Chinese newspaper, the *Nanfang Daily*, reported on its Web site that children in the school had been assembling fire-

works since 1998, with teachers sharing in the profits” (Gargan, 2001, p. 2). The *Newsday* report continued: “The United Nations Children’s Defense Fund expressed outrage. In a statement, it charged that the disaster in Fang Lin underscored the twin afflictions of child labor and underfunded schools in China.” Citing the Agence France-Presse as its source, the *Newsday* article quoted a local builder to the effect that “‘they began forcing students to do this two to three years ago. . . . Teachers gave responsibility to the kids to make firecrackers during their lunch hour. The school wanted to make money. . . . They didn’t pay the kids anything. . . . The parents complained many times to the school and the township government, but nothing happened’” (pp. 3–4).

Another report (Divjak and Conachy, 2001, p. 2) quoted a parent who lost his 9-year-old son in the blast: “the school said it was mandatory. They called it ‘supporting oneself through school by working.’” Another source, noted that “[d]eep-seated corruption and complete lack of regard for human life were both evident in abundance in the aftermath” (Devore, 2001, p. 1) of the school explosion. “It was common knowledge among the parents of children at the Fanglin Village Primary that the school had forced children to make fireworks to cover its budget and pay teachers—while also making a nice profit for the local Communist Party cadre” (Devore, 2001, p. 1). The report continued: “In the most grotesque convergence of corruption and disregard for life, the village’s deputy Communist Party official, a relative of the school’s financial officer, likened the blast to China’s infamous One-Child policy, telling a crowd of angry parents, ‘It’s not so bad, it’s like a kind of family planning’” (Devore, 2001, p. 2).

Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji precipitated an organized cover-up of the blast and of those people and corrupt processes responsible for it by blaming the village idiot: “‘It certainly is not the case that this primary school was trying to earn some money by trying to rent out space to store materials for fireworks. A man had grievances and he had a mental illness. He transported these fireworks and materials to the ground floor. He lit them and blew himself up’” (Divjak and Conachy, 2001, p. 3). This report recounts how

the media and state apparatus in China are now seeking to ensure that this blatant cover-up becomes not only the official, but the only version of what took place in Fanglin’s school. Police have effectively sealed Fanglin off. There are roadblocks around the village and foreign journalists were ordered to return to the provincial capital. . . . Internet chat-rooms have been cleared of any messages challenging the official account and telephone communications with the village have been cut. (p. 3)

Zhang Minggeng, who lost his 11-year-old daughter and 10-year-old son in the blast, “bitterly said of Beijing’s story: ‘It’s not true. They are all lying and trying to trick the central authorities. In China officials help officials. No one is helping us’” (p. 3) (Figure 2).

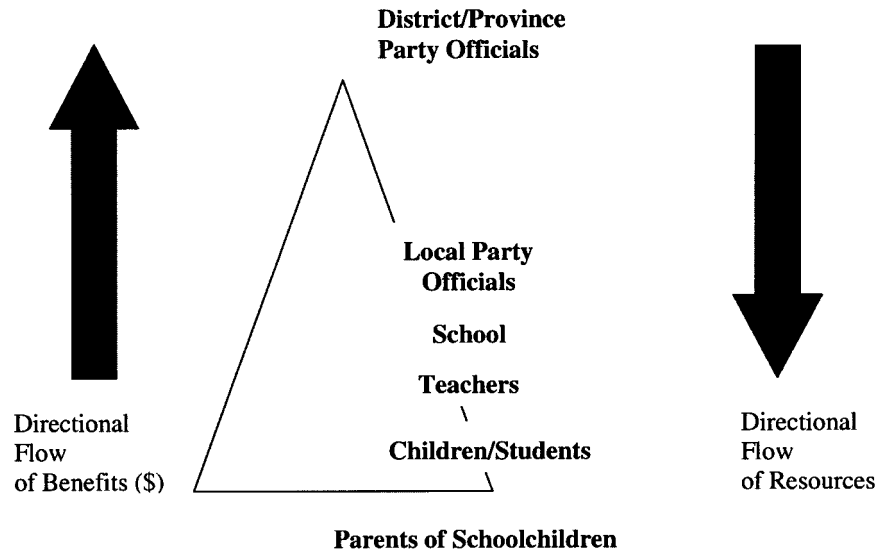


FIG. 2. Chinese school, district, and province officials.

The United States

The case of/for corruption in the United States is, as you might imagine, a bit more complicated and a bit different than the two preceding cases (Figure 3). It is sometimes difficult to see where/how corruption operates in the U.S. educational system, as there are actually multiple levels and various kinds of corruption operant.

Individual vs. Collective Corruption

In Midland, Texas, a high school senior was expelled and denied permission to graduate with his class a year or so ago (Newton, 1999, p. B4). The student, it seemed, had possession of a photograph of the married high school principal's car parked on a Saturday in front of "an attractive high school teacher's house." The student never took the photograph to school. The principal demanded a formal letter of apology from the student, and when the student refused, he was suspended, "for being disrespectful to an adult by fostering rumors," according to the news story and credited to the principal. The principal was quoted as saying that the student "was punished under policies the school has always upheld" (Newton, 1999). The school board upheld the punishment. The student was placed in an alternative school, a special campus for students with behav-

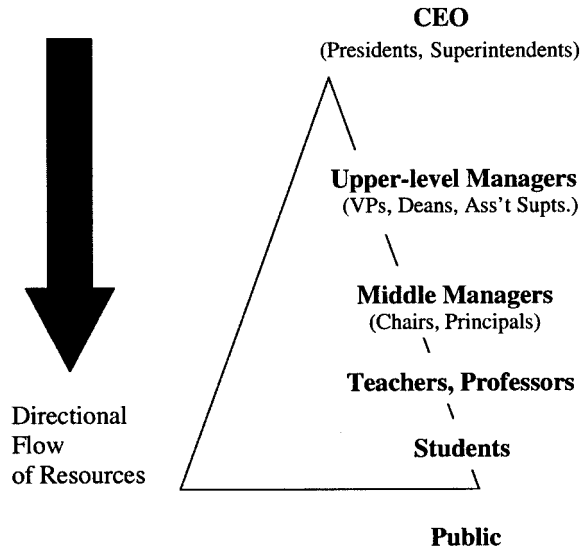


FIG. 3. U.S. Education (K–12 and tertiary).

ioral problems. The student sued the district; a suit that was later settled for \$150,000 (*Austin American-Statesman*, May 2, 2000, p. B2).

This incident is similar in kind to that which resulted in the suspension of a high school student in Evans, Georgia, for wearing a Pepsi™ T-shirt on his school's Coke™ day (*San Francisco Examiner*, March 25, 1998, p. A 12). It seems that the school was in a competition to earn money from the Coca-Cola Company (a \$500 local competition and a \$10,000 national one [The Battalion Online, March 26, 1998]) and was hosting visiting executives from the company. According to news reports, the principal suspended the student for showing disrespect to the guests (*San Francisco Examiner*, March 25, 1998).

In another incident, a school principal was investigated for soliciting a bribe from a vending machine company representative in exchange for renewing the company's contract (Spencer, 2000). The salesman reported that the principal asked him for four tickets to the University of Texas–Texas A&M football game and 200 ceramic mugs with the school's name and logo, which, according to the sales representative, she had planned to distribute as Christmas presents.

Clearly, the U.S. cases cited qualify as corruption under the definition we are using. But consider the case of the school administrators who were resigning and who may be facing criminal charges for falsifying school attendance records (*Austin American-Statesman*, July 1, 2001, B2). According to the news report, "School district investigators said attendance figures were altered to get more

money for the school during a time of sharply declining enrollment.” Is this a case of corruption? What is the benefit gained?

Or, what about a university program coordinator who disregards program policy and processes requiring a review by all program faculty in the appointment of adjunct faculty to teach courses and instead assigns a course to her “domestic partner” (i.e., live-in lover)? This act is clearly not illegal, since for nepotism to be operant there needs to be a legal relationship between the people involved, and in this particular state domestic partners are not recognized. Or what about the doctoral program director who assigns himself to teach a doctoral course when such an assignment counts one-and-a-half times the teaching credit of other classes? What of the frequently absent school principal described to one of the authors as telling her assistant principal, “the mark of a good principal is being able to run her school from her bathtub”?

Other less-than-clear-cut cases of corruption might include the following: the university professor who is the faculty advisor to a campus chapter of a national student honor society, who, in accepting university funds for a trip to the national honor society’s nationwide meeting, decided to accompany the students he chaperoned for a day at Disney World. The whole group, students included, intended to skip a day of the honor society’s program. Or, take the case of another university professor, one whose university is involved in a school-university partnership: A requirement of the consortium is that university professors and classroom teachers present together at national conferences. This professor invited a local teacher to attend a conference, then left the teacher at the conference on her own while she rented a car to spend her time visiting her family who lived nearby.

Or, what about the cases of professors who have graduate assistants mow their lawns or a department chair who has graduate assistants come to his home during department faculty parties to serve the food and drinks? What about faculty who make personal long-distance phone calls from their university phone? Or who use university copiers to photocopy personal business, or who take office supplies home for personal use?

The distinctions begin to blur. We need to allow for *degrees* of corruption. This involves employing normative distinctions. One such distinction, that made by Sayed and Bruce (1998a), citing the Knapp Commission Report (Klockars, 1983), is that between grass eaters and meat eaters—grass eaters being those who engage in corruption, but only passively, and meat eaters being those who “actively seek opportunities for corrupt gain” (Sayed and Bruce, 1998a, p. 6). Other distinctions we might employ involve legal versus illegal acts or behaviors (mentioned previously), individual versus collective acts, haphazard versus systemic corruption, and some consideration of the harm inflicted on the victim(s) of corruption.

Haphazard and Systemic Corruption

One distinction we might make is between haphazard and more systemic forms of corruption. It might be the case—as, for example, with using university equipment for personal use—that one is completely ignorant of the corrupt nature of the activity. Take, for example, the case of the secretary at Northwestern University (Hansen, 2001). The secretary was fired recently for, according to the university, downloading too many MP3 music files (some 2,000) to her university computer in violation of a policy that bars personal use of company resources. The secretary claims that her immediate supervisor was aware of her practice and even condoned it (iafrica.com, August 4, 2001). The issue came to a head when, apparently, ex-Beatle George Harrison's publishing company contacted the university complaining that the secretary had illegally downloaded its music. The secretary claimed she did not even like George Harrison's music and had none of it on her computer. She commented, "Who knows what the cutoff is for personal use? If there was a problem, I should have got a warning" (iafrica.com, 2001, p. 2).

Other practices, though not definitively corruption as they fall within legal parameters, are more systemic. Take farm subsidies in the United States. A recent story (Kelly, 2001), notes how the federal government paid \$27 billion in farm subsidies (government aid meant to bolster the income of needy farmers) the year before. However, "almost two-thirds . . . went to just 10 percent of America's farm owners, including multimillion-dollar corporations and government agencies" including "20 Fortune 500 companies and more than 1,200 universities and government farms" (Kelly, 2001, p. A1). According to the report, an heir to the Rockefeller fortune received \$146,000 in subsidies. Chevron received \$100,770. Archer Daniels Midland received \$17,793. Caterpillar Corporation received \$59,184. Media mogul Ted Turner and his companies received "at least \$190,000," and former Portland Trailblazers basketball player Scottie Pippen received \$26,000. "Colleges and universities got another \$6.3 million on research crops or farmland bequeathed by benefactors" (Kelly, 2001, p. A9).

Another example of a systemic process bordering on corruption is that cited in Waite (2002):

The Faculty Senate Chair at a small, Eastern university in the US, in her commencement speech marking the beginning of the new academic year, revealed how monies had been continually siphoned off (robbed?) from the university's instructional budget to pay administrators' salaries and to pay the salaries for other non-instructional positions. She stated:

. . . . Let me go into the salary issue for a moment. We receive faculty salary money in a budget line called 101–1310. There are a finite number of dollars in that line. A judgment must be made as to how much of that money goes to salaries and

how much of it goes to new positions. The more positions, theoretically, the lighter the workload—but the lower the salaries. (For example, every additional academic administrative position—like an Assistant Dean or Assistant Chair—decreases the average faculty salary and increases the average teaching load, creating less faculty in the classroom and less money available for pay increases.)

Over the last few years The [Faculty] Senate has been looking at just how 101–1310 money is being used. The General Administration [GA] in Raleigh [North Carolina, USA] is clear on how it is to be used—for salaries of regular term instructors. However, the Faculty Senate’s Budget Committee found that over \$600,000 of this money has been used to fund a variety of positions that are not instructional in nature: coaches, development officers, advisors, and associate deans, to mention a few. (How much higher would our salaries be if we followed the GA rules on the use of 101–1310 money?) Fortunately, the administration has agreed to gradually make all 101–1310 money go toward regular term instructors. In fact, this year \$150,000 has been “returned” to this fund. (The Provost will be notifying us soon (today?) as to exactly where this money is going this year—new positions and/or additional money for raises?). . . . (Waite, August 14, 2000, p. 38).”

This example is a case of university administrators stealing money (and large amounts over many years) from the instructional fund to pay other administrators and coaches through a process of “siphoning off” these resources.

There are purely economic and status forms of corruption operating within the U.S. educational system. Like the other examples given previously, the organizational structures of U.S. educational bureaucracies are pyramidal in nature (Figure 3). However, unlike the systems described so far, the flow of resources seems only to emanate from the top of the U.S. pyramidal structures and flow downward. For example, resources, in terms of monies allocated for education, enter the structures at the top level and are disbursed through the pyramidal, hierarchical structures. To what effect?

Take a simple example: salary structure. Generally, in the U.S. educational bureaucracies, salary rewards accrue to those highest in the bureaucracy. Superintendents’ salaries range from \$0–\$360,000/year plus benefits.³ Teachers’ salaries are much, much lower.

As a hierarchical structure, public education bureaucracies resemble U.S. businesses to a large degree. In business, CEOs of many large corporations receive substantial bonuses regardless of whether or not the companies they lead perform well. For instance, “at the 52 companies that announced layoffs of a thousand or more employees in the first half of last year, CEOs actually earned bigger than average pay increases” (Marketplace, August 28, 2001, p. 2). According to a business report, “as the value of their stock options tumbled, CEOs got what Institute [for Policy Studies] researcher Sarah Anderson calls dramatic increases in old fashioned cash-based salary and bonuses.” The report mentioned how “Rank has its privileges. Even as the economy sputtered during the

2nd half of last year and profits dried up, the stock market fell and companies laid off workers, . . . chief executives continued to command hefty pay raises. . . . During the year 2000, as the average worker's paycheck rose 3 percent—salaries and bonuses for corporate CEOs jumped by 18 percent. . . ." Citing Cornell University professor Robert Frank as its source, the report continues that "Frank says rising executive salaries and bonuses have survived a new shareholder activism trying to link CEO pay to the company's performance" (p. 3). The report cites a pending lawsuit wherein a U.S. Airways shareholder is seeking to overturn the severance packages offered by the board of directors that, "Despite a 60-percent drop in the company's stock price and the failure of its merger with United" will pay "the top three executives at U.S. Airways . . . 45-million dollars if they decide to retire" (p. 3).

The cases of the CEOs for industry and for schools are similar in that seldom is either's pay contingent on performance. In fact, the highest school superintendent's salary (see note 3) was negotiated *prior* to the superintendent accepting the position. Salary and compensation, then, are as likely to be related to status or social capital as they are to performance. The superintendent of schools for the Dallas, Texas, district came with a wealth of experience and contacts—having served as Texas Commissioner of Education, a deputy chancellor of Texas Tech University, and receiving a distinguished service award from the Texas Business and Education Coalition, among others, which is really what the Dallas school board might have been willing to pay for.⁴

As mentioned previously, another similarity between industry and education, as organizations, is the pyramidal nature of their hierarchies. What is unique about U.S. educational hierarchies/bureaucracies, as compared to the other international examples, the Mexico City police, and Chinese education, is that—lacking evidence to the contrary—it appears as though the benefit or gain of the corruption in the other two examples manifests an upward flow.⁵ That is, due to the pyramidal nature of the bureaucracy, benefits accrue upward and are multiplied. This is similar to a "pyramid scheme" or a "gifting club," in which small amounts at the bottom are multiplied upward through the layers as the corruption or gains proceed up the hierarchy, so that the incumbent at the top of the pyramid gains the most. In the U.S. case, where the higher the bureaucrat, the higher the salary, money that enters the system at the top gets siphoned off, beginning with the those at the top—for the superintendent and his/her officers control the budget. Superintendents get large, disproportional salaries. Deputy, associate, or assistant superintendents get a bit less, curriculum directors, a bit less, and principals less still. Add to the salaries each level "siphons off" the additional resources needed to maintain that office—secretaries, offices, buildings, and other physical plant expenditures, expense accounts, and so on—and the figure can become quite substantial. Does the superintendent do any more work than, say, a teacher to justify the higher salary? Or, do we professors do

more work than the prospective administrators we teach that we might justify our comparatively large salaries?

An interactionist perspective would argue that, no, each person, no matter the position, is working to their capacity, each person is always on task, all the time (Erickson, 1986). The question becomes, What is the task? And, for the discussion here, the question really hinges on how much the task is valued. The other issue is how much this siphoning off reduces the resources that can be applied to the core mission of the institution, teaching and learning?

Systemic Forms of Corruption

That this siphoning off is legal is understood. If we were to hold to a narrow, legalist definition of corruption, this siphoning off would not qualify. It should be noted, however, that the practice of using students in an entrepreneurial fashion is not illegal in China. According to reports, Chinese schools and their administrators are encouraged to supplement their meager resources in such “resourceful” manners. An examination of the Chinese and Mexico City police cases shows that gain from corruption is bottom up. We can assume (as at least some reports indicate [e.g., Althaus, 2000]), that in corrupt systems the gains are also realized from siphoning off from the “public trough” (top down). As we have suggested here, there is a top-down siphoning off in the United States as well. The oddity, the missing link—that which makes the cases of corruption in the United States that we have cited exceptional—is the apparent lack of any corrupt benefit accruing bottom up. However, as we shall show, this myopia is caused by the lens, or lenses, with which we view the educative processes in the United States. Within a culture, especially a culture of corruption, norms and practices are seen as natural, simply the way things are.

Goodlad (1979, p. 58) held that the educative function of schools is corrupted by the norms by which school performance is judged. Another way to view the U.S. system of education (more accurately, school and schooling) is through a sociological lens, specifically using the concept of impression management (Goffman, 1959).

In the present case, the impression being managed is that students are achieving, that schools—teachers and administrators—are accomplishing their task. But this sleight of hand is only made possible by the substitution of achievement for learning, of schooling for education. When standards for children/students are narrowly defined, as is the case with certain achievement tests or standardized tests, the “learning” these children are asked to demonstrate is likewise narrowly delimited. “Drill-and-kill” replaces broader, less easily measured learning (see, for example, Waite, Boone, and McGhee, 2001).

The benefits of corruption that pertain to teachers and administrators so corrupted are the positions and the salaries they receive and sometimes recognition

and accolades for fostering “student achievement” in terms of higher test scores. The price children pay in such systems is a psychic cost (Figure 4). Children surrender robust, vital educational experiences for the rote learning of minimal competencies. Children pay with their emotional labor. True, some teachers and administrators pay with the same coin. Some teachers and administrators are disgusted and disgruntled at what they are called on to do in the name of “education.” Often, these administrators must rationalize their complicity in what we are here referring to as a corrupt system in order to keep their jobs. These administrators are caught in what one of the current authors’ late uncle would refer to as “the golden handcuffs.”

The pervasive, taken-for-granted and institutionalized corruption of the U.S. educational system has a parallel in U.S. military/political history. In writing about the Vietnam war and the relations between policymakers, the public, and the press, Balzar (2001) notes:

Another truth: The military, of all institutions, is not exempt from our system of accountability. The people who want the cloak of secrecy are too often the people who need it.

Vietnam . . . was proof of this. It wasn’t the troops in the field who objected to the press. I’ll repeat that: It wasn’t the troops. No, they wanted the story told. It was the generals back in Saigon who couldn’t handle the facts: that they couldn’t win

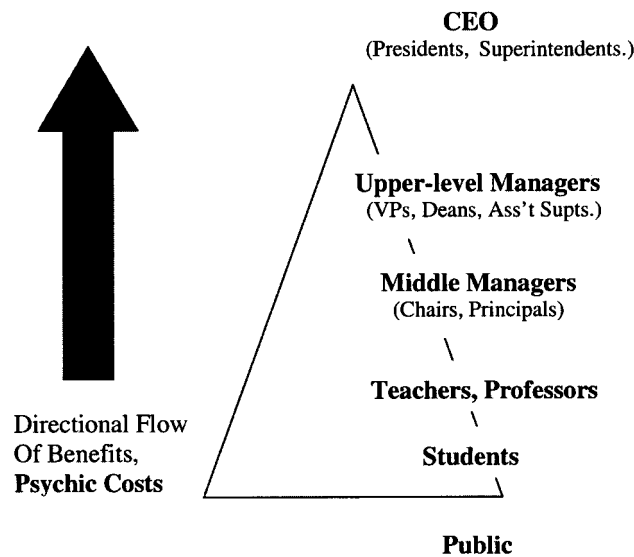


FIG. 4. Impression management in U.S. education.

by the rules they had been given and they couldn't stand up to the politicians who insisted they must. They started lying, webs of lies, years of lies. And when nobody believed them anymore, they lashed out at those who told the truth. (p. A15)

Teachers and administrators are like those troops: caught in webs of lies, trying to convince themselves, their superiors, and their publics that increased student achievement means that students are being educated and that the teachers, administrators, and schools are succeeding. However, such disingenuousness exacts a psychic cost, more so for those with some integrity (Nelson, 2002).

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Corrupt systems and corrupt individuals victimize people. Corrupt people, or those with corruption-oriented dispositions or motives, will be drawn to corrupt systems. People of integrity will attempt to alter such corrupt systems. Failing that, people are apt to succumb to such corrupt systems, become isolates within them, or move (i.e., change systems), by relocating if possible. Once someone becomes an active, willing participant in a corrupt system (say, an administrator in such a system), the inducements are there to maintain the system and the ill-gotten benefits accrued. The efforts (time, money, energy) spent in propping up a corrupt system are themselves both forms of and outcomes of corruption. Decisions made (policy, programs, etc.) are then more likely to be made out of self-interest than they are for more ideal, altruistic reasons.

We all are implicated to a greater or lesser degree. Corrupt systems are difficult, if not impossible, to challenge and change from within, especially since the power operant in such systems is self-protective and self-perpetuating. Also, corruption may work in tandem with other forms of repression, such as racism, sexism, and classism. No wonder corrupt institutions are so difficult to change. No wonder schooling in the United States is so resistant to change. It took nothing less than a voters' revolution in Mexico to rid that country of a corrupt political bureaucracy (the PRI), and, still, the effort to weed out corruption, to change the culture, is likely to be long term and daunting.

For ourselves, in our present circumstances, defining, recognizing, and naming corruption—privately and publicly—are perhaps our first, most important steps in challenging and changing it. Until we recognize corruption in all its many guises, we, and those we serve, remain its unwitting victims.

NOTES

1. This article is based on a paper given by the first author (Waite, 2001) to the annual meeting of the University Council for Educational Administration.
2. Some reports list between 60 and 70 children dead (Gargan, 2001).

3. The highest figure of this range, at the time, was what the superintendent of the Dallas (Texas) Independent School District received in his *first year* “because of incentives and to help his family resettle in Dallas, according to his contract” (Austin American-Statesman, November 24, 2000, p. B9), reportedly the highest superintendent salary in the nation at the time. The person hired was the former Commissioner of Education for Texas.
4. See Waite, Boone, and McGhee (2001) on the role the Texas Business and Education Coalition played (and continues to play) in the establishment of the Texas accountability system—among the most regressive/repressive in the nation—and on the incestuous relationships among multinational corporations, the state’s “leadership” and the state’s top “educators.”
5. It may well be that corruption in the Chinese and Mexico City cases also result in gains through the downward flow and siphoning off of resources, but, due to the protective nature of such systems and a code or culture of silence that surrounds such practices (that, and the insular nature of the Chinese state in particular), the evidence is scant. Also, power is implicated in the lack of disclosure of instances of its abuse. The powerful can easily punish the whistleblower. In the Mexico City police case, the *Houston Chronicle* (Althaus, 2000, p. 1) describes the practice whereby “some politicians reward themselves or their relatives by siphoning money from the public trough.” And, according to this article, caught up in this “culture of corruption” is the [then] ruling party’s (*Partido Revolucionario Institucional*[Institutional Revolutionary Party]; The PRI) “pyramid of power.”

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