

Dear Families,

Below is a narrative story written from the perspective of a typical student at PS 166. We want you to understand not only what teachers experience, but what your children do as well. **All of the events in this story have actually happened. The criticisms and abuses were shared by numerous teachers who have personally experienced and witnessed them.** For the sake of this narrative, all events described take place in one classroom over a fifteen minute observation time frame.

This narrative illustrates a mere fraction of the micromanagement and abuse that teachers and students experience on a daily basis. The story focuses on all of the irrelevant, negative criticisms given by the principal who rarely highlights the amazing learning taking place or how your children have grown throughout the years.

Please read the story below to see what it may be like for your child at this school. We know some parents have been hesitant to believe some of the claims, **we hope this helps share clear examples of how Ms. Mastriano's leadership impacts all staff and students.**

There are additional notes at the end of the story.

Thank you.

A Visit from Ms. Mastriano

I trickled into the classroom behind the other students, backpack strapped on, out of breath from the stairs. My teacher stood by the door, smiling, and greeted us with "Welcome back! Check the board for the morning work and then start to unpack."

As usual she appeared happy to see us and as I made my way to my desk, I saw her hastily refilling our supply boxes with new pens. Then, she began to write an objective (learning goal) on the board and was anxiously staring at the clock.

As I put away my homework folder, I thought back to yesterday. My teacher had disappeared after Morning Meeting. We had a substitute for two periods while she was gone. When my teacher came back, her eyes were red. Why did my teacher always have so many meetings? I hoped she didn't have one today.

The rest of the morning was spent doing our usual reading work. As my teacher began to write a new vocabulary word on the board, our class phone rang.

With the sound of the first ring, my teacher froze, eyes darting to the phone. Then she said "Please copy the word on your boards and use it in a sentence."

I began to copy the word, but I also watched my teacher. She picked up the phone and said "Hello?"

I waited.

"Hi Debra."

She didn't say anything else, but I knew she must be listening to something the principal was saying.

"Okay. Yes. Goodbye."

My teacher hung up the phone, hard. When she turned around she looked frustrated about something.

"Who was that?" I asked.

“Don’t worry about it,” my teacher replied with a smile. “How is your assignment? Let’s all check our work together.”

A little while later, during math, I heard our classroom door open. It was the principal. I watched my teacher. She saw that the principal was there and then began to teach as usual. She took out her whiteboard and marker and began to say “Today we will be trying a new strategy for adding three digit numbers. One way we can do that is by—”

“Where is the objective?!” interrupted the principal.

I sat there, confused and intimidated by her tone. Why was the principal talking during the lesson?

“It’s written right here on the board,” answered my teacher, pointing to the screen. I watched as the principal copied something down on her phone. Then my teacher began to show us how to set up our equations for the day. The principal kept interrupting the lesson, making it difficult for me to concentrate and listen to my teacher.

“So remember, always keep place value in mind when you’re—” began my teacher.

“Where are the charts for this lesson? They’re supposed to be hanging up!” interrupted the principal again.

My teacher silently pointed to the chart hanging next to the board, in plain sight.

When the lesson was over, each of us made our way back to our seats. I took out my notebook and a pen. Suddenly there was another finger on my paper, pointing to the empty date line.

“DO NOT forget to write the date,” ordered the principal.

I jumped in surprise. I had been so excited to start that I hadn’t written the date. I looked at my teacher, who was looking anxiously at the principal. It looked like my teacher wanted to say something but she couldn’t. Had I done something wrong?

“Well? Write it down! Now.” repeated the principal. She was leaning over me to look at my paper. I couldn’t see my neighbor. Why was she standing so close to me? I barely knew her.

I hastily scribbled down the date, my face burning in shame. Something about the way the principal spoke always made me feel like I was in big trouble.

As I got back to work I heard the principal say to my teacher “They don’t know to write the date! They must do that on every paper— before ANYTHING else!”

“I know. I do remind them to, but sometimes they just get so excited that they forget. They’re very eager to start their work,” replied my teacher.

“Well, no. They aren’t doing it!” the principal insisted, before walking towards another child.

I turned back towards my paper and kept my head bent over my work. Before I could write another number, I heard the principal’s voice again.

“What is this?!” she exclaimed, pointing to the pencil in my friend’s hand.

“A pencil,” he replied nervously.

The principal turned towards my teacher once again. "Pencil? They're supposed to use pens!" she cried in an accusatory tone.

My teacher only nodded and continued to walk around the room to check on the other students who were working.

"You know we have to use pens so we can see what their mistakes are!" she replied across the room angrily.

The principal continued to walk around, looking over the students' work. She strutted around the classroom, shook her head, scrutinized the bulletin boards, went through folders, and mainly, flipped through our notebooks. My teacher's eyes flitted constantly between the students and the principal. She had a wide, fearful look in her eyes. I wondered; why was my teacher so nervous? Math was usually so much fun.

Suddenly the principal turned towards my teacher and criticized our classroom. "Why are the students' last names not on their desks? Why are there blank pages in their notebooks? Everything in here is so disorganized. You should have put these tables here. You need to move this. NO! This is not working. I'm going to send up an aide later because this is really just so unacceptable!"

My teacher just looked at Ms. Mastriano before she moved to work with a small group on the rug. Once my teacher's back was turned I heard the principal mumble, "This room is a MESS."

I looked around our room; it didn't look messy to me. Why was the principal even talking about all of these things? They had nothing to do with math. I couldn't keep my eyes off of the principal. I wished she would just leave.

A moment later, the principal paused to look at another child's work, pointing at his paper. I craned my neck to hear her say:

"What's going on here? Don't you know what $200 + 200$ is?" she asked him, sharply.

The other child looked at her blankly. Then the principal signaled for my teacher to join her AGAIN and pointed at his paper. My teacher left the other students she was working with to join the principal.

"He doesn't know how to do this!" the principal yelled.

My teacher meekly explained that we were learning a new concept and she was sure the student was just getting started.

"NO he doesn't get it," the principal insisted before turning back to the boy.

"Well?" the principal continued, looking back at the dumbfounded student, "You're going to have to sit here until you figure it out. C'mon! What's $2+2$? What's $20+20$? Then what is $200+200$? You should know this."

Several students were no longer doing their math and looked over at the child with the principal. I looked at him too. He looked really embarrassed and kept his eyes down on his paper. He quickly scribbled down an answer.

The principal walked away from him to talk again to the teacher and loudly said, "We're going to need to meet because the kids—they just don't get it. So, we're going to have a meeting and make a plan because they need to know this! Bring their notebooks with you. I want to show the math coach because this is a problem!" I wondered why my teacher had to go to *another* meeting. We knew how to do the math!

My teacher nodded and the principal walked out the door, which slammed behind her. My teacher stood and simply stared at the door. When she turned around, her shoulders were slumped and she sighed deeply. A moment later,

another teacher came into the classroom to wait with us while my teacher stepped out to use the bathroom. She returned after several minutes, her eyes were puffy and wet, like she had been crying. She looked so unhappy. I had seen all my old teachers like this many times before, but most of my favorite teachers had left our school. I missed them so much.

I pushed my chair out from my desk and walked over to my teacher and grabbed her hand. She looked at me, surprised.

I smiled up at her and said “Even if the principal doesn’t think you’re a good teacher, I think you’re the best teacher ever!”

My teacher gently squeezed my hand and smiled “Thank you,” she said.

I skipped back to my chair to finish my work and I was just about to get started on the next problem when the phone rang again. I once again heard my teacher answer it with the same calm voice.

“Hello? Hi Debra.

Okay.

Okay.

Yes, but—

...

Okay.

Goodbye.”

When she hung up the phone, my teacher sighed once again and made her way to the front of the room. Math was over.

“Can we please do a Gonoodle? We never get to do any movement videos!” complained a student.

My teacher smiled sadly. “I know,” she replied. “Maybe we will another day, but not right now.”

“Can’t we please have some time to draw, or have some free time?” asked another child.

“I really wish we could,” my teacher responded, “but we can’t.”

Many of the students groaned and another complained “Why can’t we do fun stuff?”

“We just can’t,” repeated my teacher, sounding defeated. I guess she couldn’t tell us why.

I listened to my classmates complain and I watched my teacher. She smiled at us. I knew she cared. Her eyes didn’t match her smile—she seemed sad about something else. Maybe there was a connection—a connection between us not being able to do fun things and the woman who had just left through the classroom door.

END

Notes

Sometimes the behavior described such as the phone calls and negative dialogue between the principal and teacher can last much longer than a mere fifteen minutes.

The behavior of Ms. Mastriano described above has occurred at PS 166 throughout all grades (K-5). For the purposes of this narrative, only one classroom was highlighted over the course of a fifteen minute observation.