The fragility of trust in the world of school principals

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to examine the trust-related aspect of the work of school principals. The authors' exploratory examination of the Canadian school principals' perceptions of their moral agency and trust-brokering roles described their establishing, maintaining, and recovering of trust in schools. This article is delimited to the selected perceptions of Canadian principals' regarding the fragile nature of trust in their school settings.

Design/methodology/approach – This study used the open-ended responses from surveys sent to school principals ($n = 177$), who responded to the authors' invitation to complete a survey, as part of a larger study, in the ten provinces and three territories of Canada. The data analyses included theme and cross-theme analyses.

Findings – This study has pointed to the perception that trust-related matters are an important, yet a fragile, aspect of the work of principals. Principals often have to deal with trust-related matters, which have caused trustworthiness to be threatened and trusting relationships to be broken. Trust-related problems contribute to the fragility of trust and frequently seem to pertain to relationships between principal and other administrators, staff members, parents, and students. Most of the time, principals as leaders felt personal responsibility to make sure relationships among all stakeholders were sustained and, if broken, restored. The prevalent belief among participants in the study was that trusting relationships, though fragile and often broken, are subject to the hope of restoration and renewal.

Originality/value – This study provided valuable findings that enhance the understanding of ethical decision making and trust brokering amongst the Canadian school principals. While the discussions of trust and moral agency are certainly present in the educational literature, not much is known about the self-perceived role of a principal as both a moral agent and trust broker. Moreover, there is perceived need for qualitative studies in the area of trust in educational leadership.

Keywords Canada, Trust, Principals, Fragility of trust, Broken trust, Trust imperative

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

"I would never have thought such a little slip would make that much difference", he told us. The principal, John Miller, continued:

> I told Gwen [the teacher] that her situation was something I would try to help her with and she insisted that I hold her "particulars" in confidence. I agreed [...] but when the superintendent asked me what was going on, I told her the whole thing. Felt it was my duty. The superintendent then told someone else and it eventually got back to Gwen.

"I screwed up", John tells us. "I guess you could say I haven't had anything resembling a working relationships with Gwen ever since", says John, with a deep resigned sigh. Gwen had been one of the most energetic teacher leaders in the school; the students, parents, and staff all loved her. Some family and health issues had come up in her family and she had reluctantly shared these with her principal, John; when he had observed to her that she did not seem quite herself one day. John had promised that he would keep the personal information just between him and Gwen, but he had slipped up. Now she was hurt, feeling betrayed, and embarrassed. She avoided contact with John, and he had even heard from one of the other female teachers that Gwen was on the verge of quitting her teaching work altogether. Sitting in John's office, listening to him tell this story, we could see the regret in his expression, his whole body and manner was deflated. He had lost not only the trust of Gwen but, from his perspective, he had possibly ruined her teaching career and certainly broken the considerable collegial trust they had build up over the last eight years. "Just one slip of the tongue", he said to us, three or four times during our conversation:

> No sense trying to rationalize or justify what I did – all I know is that I am the cause of a huge breach of trust – If I had only been more careful and appreciated just how sensitive and fragile our connections with other people can be.

Stories like this one are abundant in the lives of school principals. Most school administrators, either directly or indirectly, have probably experienced trust-breaking situations in their work. The instrumental role of fostering a culture of trust in schools, and hence the immense responsibilities and challenges that come with the role, lie within the scope of school administrators' everyday activities. In this article, we will not deal with the range of ways to repair broken trust, but will look at the fragile nature of trust in relationships. This article is a part of the larger, exploratory study that examined the Canadian principals' perspectives of the notions of moral agency and trust; their perceptions of ethical problems, challenges, pressures, and influences; and grounds for their ethical decision making and recovering of trust in schools. Prior to presenting findings from our study and sharing our analysis of responses, based on the perspectives of Canadian principals ($n = 177$), we review the literature with respect to the fragile nature of trust and effects of broken trust in school settings. We conclude that school principals need to be alert to the fragility of trust in schools.

Perspectives on the fragile nature of trust

Trust is a difficult notion to define because of its complex and multi-faceted nature. Despite the fact that trust had been studied by scholars for many years, there happens to be no consensus on a best definition of trust. Our synthesis of common definitions of school-based trust is expressed as the extent to which one engages in a reciprocal relationship such that there is willingness to be vulnerable to and assume risk with the confidence that the other party will possess some semblance of benevolence, competence, honesty, openness, reliability, respect, care, wisdom, and educational ideals (Day, 2009; Mishra, 1996; Tschannen-Moran, 2004; Tschannen-Moran and Hoy, 2000). What is common across most general definitions of trust, either explicitly or implicitly, is the willingness to risk in the face of vulnerability. It might be said that where there is no vulnerability there is no need for trust. This vulnerability can

make trusting difficult and fragile. At the same time, this makes trust a fascinating concept to explore; to say nothing (yet) about its profound practicality.

Of these facets, 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 and Tschannen-Moran, 1999, p. 187).

Day (2009, p. 726) distinguished care a stand-alone facet of trust, through his definition of trust as "the extent to which the leader is seen to care for the personal as well as the academic selves of others". The facet of reliability is understood to be the extent to which one can count on another to come through with what is needed; an ability to consistently depend on another. Reliability combines a sense of predictability with benevolence, as predictability alone is insufficient because a person can be consistently or predictably malevolent. There are times when good intentions are not enough. For example, 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. Competence becomes important in the "trust complex" when it is seen as "the ability to perform a task as expected, according to appropriate standards" (Tschannen-Moran, 2004, p. 30). Honesty is also a fundamental facet of trust (Cummings and Bromily, 1996) because it concerns a person's character, their integrity and authenticity. Trust means that one can expect that the word or promise of another person can be relied upon. We then point to the facet of openness, which is the extent to which relevant information is not withheld and is:

> [...] a process by which individuals make themselves vulnerable by sharing information with others [...] 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 and Tschannen-Moran, 1999, p. 188).

Two other facets are educational ideals (the extent to which hope is nurtured, realized, and renewed by the leader), and wisdom (the extent to which the leader makes timely, prudent, and discerned decisions that are in the best interests of the students, the school, and its staff) (Day, 2009). In the sections to follow, we highlight some of the literature that gives attention to the inherent fragility of trust, the causes for breakdown of trust, and the condition of distrust in schools.

Trust as a fragile necessity

Trust is a necessary, yet fragile, part of human relationships. Cognizance of the fragile nature of trust and the consequences of this fragility for school settings is necessary for school leaders. Currall and Epstein (2003, p. 203) emphasized the centrality and fragility of trust in an organization: "If properly developed, trust can propel [organizations] to greatness. Improperly used, it can plant the seeds of collapse". A dilemma of trust is that "trust, an essential element in all satisfying relationships, is a fragile thing, easier to break than to build" (Govier, 1998, p. 204). The fragility of trust lies in its specific nature, built on two conditions: interdependence and risk (Rousseau *et al.*, 1998). According to some researchers, trust matters most in situations of interdependence, in which the interest of one party cannot be achieved without reliance upon another. Unless parties are dependent upon each other for something they care about or need, trust is not critical

(Tschannen-Moran, 2004). Interdependence, however, brings with it vulnerability. Trust is also the extent to which one is willing to rely upon and make oneself vulnerable to another (Baier, 1994). The person who trusts must recognize the possibility of betrayal and harm from the other person. As vulnerability causes the persons involved in trusting relationships to act without guarantees, trust becomes susceptible to damage:

> Since trust has to be placed without guarantees, it is inevitably sometimes misplaced: others let us down and we let others down. When this happens, trust and relationships based on trust are both damaged. Trust, it is constantly observed, is hard earned and easily dissipated. It is valuable social capital and not to be squandered (O'neill, 2002, pp. 6-7).

Thus, the fragility of trust lies in the fact that trust can be easily destroyed given the vulnerability of those who put their trust in others. Trust is also dynamic as it can change over the course of a relationship, as expectations are either fulfilled or disappointed and as the nature of the interdependence between people changes (Heimer, 2001; Tschannen-Moran, 2004).

The fragile nature of trust is also connected to decision-making uncertainty (Currall and Epstein, 2003). Trust is not an issue in situations where one has control over the actions or responses of another (Tschannen-Moran, 2004). Uncertainty about whether the other intends to and will act appropriately entails taking a risk (Rousseau *et al.*, 1998). Risk is a condition considered essential in psychological, sociological, and economic conceptualizations of trust. As Currall and Epstein (2003) posited, risk refers to the possibility that the trusting party will experience costs or damage if the other party proves untrustworthy. According to Govier (1998), trust is risky, and the primary dilemma of trust is that to have a meaningful personal and social life, one has to trust; yet one takes risks when doing so. The development of trust is buttressed when the expected behaviour materializes. The path-dependent connection between trust and risk taking arises from a reciprocal relationship: opportunities for trust leads to risk taking and vice versa.

Most people would likely agree that everyday life, and life in schools, despite some patterns and habits, is full of uncertainties. Despite our efforts to mitigate risk, our lives are full of various levels of risk situations. Trust would not be needed if actions could be undertaken with complete certainty and no risk. We know that "uncertainty regarding whether the other intends to and will act appropriately is the source of risk" (Rousseau *et al.*, 1998, p. 395). As a result, interdependence and risk lie at the core of trust and are necessary conditions for trust. Variations in these factors over the course of a relationship between parties can alter both the level and, potentially, the form that trust takes.

Causes for breakdown of trust

The literature suggested that trust in schools is often taken for granted; when the people one trusts do as expected, one barely notices its erosion or incremental disruption. Perhaps, one reason is that "we underrate the significance of trust is our strong tendency not to notice it until it breaks down" (Govier, 1998, p. 5). Govier continued that in everyday life we tend to trust other people much of the time, and we generally expect smooth functioning, reliability, and loyalty as routine aspects of our social world. She said that:

> [...] ironically, however, these very assumptions – that people should, for the most part, be trustworthy and that institutions should, for the most part, work appropriately – mean that we are especially shocked when things go wrong (p. 6).

Situations inevitably arise when what is cared for is harmed, even if by accident, or the trusted person betrays the trust and exploits the other to personal advantage (Tschannen-Moran, 2004).

Consistent with this, there are a number of factors described in the literature that cause the breakdown of trusting relationships. Because of its dynamic nature, trust can be altered instantaneously with a comment, a betrayed confidence, or a decision that violates the sense of care one has expected of another (Tschannen-Moran, 2004). The most commonly discussed breach is betrayal. Tschannen-Moran (2004, p. 64) defined betrayal as:

> [...] a voluntary violation of mutually understood expectations that has the potential to threaten the well-being of the trusting person. Betrayal involves an action or behaviour; to constitute a betrayal there needs to be an actual violation rather than just the thought or idea of betraying.

Reina and Reina (2006) referred to betrayal as an intentional or unintentional breach of trust or the perception of such a breach. They noted:

> [...] intentional betrayal is a self-serving action committed with the purpose of hurting, damaging, or harming another person. Unintentional betrayal is the by-product of a self-serving action that results in people being hurt, damaged, or harmed (p. 109).

Whatever its cause, betrayal disrupts trust and damages relationships. Despite the fact that most betrayals are minor, the effects of betrayal can be lasting. Subtle betrayals may seem innocent and unimportant yet can morph into more severe hurts and contribute to much of the negative feeling that employees have toward their bosses, each other, and their organizations. Not keeping one's promises, gossiping, and hoarding pertinent information are everyday occurrences that translate into the sense of betrayal. It is not uncommon for minor betrayals to escalate into major betrayals if they are not addressed and resolved (Reina and Reina, 2006). Minor betrayals seem to stay alive in people's minds; these root and grow bitterness and enmity.

In schools, betrayals often take two forms: damage to the civic order or damage to one's sense of identity (Bies and Tripp, 1996). Violations of trust that result in a damaged sense of civic order involve a breach of rules or norms of governing behaviour and expectations of what people owe to one another in a relationship. These include honour violations such as broken promises, lying, or stealing ideas or credit from others. Violations may also involve a breach of confidentiality. Damage to a person's identity can result from public criticism, wrong or unfair accusations, blaming of employees for personal mistakes, or insults to one's self or the collective (Tschannen-Moran, 2004).

Often, betrayals are caused by people not honoring their commitments or deceiving fellow coworkers to further their own ends. Just as it is known that educators are kind and good people (on the whole), it is also true that none is perfect. From time to time, like John in the lead story, educators are capable of "blowing it". Trust goes hand in hand with truth; as well as breach of trust goes hand in hand with deception. What is wrong with lying is that it breaches trust: "telling the truth establishes trust, and lying destroys it" (Solomon and Flores, 2001, p. 15). O'neill (2002, p. 70) added that:

> [...] deception is the real enemy of trust. Deception is not just a matter of getting things wrong. It can be pretty irritating to be misled by somebody's honest mistake, but it is not nearly as bad as being their dupe.

Deceivers mislead intentionally, and it is because their falsehood is deliberate, and because it implies a deliberate intention to undermine, damage or distort others' plans and their capacities to act, that it damages trust and future relationships.

Stemming from deception are dishonesty and breach of integrity. Dishonesty involves more than cheating, lying, or stealing; it is rooted in deceit (Cooper, 2004). Dishonesty happens when a leader denies reality or seeks gain through deviousness. It is about game playing, manipulation, and pretense. Cooper (2004, p. 47) surmised that "dishonesty always destroys the fiber of a company – regardless of how good the numbers are". Similarly, breach of integrity results in the destruction of trusting relationships. People are seen as having high integrity when their actions match their words, as well as their intent. If there is honor, dignity, full responsibility, accountability, and self-respect, there is a greater likelihood of high integrity (Marshall, 2000). Marshall said:

[…] a breach in the integrity of an individual, team or organization occurs when there is belief that the truth is not being told, or if someone is trying to achieve a gain at someone else's expense (p. 58).

Dishonesty and lack of integrity lead to corruption, which is often defined as dishonest behaviour that violates the trust placed in a public official. Corruption involves the use of a public position for private gain (Rose-Ackerman, 2001) and produces distrust and cynicism.

Trust is also utterly undermined by coercion or overuse of power (O'neill, 2002). Overcontrol diminishes trust; according to Cooper (2004, p. 38), "control-freak leaders have a hard time building truly great teams. Their lack of trust in subordinates hamstrings creativity and superior performance". School leaders have been known to use such an approach:

It seems easy to say that an honest, authentic leader can promote a climate of trust, but teachers are in a subordinate position and often fear authority. This process of leading is an attempt to influence the behaviour of others to do things differently. Therefore, [leaders] tend to base their behaviour on power and distrust rather than on trust and intimacy (Gimbel, 2003, p. 4).

Shurtleff (1998) argued that trust is a two-way street: in order to gain trust, one must also be willing to trust. School learning community members who do not feel trusted are less committed to the school team. Similarly, Tschannen-Moran (2009) called for school leaders to adopt a professional orientation in their work; the one in which they do not abuse their power to enforce the policies through manipulation or overreliance on coercive punishments. According to Shurtleff, trust and delegation go hand in hand. The author explained that:

[…] delegation means giving team members the responsibility, authority, and accountability to make decisions on their own. Delegation doesn't mean that you, as their coach, abdicate the ultimate responsibility and accountability for your team's results (p. 69).

Delegation is built on trust, not on abandonment or on micromanaging. Striking a happy medium between too much and not enough delegation can be difficult, as both extremes can hurt efforts to build trust in an organization (Shurtleff, 1998).

In a similar way, increased accountability may be harmful to trust. O'neill (2002) posited that currently fashionable methods of accountability damage trust.

She believed that accountability is often experienced not just as changing but as distorting the proper aims of professional practice and indeed as damaging professional pride and integrity. Furthermore, some accountability initiatives are substitutes for trust. Much professional practice once centred on interaction with those whom professionals serve: patients and pupils, students and families in need, but:

> [...] now there is less time to do this because everyone has to record the details of what they do and compile the evidence to protect themselves against the possibility not only of plausible, but of far-fetched complaints (O'neill, 2002, p. 50).

Exclusion of school members from decision making and information sharing disrupts trusting relationships. According to Shurtleff (1998), the lack of true communication flies in the face of what should be one of every organization's core values: honesty: "An environment that breeds suspicion ends up stifling good ideas, encouraging infighting and unhealthy competition, and destroying any enthusiasm employees might have about their jobs" (p. 46). Exclusion may lead to divisiveness, or an us versus them, atmosphere in school (Cooper, 2004). Far too often, such discord escalates to become a war and severely damage the evolving or established trusting relationships among school learning community members.

The condition of distrust in schools

Destruction of trust may start as a simple disappointment that then may lead to suspicion and eventually result in a situation of distrust. Breakdowns are often seen as violations to one or more of the facets of trust. Discussing the evolutionary phases of trust, namely, building, maintaining, and destroying, Currall and Epstein (2003) posited that when trust-destroying events occur, the overall level of trust plummets quickly into the domain of distrust. The speed with which trust can be destroyed depends on the magnitude of damage from the act of untrustworthiness and the perceived intentionality of the untrustworthiness: "In cases when the loss is particularly great, trust can evaporate almost immediately" (p. 197). Moreover, if seen as intentional, the destruction of trust is particularly severe, as intentional untrustworthiness reveals malevolent intentions, which are seen as highly probable of predicting future untrustworthiness as well.

Whatever informal rules exist in the school or workplace dictate where the line is drawn, that, if crossed, constitutes a loss of trust (Marshall, 2000). When any violation occurs, trust can be destroyed, leaving distrust and suspicion in its place. Distrust is not trusting anyone too much in a situation of utter risk or deep doubt. In this, it is different from mistrust, which is the act of questioning the established trust because the other party may have hidden agendas or ulterior motives. So, distrust may be a rational, wise, or warranted response to a past or anticipated violations, based on knowledge, experience, or difference in values (Barber, 1983). Naturally, we distrust those who we believe are deliberately deceiving us. AsShaw (1997, p. 64) posited:

> [...] whether the deception consists of a subtle manipulation of the truth or a more blatant lie, we distrust because there is no consistency between the words and actions of the person deceiving us.

The effect of distrust is corrosive, and "in some cases the damage it causes is minor; in others it can shake an organization to its roots" (Annison and Wilford, 1998, p. 25).

Distrust is often costly. When trust declines, the costs of work increase because people must engage in self-protective actions and continually make provisions for the possibility that another person will manipulate the situation for their own advantage (Limerick and Cunnington, 1993). Distrust usually provokes feelings of insecurity and anxiety, causing people to feel ill at ease and expend energy on monitoring the behaviour and attempting to understand possible motives of others (Govier, 1992). In an atmosphere of distrust, an organization's purpose and values are lost in concerns staff have for their own well being, their jobs, or their departments (Annison and Wilford, 1998). When there is distrust in a school, it diverts energy from the school's purpose. When teachers or students feel unsafe, energy that could be devoted to teaching and learning is diverted to self-protection. In the absence of trust, people are increasingly unwilling to take risks and demand greater protection to defend their interests (Tyler and Kramer, 1996).

One of the most difficult things about distrust is that once it is established it has a tendency to be self-perpetuating (Tschannen-Moran, 2004). Research indicates that low-trust environments are extremely difficult to change: "Distrust is typically self-sustaining and resistant to improvement (even in the face of positive information or events)" (Shaw, 1997, p. 153). Distrust feeds on itself and begets more distrust (Currall and Epstein, 2003; Reina and Reina, 2006). Many feel powerless to do anything about it, which limits their ability to break the cycle (Marshall, 2000). In such environments, even normally benign actions are regarded with suspicion. The negative beliefs about the other's intentions lead the suspicious person to discard any evidence that would help overcome distrust (Govier, 1992). The actions of the distrusted person are systematically interpreted in such a way that distrust is confirmed. The very communication tools needed to restore trust are regarded with suspicion, so that suspicion builds on itself (Tschannen-Moran, 2004). In schools, administrators who hold no or little credibility in the eyes of the staff have lost the necessary tools for restoration of trust. Under such conditions, there seems to be no way to escape from the condition of distrust.

Distrust not only creates a condition for an unpleasant and uncomfortable working environment, it also undermines overall effectiveness and efficiency of the organization. Productivity and motivation are likely to suffer. In a way that school leaders might relate to, Annison and Wilford (1998) discussed the example of nurses and doctors having to do more with less resources. Commitment to the patients becomes secondary to the "meaningless exercises in organizational politics" (p. 28). Similarly, betrayals can damage morale and the ability of workers to collaborate. As Tschannen-Moran (2004) posited, the consequences of a cycle of distrust in a school include a deterioration of the quality and effectiveness of communication and shared decision making, as well as a decline in the citizenship and commitment of the teachers. This raises the distinction between micro-level trust (personal, interpersonal, and local organization based) versus macro-level trust (Bottery, 2003, 2004). This second type of trust is located in system world and is much less amendable to the influence of distrust/mistrust averting strategies or alternatives. Leaders are most often left to minimize the damage and tend to have a low sense of proactive efficacy with macro-level trust issues (i.e. seemingly insensitive or unjust government policies, school system road blocks, or sense of lack of support from other administrators in the larger organization).

In summary, we reiterate the perspective of numerous research colleagues who have suggested that trust and its disposition to breakdown are important, complex, and multi-faceted phenomena to consider. The fragility of trust is inherent in the trust concept and its attendant risk for truster and interdependence between trustee and truster in school settings. We have reviewed the literature that highlights the subtle and incremental nature of trust erosion. In addition, we have described the possibility of the breakdown of trust through crisis or event misbehavior or betrayal (as apparent in our opening story) in the literature. Finally, we have touched on the connection between the loss of trust and the pathological condition of distrust in schools. Against this background, we now turn to our recent research on the fragility of trust.

The place of trust in the principalship: a study

Our exploratory examination of the Canadian school principals' perceptions of their moral agency and trust-brokering roles in schools described their establishing, maintaining, and recovering of trust in schools. This descriptive study sets out to give voice to the perceptions and insights of Canadian school principals. While the discussions of trust and moral agency are certainly present in the educational literature, not much is known about the self-perceived role of a principal as both a moral agent and trust broker. In this article, we have delimited the descriptions and discussion to the fragile nature of trust in their school settings, but the larger study describes and analyzes trust from the perspective of school principals who regularly grapple with the issues related to decision making, relationships, and trust. As Adams (2008) argued, there is a perceived need and urgency for qualitative designs to add value to the growing evidence of the trust-related studies.

Research measures

As a primary data collection tool for the study, a survey with closed- and open-ended questions was administered in both mail out and online forms. 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 prior to distribution. The survey also included demographic data items.

Data collection

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 survey were sent to approximately 2,000 principals; invitations to participate in online surveys were sent to approximately 3,000 principals across Canada. To be blunt, we were deeply disappointed in the return rate (3.5 percent or $n = 177$); a response much smaller than expected. We considered the responses sufficient for the needs of this descriptive aspect of the study; but we are appropriately modest in our generalizations. It is difficult to know how the low response rate may have affected our findings and whether or not those who did respond were of a particular subset of the population with respect to disposition relative to the fragility of trust. 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, lack of personal contact

between the researchers and participants, and technical issues (including spam filter blockage and outdated address data). While economies of online surveys are attractive, reports of blocked e-mails and ease of dismissal led to a regrettably poor response. The study design and resources did not afford follow up on either surface or online surveys; again, reducing response rates.

Data analysis
This article selectively discusses only those questions that pertain to the theme of fragility of trust. We asked the respondents to provide us with their insights, stories, experiences, and advice with respect to the fragile nature of trust, trust challenges, and breakdown of trust in school relationships through the following open-ended questions:

- In your principalship, is there a story that demonstrates how fragile trust is?
- Give an example of a trust-related problem or challenge you have experienced in your school?
- When you see mistrust in relationships, what does it look like?

Responses to open-ended questions were analyzed by the researchers and coded according to the dominant themes recurring in the responses (Macmillan and Schumacher, 2006). Codes were then combined into categories, and categories into patterns or concepts (Lichtman, 2010). In addition, we connected respondents' open-ended data to the findings from a larger study (Kutsyuruba *et al.*, 2009), in which we asked the same participants to provide their level of agreement to a five-point Likert-type scale item: "trust is extremely fragile".

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

	%		%
Age range (years)		*Province*	
31-40	14	Alberta	20
41-50	37	Saskatchewan	23
51-60	42	Ontario	20
61 or more	2	Others	37
Gender		*Years of professional experience*	
Male	53	10 or less	3
Female	45	11-20	27
No response	2	21-30	52
		31 or more	15
Years of experience as a principal		*Formal ethics training*	
5 or less	31	Yes	53
6-10	35	No	25
11-15	14	Unsure	22
16 or more	19		

Note: $n = 177$

Table I.
Demographics of respondents

The participating principals fit into four different age range categories; the majority of them (79 percent) belonged to the 41-60 age group. Gender representation was almost equal, with the slight prevalence of male principals. While the majority of participants represented three provinces, Alberta (20 percent), Saskatchewan (23 percent), and Ontario (20 percent), all provinces/territories were represented in this study. More than half of the participants were experienced educators with extensive experiences in principalship and significant experiences with formal training in ethics. For the majority of participants, formal ethical training constituted university graduate and undergraduate courses in ethics, philosophy, or religious studies; professional development workshops or seminars in ethical and moral decision making and counseling; or a combination of both.

Research findings
Participants' responses were grouped into three major themes: perceptions of fragile nature of trust, description of trust-related problems, and discussion of the perceived outcomes of broken trust.

Fragile nature of trust
In the larger study (Kutsyuruba *et al.*, 2009), principals' perspectives on the closed-ended question regarding the extreme fragility of trust in schools were divided. A third of our respondents agreed or strongly agreed that trust in their settings were extremely fragile. A third was in disagreement, and a third cohort of respondents was neutral with respect to whether or not their settings might be considered "extreme fragility". At outset of the study, our hypothesis was that most would be in the former group (they would see trust as extremely fragile). It was interesting to us that respondents held such wide range of perspectives on the fragility of trust in school-based relationships. Perhaps, we speculated, "trust-muteness", relative relational stability and calm, habitual reparation, proactive relational attention, underestimation of fragility of trust or early intervention had rendered the issue of trust and its brokering a non-issue or a neutralized one. These generalized dispositions from one question were not clearly evidenced nor confirmed in the same respondents comments on trust and fragility later in the same survey instrument as we explored this issue further through the analysis of their open-ended responses (as presented in this article). As will be depicted below, it was evident from participants' insights and stories that they repeatedly demonstrated and attested to the fragility of trust.

In the first instance, perhaps they were tilted in their perspectives by the use of the word "extremely". A number of principals used the term "fragile", yet never expressed the sense of extremity in their responses. For example, one of the principals posited: "Indeed, it is fragile. Gossip can kill you, or a perception from staff that you favour one staff member over another". Another principal provided a detailed account of his experience with fragility of trust:

> Trust is fragile [. . .] I advised a teacher about a potential discipline issue regarding the use of force. My suggestion was to allow the student to [leave] or he would become violent. Another teacher advised the person to restrain the grade 10 student. The teacher had to think quite hard about his future decision [. . .] He let the child leave. I felt that my relationship was strong with this teacher because of past situations [. . .] Trust is fragile.

The most common belief among the participants was that trust "takes years to develop and a moment to lose". The following insights from five principals vividly express this point:

It is fragile in that one wrong rumour or event can change all the trust built up over a period of years. Principals can be targets for what is happening in the media or with new stringent expectations on standard of care. One unmeaning mistake can be blown out of proportion, especially if it gets media attention (and these days that happens more frequently).

No matter how great one believes the relationship is between staff and principal, it can be shaken by issues such as refusal to accede to a request by a teacher [who wants] to be assigned a particular grade, by perceptions of favouritism, or by a particularly difficult staff appraisal.

It takes a long time to develop trust and something as simple as an email with [misunderstood] wording in it can damage the trust that is built.

Writing a letter of reprimand to a colleague who was exemplary for many, many years and then made a serious mistake; it was heart breaking.

Similarly, another participant observed that in everyday dealings with building trust relationships in the principalship, trust can be jeopardized when people do not have all the facts (in some cases due to lack of communication or misinterpretation of facts from rumor mill). Thus, it is clear that some principals consider trust a ubiquitous yet fragile part of their work lives; or, as one principal put it, "it's like love; break a trust and you get no-trust; it has many facets".

Trust challenges in relationships
When asked to express their perceptions regarding the relational aspect of trust, most of the principals indicated that in general they trusted or were able to establish trusting relationships with others in school settings. Despite the claims that participants were mostly inclined to trust others in general, and their subordinates, in particular, many principals in this study faced trust-related problems and challenges to some degree in the various dimensions of their relationships. First of all, it seemed to be easier for them to trust their subordinates than those in administrative positions above them. More specific analysis of responses revealed that it was the hardest to establish trust with other administrators, fairly hard with staff and parents, and less so with students. These relational categories are discussed in more detail in the following sections.

Administration. The most frequently mentioned trust-related problems raised by principals involved "administration". This finding may shed some light on the claim that it was easier for principals to trust their subordinates than those in administrative positions above them. Two categories emerged in the participants' discussions of "administration"-related issues. First, principals shared about decisions made by central office administration that negatively affected trusting relationships with in-school administrators. Some of the examples are as follows:

School-based administrators were given the speech that it was ok to speak our minds and disagree with central office administration. Those who did were penalized when it came to placement. It has been difficult developing a trusting relationship with them since then.

When a new teacher was assigned to the school as the result of a senior administration decision.

Overall, trust issues seem to arise when principals felt that superintendents interfered with small "localized" problems, capable of being resolved at the school level. They felt that senior administrators were micro managing in those situations.

The other category of responses that related to "administration" dealt with issues involving other in-school administrators. Many of the participants shared trust difficulties that had arisen when they replaced former administrators who were then placed into a teaching position in the same school and continued to negatively influence the staff. Similarly, respondents experienced issues with initial trust by school staff after being transferred from a school with different culture, norms, and expectations. One of the participants noted:

> The school where I am currently principal had a previous principal who had been at the school since it was built and had her personal stamp on it [. . .] when she left, a number of staff were hoping to apply for the position; however, tensions arose as I was given a transfer from another school in the district.

Several comments included distrust for the administrative team members who worked against their colleagues behind their backs, were inconsistent in their decision making, or broke previous promises and arrangements. One principal shared:

> I was once given support by the principal on a suspension that I issued. The parents complained [. . .] and the suspension was overturned. There was difficulty trusting whether [I would be supported] on future decisions, despite verbal assurances.

Similarly, another participant commented:

> In a board meeting, a planning principal lied about my beliefs on what is best for students in order to close a school. I have since seen my job as just that – a job, not a career of passion and excitement.

School staff. Second, participants claimed to regularly deal with problems related to trust involving teachers. Principals indicated an array of challenges associated with establishing trusting relationships with teachers: open conflicts, accusations, and blaming among teachers; staffing and teaching assignments tensions; misuse of professional days; rumours, gossips, and backstabbing; failure of open communication and concealing important information; and abusing rights to school property and resources; to name a few. Some of the specific examples were:

> Our school's security was threatened because over the years many people had gained keys to the building. To rectify the situation, we had the school rekeyed. The new key system gave teachers a sub-master [key] that allowed them access to most areas but not all – maintenance rooms, administrative offices, etc. This caused one of the teachers to become upset. He became very disengaged and would not communicate with the administrative team for over a month and refused to take part in the leadership team activities.

> When working as an Assistant Principal, I witnessed a relationship between a principal and a teacher erode very quickly because of a miscommunication of intent. What one believed, the other did not intend. The teacher believed that the principal was trying to take away an opportunity to organize a special event in the school that the teacher had done for years and had taken great pride in. In the end, even though a conversation cleared the air somewhat, the teacher still resented the principal for this action. The principal's intent had been to simplify processes and procedures in the school; however, the teacher understood the action as a direct attack.

Several of the participants concluded that most problems associated with the staff arose because certain staff members felt that "administration" did not understand their situation, and therefore, they reciprocated by not fully trust their principal. Furthermore, principals indicated that trust was often harmed by the school micropolitics as individuals and staff groups pursued their interests and precipitated pressure that such politics can often exert on administrators.

Parents and community. Third, there were instances cited in which principals dealt with problems related to trust-involving parents. Most frequently mentioned were issues related to instances when parents demonstrated a lack of moral integrity, sound judgment, or dishonesty in their interaction with schools. One principal commented as follows:

> Parent volunteer stole money. The next year she was on my PSSC (Parent School Support Committee). I found out about the incident from the previous year (I wasn't principal that year) and asked her to step down as chair of PSSC. She eventually took her child and left school.

The reciprocal nature of distrust in principals by parents was expressed in issues when parents believed principals were taking sides with others. On several occasions, principals shared how parent-school relationships eroded because parents were mistrustful of the "education system" in general:

> There was a student whose parent was also a professional colleague. This parent was unable to acknowledge the severity of the student's behaviour problems. No matter how delicately we tried to discuss concerns and strategies, the parent became more and more blaming of "the system". The parent continues to refuse to share specialist reports and makes sweeping statements of how the system has "failed" her child.

Furthermore, some respondents did not trust parents who wanted their students to succeed without doing the work and then had blamed educators and "the system" for these failures. Commenting on the antecedents of fragile nature of trust in schools, principals also reported trust-related problems with community or people not directly involved in school issues. In those cases, they felt that trust declined as a result of hearsay, misunderstanding of the schooling process, and rumours in the community.

Students. Finally, according to the quantity and intensity of participants' responses, the problems related to trust-involving students were of least concern. For participants, trust issues that involved students usually revolved around the issues of theft, cheating, plagiarizing, and discipline. However, there were more serious concerns that involved confidential information sharing and further investigations. Two examples of the shared instances were:

> The day before March Break, a student came into tell me that her friend was going to run away. This had become obvious to her through a note her friend had shared with her. I saw the note and had to act. The student who brought the note to my attention trusted me to share her concern, but I did not want to destroy her friendship by my actions, which would give away the fact that I had seen the note. I had to ensure that the girl who brought the note to me did not see my actions as a trust-breaking act.

> Earlier this year, I had had several discussions with a student who was having an especially difficult time. This student was comfortable opening up to me until I informed her that something she had disclosed to me had to be reported to social services. I explained that I was bound by law to report the incident she had described but she did not want to hear that, even though I had informed her before we began having discussions that I would

have to go to social services if she told me anything that put her at risk. Her perception of danger was different from mine and she could not understand why I had to inform anyone. She has rarely spoken to me since.

Others shared how students misinterpreted their questions around an issue as disbelief of their information and stopped coming to the office with concerns. These comments indicated that if a principal of the school had lost or diminished trust by any type of behaviour, he/she was less likely to be trusted by students in the future. On the other hand, following up with the students' concerns facilitated and strengthened the trusting relationship between a principal and a student. Although these scenarios had different outcomes, both significantly affected the experience of the entrusting individual.

Breakdown of trust

Principals also discussed the effects of broken trust in their schools. Majority of participants acknowledged that sometimes it was easier to trust particular individuals than it was to trust others. Such dispositions were seen as direct outcomes of breakdown in trusting relationships due to the following: students lying about other students, staff saying one thing and doing another or not delivering on their promises, and parents of students engaging in gossip. Furthermore, instrumental for breaking of trust were breach of confidentiality; undermining authority; different agendas; taking advantage of time, people, situations; or putting themselves first at a disadvantage to others. Such responses suggest that low levels of trust result from the breakdown of trust created by environments of distrust and mistrust in schools. As a result of mistrust, many principals indicated that they had become more vigilant and were constantly observing the behaviour of those who had damaged the trusting relationships. In rare and extreme cases, some principals became guarded against those who had violated their trust and exercised extreme caution in reestablishing of trusting relationships with them.

Although all principals shared about disappointments, failures, and simple breaches that affected their relationships with others, most indicated that it was the intentionality and dishonesty in the action that seemed to constitute the main source of breakdown of trust for them. In other words, they felt betrayed. In line with the discussions of betrayal in the literature (Bies and Tipp, 1996), two categories of trust breaches emerged from the responses: betrayal affecting a broader context (i.e. damage to the civic order) and betrayal affecting individual (i.e. damage to one's sense of identity).

In the first category, principals reported violations such as lying, broken promises, loss of integrity, and miscommunication. Comments included:

Teachers will disclose to me that "they will be sick [. . .] wink, wink". As if comfort is found in passing a lie onto the boss.

Students will lie about other students to get them into trouble or lie about misconduct involving a teacher.

Some staff members fundraised for a trip. There was extra money and it went to a retiring staff member instead of being returned to the students. When I questioned this, it became very difficult to work with those people again.

Some people will take what a principal says out of context and use it to discredit or hurt someone. The principal's words should not be more powerful than anyone else's, but often they seem to be.

Furthermore, several principals spoke about deception or lying combined with dishonesty and breach of integrity. Principals' commented on how deception contributed to the fragility of trust, for example:

> Individuals giving me notion of being upright and having integrity yet doing opposite when opportunity presented itself.

> Someone who I have seen be dishonest on a regular basis and constantly lied – I found I could not tell when he was telling the truth so I could not trust him.

> Some people are not honest – past experience indicates they are saying things to me that don't match with what they are saying to others.

Ultimately, deception influenced principals' perceptions of trustworthiness and professionalism of others. As one participant put it, "trustworthiness is more than integrity; it also must be accompanied by competence and professionalism".

In the second category, principals demonstrated the damage to identity of others through gossip, slander, public criticisms, accusations, and insults; for example, they said:

> A number of years ago, the parent of a student attempted to slander and sue me because I refused to let her bully my staff members. We still continue to deal with that person in our school.

> Undermining other professionals and principals is not uncommon; I've had others commenting on my work performance behind my back.

> Two staff members did not like a decision that was made about a budget that they had previously controlled and that was now being controlled by the principal on the advice of a whole staff planning group. They rallied staff and community with false accusations and tried to engage the superintendent in the discussion.

One principal shared an "extreme" example about a parent on the school council who questioned every decision he made and insinuated that he was "in bed" with the parents on the council and used the council for his own sake because the other council members disagreed with her stand on things.

Discussion of findings: centrality and fragility of trust
The analysis of the research findings related to the fragility of trust in school relationships revealed several major themes. First, principals considered trust to be a ubiquitous yet fragile part of their working relationships, a phenomenon that some respondents suggested may take years to develop or a moment to lose. For principals, the requirement of trust seemed to be implied in their relationship-centric work and the presence of relational good will in schools was sometimes compromised by threats to trust or by its actual loss. For about one-third of participating principals, trust was not so fragile that it required explicit or conscious effort to sustain. Responses indicate that if a principal or any other member of the school has diminished or lost trust by any type of behaviour, that person was less likely to be trusted in the future. While this finding seems hyper-logical (even circular), it underlines a step-wise progression of current trust capital that may deeply affect future relationships, and that the currency of trust in relationships builds, iteratively, on previous experience. This is the case of the natural consequence of current behaviour or misbehaviour on future prospects.

People do not forget and, perhaps unfortunately, judge their involvement with others on their worst behaviour rather than their best intentions. In the instance of trust, there seems to be a linear relationship that connects past and future good will. Under the condition of fragility, we think it would be of great interest to know (empirically) more about the direct consequence of trust violations and diminished trust quotients on future relationships. As Marshall (2000) posited, violating the informal rules or crossing the line set by those rules results in a suspicion and loss of trust. For our participants, violations of trust exerted the most impact on their trusting relationships with other administrators, to a lesser degree with staff and parents, and the least with students.

Trust and school micropolitics
As middle managers, principals simultaneously manage at least four sets of trusting relationships: "upward with their superiors, downward with subordinates, laterally with other principals, and externally with parents and other community and business groups" (Goldring, 1993, p. 95). Students are obviously absent from this list but are likely to either be advantaged by or suffer the indirect negative effects of trust breakdowns amongst educators and others. In their relationships with other administrators and staff, participants found it easier to trust their subordinates than to trust those in administrative positions above them. Trust issues with central office or in-school administrators arose due to micromanaging, broken promises, inconsistencies in decision making, and undermining their authority. Trusting relationships between administrators were harmed by increased accountability (O'neill, 2002). In this context, trust is closely related to the notions of power, influence, and position, as "hierarchy by nature builds distrust" (Stimson and Appelbaum, 1988, p. 316). This holds true in regards to principals' trust challenges with staff as problems in this pairing seemed to arise because staff members felt that "administration" was distant from the teachers and had a different perspective on school matters. Trust was corroded by the school micropolitics and pressure that such politics exerted on administrators. Thus, trust is directly dependent on the interactions and political ideologies of social systems of administrators and teachers within school building that involve the acquisition and exercise of influence, authority, control, and power through conflictive and cooperative-consensual behaviours (Bacharach and Mundell, 1993; Ball, 1987; Blase and Blase, 2002; Iannaccone, 1991; Marshall and Scribner, 1991). In order to counteract negative impact of micropolitics, principals need to exercise wisdom and make timely and prudent decisions in the interests of the social systems involved (Day, 2009). As Moye *et al.* (2005) suggested, principals need to empower staff in their positions. As a result, teachers may be more inclined toward positive relationships with their supervisors; such relationships are dependent on a substantial, discernible level of interpersonal trust.

Students and parents are also actively engaged in school micropolitics for the purposes of both protection and influence as a result of clash of interests (Blase, 1991; Mawhinney, 1999). Although trust issues involving students seemed to be the least frequent for principals, the significance of these for school life cannot be underestimated. Trust issues arose as students pursued their individual and collective interests through theft, cheating, plagiarizing, eroding discipline, or sharing of confidential information. As for parents, principals described reciprocal trust challenges and feelings of distrust between parents (and broader community) and schools. These were viewed

as detrimental for achievement of school purposes. This finding echoes Adams's (2008) claim that whereas schools at one point in their history had an inherent level of blind trust from the community and parents, distrust tends to define attitudes and behaviours today. Trust issues between principals and parents and community were reciprocal, as administrators felt parents lacked moral integrity, honesty, and sound judgment in their interactions with school, whereas parents tend to further their personal interests and mistrust and blame "the system" of education. Such scenarios testify to the idea that in the absence of trust, people become increasingly unwilling to take risks and divert their energy from educational purposes and values to greater protection in defense of their individual well being, security, and interests (Annison and Wilford, 1998; Tyler and Kramer, 1996). Furthermore, distrust toward students and parents in schools tends to inhibit the level of collaboration that goes on in a school (Tschannen-Moran, 2001). Tschannen-Moran (2004) emphasized the important role of principals in overcoming trust challenges in principal-students and principal-parents pairings by engaging in proactive strategies to make positive connections with parents and support students into achieving success. Similarly, Bryk and Schneider (2002) called for outreach to parents and commitment to school community to foster trusting relationships with schools. Forsyth *et al.* (2006) found that school community's trust environment is a rather powerful predictor of school consequences; parental trust was considered as one of the contextual conditions on which school success and survival appear to hinge. Furthermore, establishing trust is one of the principles advocated by Hoy and Smith (2007) that are intended for principals who seek to expand their school-based and community influence. Through these efforts, principals can foster such facets of trust as openness, benevolence and care (Day, 2009; Tschannen-Moran, 2004). Finally, besides promoting school effectiveness and improvement, principal trust in students and parents was found to be moderately negatively related with principal burnout (Dönmez *et al.*, 2010).

Tensions in trusting relationships experienced by the principals in this study highlight the need for closer attention to the importance of trust between and among the primary role groups that make up the school community (Bryk and Schneider, 2002). Our participants discussed relational trust issues arising in their work with both internal and external role groups. School leaders need to devote attention to both of these strands, as the strength of relational trust inherent in role groups within and outside of the school organization has been found to predict how effective a school can be (Forsyth *et al.*, 2006).

Betrayal of trust

Breakdown in trusting relationships between and among different stakeholders in schools resulted in distrust. The effects of distrust may be minor or major, but are always corrosive for an organization (Annison and Wilford, 1998). Although all principals shared about minor instances (disappointments, failures, and simple breaches) that affected their relationships with others, it was the intentionality and dishonesty in the action that seemed to be the major cause of breakdown (i.e. betrayal) of trust for the participants. It is the intentionality of the act that sets betrayal apart from simple disappointments and breaches (Solomon and Flores, 2001). Betrayal is a voluntary violation of mutually understood expectations and a threat to the well being of the trusting person (Elangovan and Shapiro, 1998). Moreover,

as Tschannen-Moran (2004) argued, in order to constitute betrayal there needs to be an action involving violation rather than the thought or idea of betraying. The perpetrator's choice to violate the expectations of the trusting party affects benevolence (implying the decrease in care for the good of the other), integrity (implying the decrease in commitment to principles accepted to the other), and openness (implying avoidance of detection and the need to be perpetually watchful of one's words and actions) (Tschannen-Moran, 2004). Moreover, betrayal tends to have a lasting effect, disrupting not only ongoing, but also future meaningful relationships (Jones and Burdette, 1994).

Principals' comments tended to relate to one of the two forms of betrayal: damage to one's sense of identity or damage to the civic order (Bies and Tripp, 1996). The damage to one's sense of identity was observed through public criticism, accusations, and insults. With respect to the second form of betrayal, principals reported violations such as broken promises, lying, and stealing ideas or credit from others. Tschannen-Moran (2004) posited that trust can also be damaged by the disclosure of private confidences and secrets. In this sense, participating principals spoke of deception that was seen as being distinct from lying by combining such characteristics as dishonesty and breach of integrity. This resonates with Shaw's (1997) observation that people distrust those whom they believe are deliberately deceiving them; be it a slight manipulation of the truth or a blatant lie, distrust appears due to inconsistency between the words and actions of others. Ultimately, we found that deception influenced principals' perceptions not only of trustworthiness, but also of competence and professionalism of others. Deception, thus, may be viewed not only as the major destroying factor of the trusted person's image of honesty, but also competence or ability to perform a task as expected in accordance with appropriate standards (Tschannen-Moran, 2004).

Outcomes of distrust
Distrust was seen as a direct outcome of breakdown in trusting relationships and past negative experiences with misuse of trust by others to achieve their own purposes. According to Govier (1992), distrust tends to provoke feelings of anxiety and insecurity, causing people to feel ill at ease and expend energy on monitoring the behaviour and possible motives of others. This claim was confirmed in our study as many principals indicated that they became more vigilant and were constantly observing the behaviour of those who damaged the trust previously afforded in the relationships. Ultimately, trust building in the context of distrust requires greater efforts on behalf of parties involved. As Curall and Epstein (2003) posited, once distrust is created, there is greater demand for compelling evidence of trustworthiness than it is required during the stage of initial trust building.

Besides the role in creating unpleasant and uncomfortable working environment, distrust also undermines overall effectiveness and efficiency of the school organization and attempts of school improvement (Bryk and Schneider, 2002). In accordance with Tschannen-Moran's (2004) findings, the consequences of a cycle of distrust in a school included a deterioration of the quality and effectiveness of communication and shared decision making, as well as a decline in the citizenship and commitment of the teachers. Dishonesty and betrayals were instrumental in damaging morale and the ability of workers to collaborate. In this study, some participants became guarded against those who violated trust and tried not to establish trusting relationships with them, and as a result, collaboration and climate of collegiality suffered.

Probably, one that is the most difficult outcomes of distrust to deal with was the tendency of distrust to be self-perpetuating, to feed on itself, and to resist change (Currall and Epstein, 2003; Reina and Reina, 2006; Shaw, 1997). A sense of powerlessness to break the incessant cycle of suspicion developed when any action of the distrusted person is systematically interpreted in such a way that distrust is confirmed (Marshall, 2000; Tschannen-Moran, 2004). Several principals related to this, describing situations when others continually broke their promises, constantly lied, were dishonest, or were not consistent in their actions. As a result, considerable amount of time and effort were necessary to rebuild trusting relationships. Most of the time, principals felt personal responsibility to ensure that broken relationships were restored. Principals' credibility was seen as a crucial requirement in this case; as Tschannen-Moran's (2004) claimed, administrators who hold no credibility in the eyes of others, lose the necessary tool for restoration of trust.

Hopefulness of trust
Finally, responses supported the claim of centrality and fragility of trust in school organizations, characterizing it as a "fragile necessity". On the other hand, based on the finding from a larger study, there seemed to be only modest (one-third of respondents) indication of the "extreme fragility" of trust in their school settings. This finding may be attributed to prevalent belief that trusting relationships once established are reasonably robust, and despite being fragile and prone to breaking, may be enduring in nature and subject to restoration and renewal. This should bring hope to the world of principals and encourage them to realize that, although challenging and time consuming, broken trust and low-trust situations in school setting can be restored and trustworthy relationships can be rebuilt. As Gardner (1990, p. 195) asserted, "the first and the last task of a leader is to keep hope alive". In line with this argument, Walker (2006) implied that school leaders need to foster hope for future generations of leaders in society. Principals can foster hope by modeling how trust-related challenges are handled in school setting. After all, trust in schools requires such ingredient as educational ideals, i.e. the extent to which hope is nurtured, realized and renewed by the leader (Day, 2009). Realization that principals are not perfect people and are prone to blunders, should only encourage significant efforts on their part to become leaders in trust restoration. Thus, principals can instill hope as a transforming leadership concept. Different from a principle of optimism as a strategic leadership concept (Hoy and Smith, 2007), capacity and hopefulness for the restoration of trust allows the leaders to foster "warranted hope" (Walker and Atkinson, 2010), a hope grounded in such leadership behaviours as diligence and mindful practice, sense making, and adaptive confidence.

Conclusion
This study has pointed to the fact that trust-related matters are an important, yet a fragile, aspect of the work of principals. In the preceding sections, we have explored what this fragility of trust looks like and feels like for a small number of Canadian school principals ($n = 177$). Owing to its fragile nature, trust poses many challenges for principals. Principals often have to deal with trust-related matters, which have caused trustworthiness to be threatened and trusting relationships to be broken. Trust-related problems contribute to the degree of fragility of trust. These trust issues seem

to be unequally distributed in relationships between principal and other administrators, staff members, parents, and students. Principals acknowledgement that it was easier to trust students, staff, and parents than to trust other administrators (either central office or in-school) may be closely related to the hierarchical structure, power struggles, and micropolitical activity in schools. Participants believed that if a principal or any other member of the school had lost or diminished trust by any type of behaviour, that person was less likely to be trusted in the future. On the other hand, if an individual acted in a way that facilitated trust then this would strengthen the trust level in the relationship.

Examining principal's responses, a number of themes emerged describing various ways of betrayal, including damages to the civic order, such as lying, broken promises, and loss of integrity, and damages to one's sense of identity, such as gossiping, slander, public criticisms, accusations, and insults. All of these behaviours seemed to have influenced principals' perceptions of trustworthiness of others. As moral agents, principals felt personal responsibility to make sure relationships among all stakeholders were sustained and, if broken, restored. The prevalent belief among participants in this study was that trusting relationships, once established, are reasonably robust, and despite being fragile and prone to breaking, may be enduring in nature and subject to hope of restoration and renewal.

Finally, what might be the implication of these findings for principal preparation and professional development? We would offer that strong interpersonal relationships and good judgment are perhaps too often assumed to be in place amongst aspiring and practicing principals. There own view of the stability and good health of relationships (founded on trust) may sometimes be overestimated and undervalued. Certainly, mentorship, story telling, case scenarios (see our opening story), and sensitivity education with respect to the importance of nurturing and sustaining trusting relationship would serve principals well. Obviously, the adage of "an ounce of prevention being better than a pound of cure" is a defendable professional development thesis to assist principals to see the relevance of the subjects of trust building and trust repair for their work. However, the other truism that suggests we ought to be careful not to over estimate our moral standing with others – "let them that think they stand take heed lest they fall" – points to the potential muteness or disinterest amongst administrators in the topic. Reflections on one's leadership journey that highlights the preciousness of trust and the minor experiences of trust's fragility are important likely prompters of administrative readiness to engage in further learning about trust and its fragility. In our view, principals need to develop: a consciousness (or sensitivity) with respect to factors that enhance and threaten trust; a set of interpersonal competences and character commitments which enable them to foster the establishment, nurture, maintenance, and repair of good will in their learning communities; and then, the encouragement from constituents, mentors and leader educators to be vigilant in their attention to trust's fragility as well as to the leverage garnered when trust capital is high.

Further research on trust dynamics (including the relationship of system and interpersonal confidence, reliability of judgment, timing of communication) and robust testing of some of the findings from this study are suggested. The tacit and assumed nature of trust and positive relationships presents challenges to the research agenda on trust that we share with others and to those who practice leadership in schools and school systems.

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