The Ecology of Trust in the Principalship

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Trust is a fundamental concept in the relational aspects of our lives. As schools play a special role in our society, understanding trust dynamics in schools is vital. The instrumental role in fostering the culture of trust in schools—and hence the immense responsibility and challenges that come with it—lies in the scope of school administrators' everyday activity. Our extensive study examined Canadian school principals' perceptions of their moral agency and trust-brokering roles in schools. In this article, we took a contextual and ecological perspective on the ebb and flow of trust in the relationships mediated by school principals. We reviewed the literature with respect to establishing, maintaining, and sustaining trust in school settings before presenting our qualitative analysis of responses based on the perspectives of Canadian principals (n=177) who participated in our study.

Introduction

Schools play a special role in our society, and these organizations most effectively operate on the good will of all learning community members in a flourishing relationships environment. Using a social-psychological perspective of trust (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996), which emphasizes the nature of trust in interpersonal transactions and relational trust perspective, where trust in school embodies the social exchanges in the school around distinct sets of role relationships (Blau, 1986; Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Merton, 1957), we contend that understanding trust in professional relationships and fostering healthy cultures of trust in school environments is vital. Trust relations are integral to the quality of a school's social system (Goddard, Salloum, & Berebitsky, 2009; Parsons, 1951; Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2010). It is increasingly acknowledged in educational research that trust is a significant indicator of positive relationships in schools that produce favorable outcomes for learning and school functioning (Bryk & Schneider; Forsyth, 2008; Goddard, Tschannen-Moran, & Hoy, 2001; Lewicki & Bunker, 1996; Limerick & Cunnington, 1993; Tschannen-Moran, 2009). Creating, sustaining, fostering, and restoring trust are imperative activities for school leaders, and cog-

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nizance of the fundamental importance of trust and trust dynamics is essential for a successful principalship. As we interact with principals about the social and relational dynamics of their life-worlds, we are struck by the ebb and flow patterns, the comings and goings, the seasons, the crises and calms, the times when relationships seem seamless and taken-for-granted, and the times when relationships demand full attention. This article describes some of the relational dynamics that cross the radar screen of school principals.

Schools are living and breathing systems or, as we prefer to say: "ecosystems." Schools are not merely problems to be solved or mechanically tuned. Schools are mysteries to be embraced and wonderfully complicated and intricate settings where the addition of each unique person exponentially and beautifully complexifies the life-world of those the school environment hosts. We have often invited new teachers or neophyte school administrators to consider two pictures: one of a bicycle and the other a frog. We invite these colleagues to imagine taking a bike apart, piece by piece, and then to consider the reassembly process. We then ask if the same approach might be taken with the frog. In some ways, this is a ridiculous proposition, but we wonder if sometimes we misorient our "fixing" of schools using a bike approach. Schools, like frogs or other living systems, consist of interdependent parts and are infinitely complex and fragile. One construct that seems vital to the health of the living system of a school is trust. Trust seems to act as an antitoxin, a health-giving ingredient for good will, excellent working conditions, and enhanced learning experiences. Of course, trust can be built, brokered, and bolstered, as well as breached, broken, and betrayed. Although trust restoration is an integral part of the life cycle of trust, it is not discussed in this particular article. Instead, we review some of the trust dynamics literature with respect to *establishing, maintaining, and sustaining* trust in school settings. We also describe the methodological underpinnings of our research and then share the qualitative analysis findings based on the perspectives of responding Canadian principals (*n*=177) to demonstrate the appropriateness of this ecological perspective of trust in the context of the principalship. We conclude with a discussion of our findings regarding the ecology of trust in school relationships as perceived by principals.

Establishing Trust

The concept of trust has emerged as a dynamic, multidimensional phenomenon that affects many aspects of human relationships and behavior (Adams, 2008). This complex and multifaceted nature makes trust a difficult notion to define. Through our synthesis of common definitions of trust, we have come to understand trust as the extent to which one engages in reciprocal interactive relationships such that there is willingness to be vulnerable to another and to assume risk with the confidence that the other party will possess some semblance of benevolence, competence, honesty, openness, reliability,

respect, wisdom, and care (Daly, 2009; Day, 2009; Mishra, 1996; Tschannen-Moran, 2004; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). Trust "operates within the cognitive and psychological domain as a motive for behavior, at the interpersonal level to shape social exchanges, and within organizations to influence collective performance" (Adams, pp. 29-30). The question that begs our response is: how is this pervasive, multidimensional, and dynamic phenomenon established, maintained, and sustained? Tschannen-Moran argued that the way trust unfolds will not be the same at all times and in all places, as it takes on varying characteristics at diverse stages of a relationship. In this and the following sections, we examine a few ways that trust can develop.

We realize that trust cannot be established overnight and that the process of establishing trust is time consuming. Trust is also a phenomenon that requires particular efforts on the part of those involved in the process. It is not automatic, but is created by the things one does (or fails to do).

> The issue is *building* trust—that is, creating trust, maintaining trust, restoring trust once it has been lost or betrayed. Trusting is something that we individually *do*; it is something we make, we create, we build, we maintain, we sustain with our promises, our commitments, our emotions and our sense of our own integrity. (Solomon & Flores, 2001, p. 5)

Moreover, trust does not just happen; trust is essentially a learned behavior. Solomon and Flores argued that trust, like love, is an emotional skill: "It requires judgment. It requires vigilant attention. It requires conscientious action. It involves all of the intricate reciprocities of a human relationship (even in cases where it remains 'unrequited')" (p. 6). Trust is said to be a human virtue, cultivated through speech, conversation, commitments, and action (Solomon & Flores).

In their relationships, people base their trust judgments around *facets* or *faces of trust*: benevolence, honesty, openness, reliability and competence, care, educational ideals, and wisdom (Day, 2009; Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999; Tschannen-Moran, 2004). School leaders can facilitate trust through employing these elements, each of which is a part of school relationships. Perhaps the most essential ingredient and commonly recognizable facet of trust is the sense of caring or benevolence: "the confidence that one's well-being or something one cares about will be protected by the trusted person or group. One can count on the good will of the other to act in one's best interest" (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999, p. 187). Day distinguished care from benevolence as a stand-alone facet of trust, defining it as "the extent to which the leader is seen to care for the personal as well as the academic selves of others" (p. 726). *Reliability* is the extent to which one can count on another to come through with what is needed. "The sense that one is able to depend on another consistently is an important element of trust" (Tschannen-Moran,

2004, p. 28). Reliability combines a sense of predictability with benevolence. Predictability alone is insufficient because a person can be consistently malevolent. There are times when good intentions are not enough. When a person is dependent on another and some level of skill is involved in fulfilling an expectation, then a person who means well may nonetheless not be trusted. Thus competence becomes important as "the ability to perform a task as expected, according to appropriate standards" (p. 30). *Honesty* is a fundamental facet of trust (Cummings & Bromily, 1996). Honesty concerns a person's character, integrity, and authenticity. Trusting another means that one can expect that the word or promise of another individual, whether oral or written, can be relied on. *Openness* is the extent to which relevant information is not withheld by either communicator. We would agree that

> It is a process by which individuals make themselves vulnerable by sharing information with others. Such openness signals a kind of reciprocal trust, a confidence that the information will not be exploited and that recipients can feel the same confidence in return. (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999, p. 188)

Two additional facets are *educational ideals*, or the extent to which hope is nurtured, realized, and renewed by the leader; and *wisdom*: the extent to which the leader makes prudent, discerning, and timely decisions that are in the interests of the students, the school, and its staff (Day, 2009).

As discussed above, at its core, trust is about relationships (Maister, Green, & Galford, 2004). Trust is featured in the daily social interactions of school life that develop or fail to develop (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999) helpfully remind us that, "relationships within organizations are continuous. Individuals relate to the same network of people, and there is incentive to behave in trustworthy ways, to develop a reputation for trustworthiness, and to garner the benefits of trusting relationships" (p. 185). Social relations and the obligations inherent in such relations are mainly responsible for the production of trust. It has been said that "central to the concepts of trust, seen as embodied in structures of social relations, is uncertainty about other people's motivations" (Misztal, 1996, p. 21). Of great importance for building trust are *lasting* social relationships:

> I will trust you if I believe you're in this for the long haul, that you're not just trying to maximize the short-term benefit to you in each of our interactions. Trust is about reciprocity: you help me and I'll help you. But I need to know that I can rely on you to do your part, and that our relationship is built on shared values and principles. (Maister et al., 2004, p. 66)

In addition to social processes, trust may result from calculation or from shared values (Liebskind & Oliver, 2000). *Process-based trust* is built up over

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time; as actors interact, the more they tend to trust or distrust one another as they update their information about each other's capabilities and character. *Calculative trust* is based on estimates of another's motives and interests; these will comprise both the gains from behaving in a trustworthy manner (or not), and the costs that may result from untrustworthy behavior. *Value-based trust* is predicated on the understanding that the actors share norms of trustworthy behavior in relation to particular types of exchange.

Thus as a relational phenomenon, trust is derived from repeated interactions over time between trustor and trustee (Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, & Camerer, 1998). Relational trust encompasses the complex web of social exchanges that condition the basic operations of school life. Embedded in the daily social routines of schools is an interrelated set of mutual dependencies among all key actors: students, teachers, principals, administrators, and parents. There are at least three levels of relational trust: *discernment, formation*, and *culmination*.

> At its most basic (intrapersonal) level, relational trust is rooted in a complex cognitive activity of discerning the intentions of others. These discernments occur within a set of role relations (interpersonal level) that are formed both by the institutional structure of schooling and by the particularities of an individual school community with its own culture, history, and local understandings. Finally, these trust relations culminate in important consequences at the organizational level, including more effective decision-making, enhanced social support for innovation, more efficient social control of adults' work, and an expanded moral authority to "go the extra mile for children." (Bryk & Schneider, 2002, p. 22)

In the broad sense, relational trust grows from social respect. Relational trust diminishes when individuals perceive that others are behaving in ways that seem inconsistent with their expectations about the other's role obligations to do the right thing respectfully for the right reasons.

Maintaining Trust

Establishing trusting relationships is only the beginning of the trust development process. Trust is only as durable as the proximal conditions that support it (Messick & Kramer, 2001). If empathy disappears, trust may also disappear. If positive affect evaporates, the behaviors that depend on the affect will also change. People consciously and perhaps unconsciously monitor relationships and evaluate them both in terms of the relative value of the outcomes and in terms of procedures. In other words, "people ask whether what they get out of a relationship is commensurate with what they think others are getting out of relationships, and they also ask whether the rules of the relationship are fair" (Messick & Kramer, p. 101). Therefore, trusting

relationships between principal and teachers, principal and students, and principal and parents need to be continually maintained in order to ensure a trusting atmosphere in the school's ecosystem.

Once they have been initiated, trust relationships tend to be maintained in two broadly defined ways: "through *direct recognition of the value of the relationship* and through *indirect feedback*, which stimulates continuation or iteration of the reciprocal dealings that constitute the relationship" (Hardin, 2002, p. 145). The mode of direct recognition may be the whole story for many dyadic trust relationships, as the people involved know that continued interaction with each other will benefit them.

Responsibility for maintaining trust in schools falls to those who have more hierarchical power and objective responsibility for the school environment. Modeling and extending trust are pivotal activities for school leaders both to establish and to sustain the reciprocal nature of trust in their respective settings. Tschannen-Moran (2004) suggested: "Even if trust is not readily extended to you, it is important to remember that the responsibility for establishing trust rests most heavily with the one with the most power" (p. 58). Trustworthy behavior on the part of a school principal can cultivate trustworthy norms of behavior among the faculty, staff, and students. In fact one of the most powerful actions of a school leader is to articulate and enforce norms of behavior that will foster a greater level of trust in the school community. Typically, "enforcing the norms means calling people who break those norms to account for their actions, doing so in ways that do not embarrass, humiliate, or demean them but that challenge them to behave better in the future" (Tschannen-Moran, p. 59). However, according to Annison and Wilford (1998), one should always be aware of rights and responsibilities: "Developing trusting relationships—in our personal lives and at work—requires that we understand the balance between rights—what we think we are entitled to—and responsibilities—our obligations to the people around us and the community of which we are part" (p. 98).

Principals' openness is of great importance for maintaining trusting relationships. Hoffman, Sabo, Bliss, and Hoy (1994) found that those factors that promote faculty trust in the principal are primarily related to the openness of the leadership behavior of the principal. In particular, openness in the supportiveness of the principal's behavior best fosters trust in the principal. The principal's constructive criticism and hard work set an example and foster trust in the administration (Tarter, Bliss, & Hoy, 1989). Principals striving to develop more productive social relationships in schools should not underestimate the importance of *leadership by example*. We would agree that, "supportiveness is within the principal's control—a function of working hard and maintaining a constructive, upbeat focus on the matters at hand" (Tarter et al., p. 306). Similarly, Hoffman et al. (1994) concluded, "If principals are to

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lead effectively, they must develop openness and trust with teachers" (p. 498).

The most effective means by which to establish openness is communication. According to Govier (1998), trust is "a presumption of meaningful communication" (p. 8). We listen to others because we assume that we can believe what they say; and we speak to others because we assume that they are able to understand what we say. Shurtleff (1998) argued that open and direct communication is necessary for the development of an atmosphere of trust. Gabarro (1990) found that "mature and stable relationships are characterized by greater multimodality [of communication] than casual or less intense relationships" (p. 84). Trust is maintained through the facilitation of ongoing communication: "Access to information and the shared perception of openness in decision-making supported an ongoing commitment to collective action and the mutual trust required to proceed" (Fauske, 1999, p. 12).

According to Spuck and MacNeil (1999), the primary characteristics of principals who gained teacher trust were holding to high ethical standards and displaying competence. They found that principals gained teachers' trust by promoting their professional growth and curriculum development; demonstrating confidence in themselves; demonstrating their beliefs about what is important in the school; being committed to the school and its continued progress; and empowering teachers. In order to enhance trust, principals, in addition to being instructional leaders, need to be "strong enough to confront conflicts and have the interpersonal skills to listen to teachers, maintain their confidence, and encourage and motivate them by recognizing their professionalism and personal lives" (Gimbel, 2003, p. 52). Furthermore, Gimbel provided a list of trust enhancers for principals that consists of supportive and communication behaviors. Some of her supportive behaviors include: maintaining confidentiality, consistency, reliability, admitting mistakes, and showing respect and care for others. Among prominent communicative behaviors are timely and accurate communication, empathy, shared decision-making, conflict resolution, and availability to others.

Bennis (1999) described five C factors that help the leader generate trust: *competence, constancy, caring, candor,* and *congruity.* Beginning with *congruity,* Bennis described this factor as authenticity, which reflects character. But congruity goes beyond simply knowing oneself; it requires *constancy:* presenting the same face at school as at home or in community. *Candor* is fundamental to building trust, because by acknowledging our shortcomings, we earn both the understanding and trust of followers. *Caring* leaders proactively engage and invest in the professional lives and occasionally in the personal lives of their followers. Last, another vital characteristic of trust building is *competence.* Although essential, this factor may have been overemphasized at the expense of the other more enduring trust-building characteristics of candor, caring, constancy, and congruity.

Summarizing the findings of empirical research on trust consequences, Forsyth (2008) reported that teachers' trust of a principal is positively related to the principal's authenticity, transformational leadership, teachers' trust of school organization and colleagues, and school climate. It is also positively related to collective teacher efficacy; professional community; and high academic standards, expectations, and performance. It is said that, "relational trust (combined teacher trust of principal, colleagues and parents) is positively related to teacher 'can do' orientation to innovation and internalized responsibility" (p. 21). Ensminger (2001) noted that reputation plays an important role in the establishment of trust. As principals' relationships with others develop, so do trust and reputation. In addition, maintaining one's personal integrity in interactions with colleagues spawns trust (Leonard, 1999).

Sustaining Trust

One of the most challenging tasks for principals is to create strategies, ethos, and mechanisms to preserve and improve trust once it is established. This is more easily intended and said than it is actually done. Tschannen-Moran (2004) viewed sustaining as development of authentic and optimal levels of trust, characterized by deep and complete interdependence and vulnerability without anxiety. If school ecosystems are to reap the rewards of a trusting work environment, it is the principal's responsibility not only to build, but also to sustain trusting relationships (Whitener, Brodt, Korsgaard, & Werner, 1998). Sustainability of relationships puts trust squarely in a place of resonance with the metaphor of ecological language. According to Hardin (2002), a leader's trustworthiness is the foundation for enhancing trust.

> If my trust in you is well placed, that is because you are likely to have the motivation to do what I trust you to do. That is to say, you are likely to be trustworthy. In the encapsulated-interest account, trustworthiness is just the capacity to judge one's interests as dependent on doing what one is trusted to do. In virtually all accounts, the central problem in your trustworthiness is your commitment to fulfill another's trust in you. (p. 28)

One can imagine that enhancing trustworthiness in general will increase levels of trust, because people will tend to recognize the level of trustworthiness in others. Hence there will be more productive cooperation in schools (Hardin). Furthermore, trustworthiness builds social capital:

> There might be some feedback between trust and further development of trust. I cooperate with you, discover your trustworthiness, and therefore cooperate even more or on even more important matters with you. If I trust most of the people with whom I interact, I might also

begin to take the risk of cooperating with almost anyone I meet, at least if they are likely to remain in my ambit. Hence my general optimism about others is a benefit to those others when they might wish to cooperate with me (or even to abuse my optimistic expectations). (p. 84)

However, according to Hardin, it is the high level of trustworthiness of people in the network that generates this benefit. Their trustworthiness is on the encapsulated-interest account, the result of their having an interest in being trustworthy toward those with whom they have ongoing interactions that are beneficial and are likely to continue to be.

Many years ago, Kouzes and Posner (1993) discussed the importance of "value-added competence" for leaders to sustain the trust of their followers. This means that we are more likely to have confidence in well-meaning people who can perform their technical, professional, and people-oriented functions well. This account calls on more than trusting those who are merely well intended. Leader-watchers expect a certain level of performance from their leaders. Over half the respondents in their study said that leaders who have a sense of direction and convictions about how to move closer to preferred futures garnered their confidence. Finally, Kouzes and Posner's study pointed to the importance that followers place on the ability of leaders to communicate, encourage, and inspire the confidence of people toward worthwhile goals. Personal conviction, passion, commitment, and enthusiasm for the cause of the organization or community were cited as key attributes of leader trustworthiness.

Tschannen-Moran (2004) argued that in order to understand the process of sustaining trust, it is useful to consider the five facets of trust (benevolence, honesty, openness, reliability, and competence) in relation to the five functions of instructional leaders (visioning, modeling, coaching, managing, and mediating). First, the principal is responsible for lifting up a *vision* of the school as a trustworthy environment for all constituencies (i.e., administration, teachers, students, parents, and the public). This exploration of trust provides school leaders with a framework from which to speak of trust dynamically and proactively. Second, "effective school leaders not only know how to 'talk the talk' of trust, they also know how to 'walk the walk'" (p. 177). In other words, principals are called to be role models when it comes to cultivating a *culture of trust*. Third, principals can also build trust by how they engage around the instructional matters of the school. Being a coach means assisting people to move forward toward their goals. Fourth, in addition to their role as instructional leader and coach, principals are charged with the responsibility for management and administration. This needs to be accomplished not by mechanically taking things apart and putting them back together (like the bike approach), but rather by using an approach that honors the intricacies of a living system. Finally, trustworthy principals

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know how to deal with conflict through reconciliation and repair of trust through mediation and other means.

Ecology of Trust in the Principalship: A Study

Our examination of the Canadian school principals' perceptions of their moral agency and trust-brokering roles in schools described their efficacy in establishing, maintaining, and recovering trust in schools. This study provided valuable findings that enhance our understandings of ethical decision-making and trust-brokering role perceptions of the Canadian school principals. Although the discussions of trust and moral agency are certainly present in the educational literature, not much is known about the perceived role of a principal as both a moral agent and trust broker. As Glanz (2010) observed, despite some work in this area, scholarship and research have not delved more deeply into issues of moral or ethical leadership in regard to the roles and responsibilities of principals. Only scant empirical descriptions and analyses of trust are offered to school principals, who regularly grapple with issues related to decision-making, relationships, and trust. Furthermore, only a few studies have considered how trust develops, and little extant research has considered how trust might recover after it has been harmed (Schweitzer, Hershey, & Bradlow, 2006).

As a primary data-collection tool for this study, a survey was administered in both mail-out and on-line forms. Open-ended questions for the instrument were developed by the researchers based on suggestions and recommendations from an expert panel of principals, the relevant literature, and adapted items from related instruments (Center for Corporate Excellence, 2007; Tschannen-Moran, 2004). The survey was field-tested with a group of principals before distribution by mail and on line. In this article, we selectively discuss only those questions that pertain to the theme of the ecology of trust in school settings.

For this exploratory study, principals from across Canada were contacted using e-mail and mail addresses from the *Canadian Education on the Web* (2007) Web site. Hard copies of the survey were sent to approximately 2,000 principals; invitations to participate in on-line surveys were sent to approximately 3,000 principals across Canada. We were deeply disappointed in the return rate ($n=177$), a response much smaller than expected. We do consider the responses sufficient for the needs of this qualitative aspect of the study, but we are modest in our generalizations. We also noted the disproportionate responses from three of 13 jurisdictions. We believe such a low response rate was indicative of principals' extremely busy professional lives and lack of personal contact between the ourselves and participants. Although economies of on-line surveys are attractive, reports of blocked e-mails and ease of dismissal led to a poor response rate. Unfortunately, the

study did not afford follow-up on either surface or on-line surveys; again, reducing response rates.

The demographic data for the study included six categories: age, sex, province, years of professional experience, years of experience as a principal, and formal ethical training (see Table 1).

The participating principals fitted into four age-range categories; most (79%) belonged to the 41-60 age group. Representation of the sexes was almost equal, with a slight prevalence of male principals. Although most of the participants represented three provinces—Alberta (20%), Saskatchewan (23%), and Ontario (20%)—all provinces and territories were represented in this study. More than half the participants were experienced educators with extensive experience in principalship and significant experience with formal training in ethics. More than three quarters of the participants held a master's degree, and a few had doctorates. Prevalently, formal training consisted of university-level courses in ethics or ethical leadership, as well as board or school professional development activities (or a combination of both).

We received responses to open-ended questions and coded them according to the coding system of dominant themes that recurred (MacMillan & Schumacher, 2006). We then combined the codes into categories and the

Table 1
Demographics of Respondents (*n*=177)

Age Range	%	Province	%
31-40 yrs	14	Alberta	20
41-50 yrs	37	Saskatchewan	23
51-60 yrs	42	Ontario	20
61 yrs or more	2	Others	37
Sex	*%*	*Years of Professional Experience*	*%*
Male	53	10 years or less	3
Female	45	11 to 20 years	27
No Response	2	21 to 30 years	52
		31 years or more	15
Years of Experience as a Principal	*%*	*Formal Ethics Training*	*%*
5 years or less	31	Yes	53
6-10 years	35	No	25
11-15 years	14	Unsure	22
16 years or more	19		

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categories into patterns or concepts (Lichtman, 2010). Analysis of open-ended responses provided rich descriptive data for the study.

Research Findings

In line with both the literature review and the analysis of emergent themes, participants' responses were grouped into three major categories that described ebbs and flows of trust at three stages: principals' successes and obstacles in establishing or developing trusting relationships; their approaches to and difficulties with maintaining trust; and principals' perspectives of culture of trust and advice for sustaining trust in schools. Although infrequently, principals discussed these stages in their relationships with parents, students, and other administrators. The most frequent nature of relationships was related to establishing, maintaining, and sustaining trust in relationships with teachers (staff).

Developing Trust

Analysis of the qualitative data pointed to the fact that establishing trust was a crucial (and often challenging) stage for principals in their leadership roles. Most of the responses reflected principals' beliefs that the development of trust required time, and that school contexts, organizational culture, and previous experiences expedited or slowed the process. As one of the participants noted, "Time is a key factor for establishing of trust, as staff [members] need to see the principal operate for some time to make their own assessments about trust." Another principal said, "Trust only develops with time and consistent integrity, yet often 'time' is the enemy." Such behaviors as ethical integrity, honesty, openness, positive attitudes, high competence, motivation levels, and foremost, willingness, greatly benefited trust-initiated relationships between the involved parties. Moreover, relationship-building was seen by participants as key to the development of trust. As one participant noted, "Trust relationships must be earned; they are not just given to any principal. It takes time to develop positive relationships with staff." Also some participants voiced an opinion that trust preexists in relationships and may diminish or increase over time. "I think we start off on the basis of trust. We are not wary or cautious until someone has proven to be less than honest. Trust certainly improves through times of testing," posited one participant. Preexisting trust for some principals was dependent on the referral from a trusted source such as referential information from a colleague or other referee, based on experiences that demonstrated to the referee the person's trustworthiness in the past. Further exploration of these juxtaposing perspectives revealed that professional and personal contexts and positive or negative past experiences with trust affected participants' views on the mechanisms of trust development. Whereas the latter perspective was indicative of positive school climates and strong learning communities in

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general, the former was particularly evident in the comments of those principals who told about administrative placements in the new schools. The culture of their schools played a significant role in the process of establishing trust in these situations, as principals had to learn "the ways staff were set in, that is, the way things have always been done in this school" and believed that "time was needed for staff to know you vs. the rumors of who you are." One principal shared that being new to the school, he needed time to "create a new reality of trust; staff had to ascertain whether [he] was real or not."

Logically, among the most common obstacles instrumental in preventing the development of trust in relationships were the opposites of the behaviors discussed above such as dishonesty, lack of integrity, backstabbing, lack of time, unwillingness to trust, and overall negative professional and positive attitudes, and so forth. However, a number of other significant issues surfaced in the analysis of the data. The biggest hurdles for principals to overcome in establishing trustful relationships with others, it seems, were feelings of betrayal and poor, untruthful relationships in the past. "People see and understand events from their perspective and life experiences. It is hard when a staff member has previous emotional baggage that hinders their ability to trust others," said one of the participants. Some principals observed that past experiences caused work-related depression and unwillingness to be around people among their school staff. Referring to the relationships between administration and staff, one of the respondents stated that the staff's "own experiences with authority in the past color their acceptance or rejection of trusting relationships." Interestingly, cultural and racial differences were seen by one of the participants as the major obstacle in developing trust; he stated, "my community is all black, I am white. Trust is not a given."

Stemming from the above discussion was the role of power and politics in the development of trusting relationships. In-school politics affected some administrators' rapport with the staff and limited their authority and influence. In one instance, a principal said, "The challenge to my competence has led me to resist confronting issues in my school as I know teachers have strong connection to school board members." As seen from multiple comments, politics were most certainly at play in situations when a new principal was hired into a school. For example, one participant reported:

> When I was hired as the principal, the vice-principal [VP] of the school had also applied. I was told the VP was not interested and only found out after I got the job. The VP formed alliances on staff and transferred mistrust from district office personnel to me.

In such cases, it seemed that there was a fear of change involved on behalf of the staff (in addition to personal biases, motives and collective agendas) as the new administrator was coming into school. One of the principals commented, "Coming in as a new principal to the school but not the district and

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having a reputation as a principal who 'cleans the house' made it difficult for staff to initially trust me." Furthermore, fear of change and uncertainty caused staff to form allegiances and cliques in support of someone they knew well. For example, the existing school administrator often vied for power as well. Principals wrote at length about "us vs. them" attitudes that had become a major barrier in their attempts to establish trust with staff. Some observed that members of school faculty maintained the *we/they* mentality developed during labor disputes and strikes of years past; others believed that certain staff members felt that administration did not understand their situation and, therefore, did not trust their principals. One of the principals alluded to the fact that he understood this stance, as "it was the natural consequence of seniority of position."

Maintaining Trust

Discussing the process of maintaining trust with and among staff, participating principals voiced the opinion that it may sometimes be even harder than the process of initiating or establishing trusting relationships in schools. Some of the most common difficulties arising in this process for the participants were related to performance (or lack thereof) and unprofessional behavior on the part of certain teachers. Performance-related issues often surfaced in the process of staff evaluation and included lack of commitment to an agreed-on task or responsibility, unwillingness to engage in professional development, and "slacking" or "doing the bare minimum." As a result of administrative intervention in these issues, principals often experienced hostility and "dislike campaigns" that made it difficult to maintain trust. Cited unprofessional behaviors involved slander, backstabbing, and gossip; teachers abusing the illness or leave-of-absence clauses in contracts or policies; and physical and emotional abuse, to name a few. Summarizing his experiences, one principal noted that it was hardest to maintain trust with staff "when you know their motivations are founded in evil, mal-intent, selfishness, and dishonesty."

Looking back at their experiences, principals believed that consistent leadership; continual involvement in the life of the school; formal and informal collaboration with staff; frequent, open, and honest communication; promise-keeping; and follow-through in decision-making were the most instrumental approaches to overcoming obstacles in maintaining trust. As an overarching notion for all these behaviors, the principals indicated that continual relationship-building, both in formal—professional and school-related activities—and informal—out-of-school social gatherings and community involvement—settings was considered key by most of the responding principals. As one noted, in order to maintain trust, "A leader needs to develop and expand relationships and know the person beyond just a staff member."

Principals believed that they needed to demonstrate leadership through genuine care and authentic interest in staff's issues to maintain trusting relationships. Emerging from their responses, the most effective leadership approaches included visibility and approachability; ability to listen and commitment to staff concern; shared, inclusive leadership; consultation and empowerment of staff with distributed decision-making; role-modeling and high ethical standards in personal conduct; truthfulness and forthright communication (no hidden agendas); valuing feedback and input; and promoting shared vision and positive attitudes. A number of comments addressed the issue of community of leaders. For example, one principal suggested that administrators need to "work in an egalitarian manner—be a leader or leaders—and keep communication and collaboration authentic." Transparent decision-making seemed to be the most important ingredient of such "authentic collaboration," capable of keeping the gained trust from dissipating. Referring to the vitality of transparent decision-making for trust maintenance, principals emphasized: Maintain trust through transparent decision-making, ask questions of all, keep track of promises and fulfill them; and maintain [trust] by supporting requests (reasonable), keeping lines of communication open; articulating and transmitting belief system (consistently); and transparent decision-making. Finally, and probably most important, participants explicated the need to ask for input and to respect staff's feedback to maintain the focus on collaborative leadership in school.

Sustaining Trust

When talking about sustaining trusting relationships in schools, principals in our study referred to what was termed by some participants as a culture of trust. By this is meant a school culture built on systems of values, beliefs, and norms that enforce such aspects as collaboration and cohesiveness, openness and honesty, peaceful and safe environment, high professionalism and morale, and a climate of harmony and happiness. For one of the female principals, this culture was characterized by "absence of doubt and mistrust in the climate of the school." Some of the other attributes of a culture of trust included:

> People truly listen and hear one another. New ideas are entertained.
> Praise and compliments abound. There is laughter and genuine concern
> for each other; ... Morale is high, which helps to support student
> learning. Teachers are comfortable with each other and are willing to
> learn from each other; ... It takes much less energy to maintain school
> operations—school satisfaction much higher with all. We all are glad to
> be there with one another; parents, students and staff; and ... It makes
> conversation and discussion a healthy and respectful process. People
> are willing to work on common goals, to come out of their silos and
> work toward the good of the whole school.

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Moreover, integrity was seen as playing a crucial role in sustaining trusting relationships. All of the characteristics described by the participants suggested their deep embeddedness in the system of values, beliefs, norms, and everyday behaviors in schools.

Principals suggested that an instrumental role in the process of sustaining trust in school was played by the principal, who needs to be trustworthy and to model behavior by following and enforcing school-wide values in the decision-making. One of the respondents commented, "The best way to develop trust is to be trustworthy. I do what we agree to and I try to act accordingly with the school's values. I uphold these values." However, this required trust reciprocity on the part of staff, who need to respect the principal's ideas, morals, and values as well (which is more likely if there is mutual understanding in relationships between principal and teachers). Essential for this process is a shared vision and common purpose based on the value of learning. Some of principals' comments about being role models in the enforcement of this value included:

> I attempt to model my focus on learning in an effort to instill this kind of value in others; and ... I value learning. Therefore, decisions that are made in this school should be made on the basis of this belief that learning is our fundamental purpose.

Ultimately, most of the responding principals believed that sustaining trust was best attained by making decisions in the school that were in line with the most important value: the learning undertaken by children. As some participants stated, "always keep what is best for kids in mind" and "remember, we are here for the children." Most of the time, principals felt personal responsibility as leaders of leaders to sustain a positive, trusting environment in the school and were confident in their ability to accomplish this task. One of the most common beliefs among the principals was that "working to ensure continuous strong trusting relationships in school is imperative for a principal."

Discussion

Stemming from the findings described is the crucial point that for people to trust each other in a school setting, establishing, maintaining, and sustaining trust are necessary components of the role of an effective school principal. The dynamic nature of trust at each of these stages (most often overlapping and without any set boundaries) presented principals with many challenges and opportunities to overcome obstacles with certain behaviors, actions, and decision-making strategies. We discuss our findings below, with the understanding that how trust unfolded for the participants in our study may not be the same at all times, in all places, and at all stages, as trust may take on

varied characteristics at various stages of relationships between the principals and teachers in schools (Tschannen-Moran, 2004).

As possibly the most crucial stage in their leadership roles, *establishing trust* was believed to require strong motivation and competence, a great deal of time and effort, as well as consistent openness and integrity on the part of school principals. Two perspectives on the development of trust were voiced: first, one needs time to develop trust; and second, trust preexists in relationships. Both these scenarios have been discussed in the literature. As trust develops in newly established work relationships, an initial period of making impressions is followed by a period of more intense exploration. It would seem that "trust is established through a commitment period during which each partner has the opportunity to signal to the other a willingness to accept personal risk and not to exploit the vulnerability of the other for personal gain" (Tschannen-Moran, 2004, p. 42). Shapiro, Sheppard, and Cheraskin (1992) termed this type of trust *knowledge-based trust,* in which regular communication and courtship are used by the parties to determine if they can work together well by being careful not to violate each other's developing trust. This trust is based on the other's predictability (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996). At the same time, although it is intuitive that trust grows gradually over time, researchers were surprised to find higher levels of initial trust than expected between parties who had little knowledge of each other. Tschannen-Moran) argued that *provisional trust* is extended in these cases until evidence surfaces to suggest that the other is untrustworthy, subsequently triggering defensive action. For our participants, common features in both these perspectives were the points that school contexts, organizational culture, cultural background, and previous experiences with trust affected participants' views of the trust-development patterns. Furthermore, the latter perspective was indicative of mechanisms of trust development in positive school climates and strong learning communities in general, whereas the former scenario may be more indicative of trust-building situations in schools with principals being newly assigned to the administrative positions.

We found that in-school politics affected some administrators' rapport with the staff and could limit their authority and influence and impair the development of trust (especially in situations when a new principal was hired into a school). Teachers' experiences with authority seemed to affect their acceptance or rejection of trusting relationships. In this context, trust was closely related to the notions of power, influence, and position, as "hierarchy by nature builds distrust" (Stimson & Appelbaum, 1988, p. 316). The *us vs. them* attitude of staff members became a major barrier to principals' attempts to establish trust with staff. Factors that contributed to *we/they* mentality developed as a result of labor disputes and strikes of years past or teachers' feelings that administration did not understand their situation. Thus trust was subject to barriers set by school micropolitics and the

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pressure that such politics exert on administrators. Establishing trust is thus directly dependent on those interactions and political ideologies of social systems of administrators and teachers that involve the acquisition and exercise of influence, authority, control, and power through conflictive and cooperative-consensual behaviors (Bacharach & Mundell, 1993; Ball, 1987; Blase & Blase, 2002; Iannaccone, 1991; Marshall & Scribner, 1991). However, as Duffy (2003) posits, power and politics are expected processes that occur naturally in school settings. As such, power and politics are neutral; they are not inherently wrong or evil, but "the exercise of power and politics must … be done in an ethical manner" (p. 15) by school principals.

At times more challenging than establishing trust, the process of main-taining trust required from participants a consistency of leadership; continual involvement in the life of the school; formal and informal collaboration with staff; frequent, open, and honest communication; and promise-keeping and follow-through in decision-making. Trust main-tenance was seen as a continual relationship-building process in which a principal needed to develop and expand forming trusting relationships in professional (in-school) and social (out-of-school) settings by demonstrating leadership through genuine care and authentic interest in staff's issues. Bryk and Schneider (2002) argued that relational trust requires (in addition to respect, integrity, and competence) personal regard for others. Expanding trusting relationships is a demonstration of principals' personal regard for others (Elmore, 2000) in both professional and social settings. Leithwood and Riehl (2003) posited that successful school leaders develop relationships with people by showing concern about their feelings and needs.

Principals seem to suggest that developing a community of leaders with open communication and authentic collaboration is necessary for maintaining trust in schools. Arguing for the need for school to become a "community of leaders," Barth (1987) suggested a reconfiguration of the relationships between principal and teachers, characterized by shared leadership, to promote "independence, interdependence and resourcefulness" (p. 32). Implicit in the distributed leadership model are the leadership practices of teachers, either in formal leadership roles or as informal leaders (Harris, 2004; Muijs & Harris, 2003). Hopkins and Jackson (2002) argued that trust, along with distributed leadership and social cohesion, lie at the core of the capacity-building model (Fullan, 2001; Mitchell & Sackney, 2000); that leadership resides in the human potential available to be released in an organization. Shared leadership for the participating principals consisted of such charac-teristics as visibility and approachability; ability to listen and commitment to staff concern; consultation and empowerment of staff with distributed decision-making; truthfulness and forthright communication (no hidden agendas); valuing feedback and input; and promoting shared vision and positive attitudes. Transparent decision-making seemed to be the most im-

portant ingredient of the "authentic collaboration," capable of keeping the gained trust from dissipating. At the same time, principals felt personal responsibility to maintain trust by role-modeling and high ethical standards of personal conduct. Thus maintaining trust required a combination of teacher leadership and administrative leadership, or what has been termed *parallel leadership* (Crowther, Ferguson, & Hann, 2009). Administrative leadership takes the form of *leadership modeling* (Reeves, 2002). That is to say, principals model values through their demeanor and actions and by encouraging the leadership initiatives of teachers. In turn, teacher leaders have instrumental roles in maintaining collaborative relationships, establishing professional learning in communities of practice, and reshaping school culture (Lieberman & Miller, 2004).

As discussed by the participants, sustaining trust involves deepening and optimizing relationships in schools. As members of the school community interact and get to know each other over time, trust is afforded the possibility of deepening and becoming more authentic as each person comes to understand and predict the others' behaviors (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996; Zucker, 1986). Although this may be idealizing the ecosystem, the underlying point is that healthy relationships over time may become richer and more meaningful. Participants in this study discussed sustaining trust through the culture of trust wherein school culture builds on embedded systems of values, beliefs, and norms that enforce such aspects as collaboration and cohesiveness, openness and honesty, peaceful and safe environment, high professionalism and morale, and a climate of harmony and happiness. Of course, not all cultures are nurturing and healthy. In some cases, embedded cultures have huge turnovers in staff due in part to relational fatigue where trust wears thin. Essential for the positive development of trust is the possession of a shared vision and common purpose based on the value of learning and decision-making "in the best interests of children." Similarly, Deal and Peterson (2009) discussed the "climate of trust" (p. 189), built on what is in the best interest of children. They argued that trust-building in school requires *time* to get to know and accept each other, *stories* to cement beliefs, and *traditions* to let trust grow in a *positive* direction.

Principals in our study suggested that an instrumental role in the process of sustaining trust in school is played by the principal, who needs to be trustworthy and to model behavior by following and enforcing school-wide values in decision-making. Mendoz-Morse (1992, as cited in Phillips, Renihan, & Graham, 2006) found that the presence of a skilled principal who fosters a sense of shared responsibility for learning and delegates authority to teachers is a key factor in the success of effective schools. School principals (with the help of other stakeholders) are called to change school culture by establishing new forms of "demanding trust" (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Fullan, 2005; Reina & Reina, 2006). In order to sustain trusting relationships,

school culture needs to become a "high trust culture" (Bryk & Schneider) or a "demanding culture" (Fullan) that combines respect, personal regard, integrity, and competence, and effectively incorporates high pressure and high support. The sustainability of trust is a matter of changes in culture: powerful strategies that enable people to question and alter certain values and beliefs as they create new forms of learning in schools (Fullan). As Hargreaves and Fink (2006) argued, trust is a valuable resource that "creates and consolidates energy, commitment, and relationships" (p. 213), and sustainable leadership requires wise and prudent use of such resources. Optimal (or sustainable) trust is prudent, measured, and conditional in that members of a school community know not only when to trust others, but also when to monitor others closely (Lewicki et al., 1998; Tschannen-Moran, 2004). Furthermore, strategic actions toward sustaining trust are necessary for reducing isolation in the work of teachers (Hargreaves, 1994; Lortie, 1975) and establishing mature professional learning communities where trust is nurtured, practiced, and valued (King & Newmann, 2000; Newmann & Wehlage, 1995).

All stages described by the participants in this study had one important feature in common: relationship-building was seen as a key component for developing, maintaining, and sustaining trust. However, the nature of trust seemed to differ at various stages, as principals often related levels of trust to the stages of relationships. Basic levels of trust at the developmental level were dependent on the referral from a trusted source, reputation in past dealings, instances that demonstrated trustees' trustworthiness, or past experiences of the entrusting individual. The deeper levels of trust observed at the maintaining and sustaining stages were dependent on the quality and depth of formal (professional) and informal (out-of-school) relationships related to honesty, integrity, loyalty, reliability, responsibility, and promise-keeping. Thus relationships are a vehicle through which trust can establish social capital and moral community. It is generally agreed that, "social capital is a capability that arises from the prevalence of trust in a society or certain parts of it. It can be embodied in the smallest and the most basic social group, the family, as well as the largest of groups, the nation, and all groups in between" (Fukuyama, 1995, p. 26). Furthermore, as Seligman (1997) suggested,

> Trust creates a moral community among social actors by providing a
> form of social capital that can only be acquired and utilized by the
> group as a whole and which allows for the existence of generalized trust
> among its members (as opposed to individual capital which can be
> acquired by individuals and used for the pursuit of private goods, such
> as education, training, etc.). (p. 77)

Fukuyama (1995) added that acquisition of social capital requires habituation to the moral norms of a community, and in its context, the acquisition of virtues like loyalty, honesty, and dependability. In our study,

principals asserted that strong trusting relationships were essential for the proper functioning of the school, effective decision-making, collaborative school culture, a safe learning environment, and a sense of moral community or culture of trust.

Understanding the dynamic nature of trust is an important undertaking for school administrators. Awareness of the issues involved in the ecological life cycle of trust will help principals become *symbolic leaders* (Deal & Peterson, 2009) by modeling how trusting relationships can be established, maintained, and sustained. Certainly, as evident in our discussion of the need for distributed leadership in maintaining trust in schools, a principal is not and should not be a "lone ranger" in this undertaking. However, by role-modeling and collaboration, principals can instill hope as a strategic leadership concept (Hoy & Smith, 2007). Furthermore, as Walker (2006) argued, school leaders are charged with fostering hope for future generations of leaders in society. As symbolic leaders, principals can build capacity and instill hopefulness for the sustainability of trust (i.e., development and sustaining a culture of trust) by fostering "warranted hope" (Walker & Atkinson, 2010), a hope that is grounded in such leadership behaviors as diligence and mindful practice, sense-making, and adaptive confidence.

Conclusions

The findings of this research have made it possible to conclude that building trust was a crucial yet difficult task in the work of school principals. They often had to deal with ebbs and flows of relationships at various stages of establishing, maintaining, and sustaining trust. The dynamic nature of trust at each of these stages (most often overlapping and without any set boundaries) presented principals with many challenges and opportunities to overcome obstacles with certain behaviors, actions, and decision-making strategies. The study revealed that building trust in school relationships is a complex process that required energy, time, consistency, and persistence on the part of a school leader. Most of the time, principals felt personal responsibility to make sure that relationships with teachers were established, maintained, and sustained, and were confident in their ability to accomplish this through open communication, honesty and integrity, promise-keeping and follow-through, shared leadership, caring and appreciation, and consistency. *Relationship-building* was seen as a key component for developing, maintaining, and sustaining trust. The nature of relationships and trust differed at various stages, from basic levels of trust and relationships at the initial stage to deeper levels of trust and relationships at the stages of maintaining and sustaining trust. Organizational culture, cultural background, and previous experiences with trust affected participants' views of the trust-development patterns. Trust maintenance was seen as a continual relationship-building process in which a principal needed to develop and expand forming trusting

relationships in professional (in-school) and social (out-of-school) settings by demonstrating leadership through genuine care and authentic interest in staff's issues. Sustaining trust involves deepening and optimizing relationships in schools to form a culture of trust. An instrumental role in the process of sustaining trust in school is played by the principal, who needs to be trustworthy and to model trustworthy behavior by following and enforcing school-wide values in his or her decision-making. Strong trusting relationships are deemed by principals to be essential to the proper functioning of the school, effective decision-making, a collaborative school culture, a safe learning environment, and a sense of moral community or culture of trust. We conclude that understanding the dynamic nature and ecological life cycle of trust is an important undertaking for school administrators because as leaders they are called to model how trusting relationships can be established, maintained, and sustained in their schools.

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