

InSights

Literature review: A culture of trust enhances performance

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Abstract

In this environmental scan of research and policy literature, the authors consider various definitions of trust as they seek to address and inform the hypothesis that 'a culture of trust enhances performance' in schools.

The discussion draws on the work of the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership in school leadership and research by Caldwell and Harris (2008) to consider ways in which trust is linked to performance in schools and organisations. It explores the concept of trust as a form of capital available to schools, and highlights how successful school leaders work to align trust, strategy and passion in implementing effective change.

At the heart of the review is the relationship between trust and school improvement. An adapted model of the elements of a culture of trust developed by Bryk and Schneider in their influential study of trust in school reform in Chicago is used to frame this aspect of the review. The authors identify four essential categories of relationships that enable schools to be described as having a culture of trust. The review concludes with a discussion of the relationship between trust and school governance.

Key Points

1. Definitions of trust distinguish different elements and contexts, broadly, self-trust; relational trust, structural trust; and transactional trust. Of these, relational trust – the trust a person puts in another person or group of people as established over time – is given greater prominence in the literature related to school settings. (p. 5)
2. In schools with a strong culture of trust between educators, levels of vulnerability are lowered, educators feel more assured about engaging in reform and are more likely to engage in collaborative problem-solving. (p. 6)
3. Effective school leaders are able to build and foster trust across the school community. They inspire and motivate others with their passion for improving educational outcomes, and by aligning trust with strategies to move towards a shared vision. (p. 7)
4. Trust can be seen as a form of capital, that is, a resource that has the potential to accelerate the performance of a school. There are four types of capital: intellectual, social, spiritual and financial capital which are interrelated and underpinned by trust. (p. 10)
5. Trust, in and of itself, is not the cause of improvement but it creates the basic social fabric within which the members of school communities can initiate and sustain efforts at building the essential supports for school improvement. (p. 19)
6. School leaders who are successful in developing a culture of trust make relationship-building (both within and outside the school) a priority in their leadership and they create the organisational conditions (eg. time, spaces) necessary for teachers to engage in collaborative relationships. (p. 22, 25)
7. Creating a safe space within schools is key to developing innovative, creative and collaborative practices that directly enhance student achievements. (p. 27)
8. Trust does not stand alone as a discrete capacity: it is the lifeblood of success in virtually every structure and process that involves principals and other school leaders. For this reason, one-off efforts to create trust are unlikely to succeed. (p. 27, 37)
9. Trust will be lost very quickly if a leader is perceived to be incompetent. It is therefore important to build strength in and draw on intellectual or professional capital in establishing relational trust. (p. 26, 37)

Introduction

The purpose of this review of literature is to address and inform the hypothesis that 'a culture of trust enhances performance' in schools. Drawing on an environmental scan of research and policy literature, we explore the definition of trust and the ways in which trust is linked to performance in schools and organisations more broadly.

We begin our review with a discussion of the various definitions of trust that have been identified in our environmental scan. We then describe the two major touchstones for the review, first the work of the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) in school leadership, in particular, statements from the *Australian Charter for the Professional Learning of Teachers and School Leaders* and the *Australian Professional Standard for Principals*.

Second, we make reference to research by Caldwell and Harris (2008) and explore the conceptualisation of trust as a form of capital available to schools.

Central to our examination of the hypothesis that 'a culture of trust enhances performance' is a synthesis of literature exploring the relationships between trust and various measures of school improvement. An adapted model of the elements of a culture of trust used in Bryk and Schneider's influential study of trust in school reform in Chicago (Bryk et al. 2010) is used to frame this aspect of the review. Finally, the review offers a discussion of the relationship between trust and school governance.

Definition

It is surprising how many books about trust do not include a concise definition. It is assumed that the reader knows what it is. For this reason it may be best to start with a dictionary definition. The Merriam-Webster online dictionary tells us that trust is 'assured reliance on the character, ability, strength, or truth of someone or something'. The associated meaning in the Merriam-Webster online thesaurus is a 'firm belief in the integrity, ability, effectiveness, or genuineness of someone or something'. This review of literature about trust in schools is therefore concerned with how this 'assured reliance' and 'firm belief' can be embedded in the school and the role that principals and school leaders play in creating this state of affairs. Evidence that shows the relationship between trust and school performance and school improvement is relevant.

Reference to the general literature on trust requires the reader to construct what amounts to an operational definition. For example, Sally Bibb and Jeremy Kourdi, who work for McKinsey & Company, refer to the 'building blocks of trust': authentic communication, competence, supporting processes, boundaries, contact, positive intent and forgiveness' (Bibb & Kourdi 2004, pp. 9–10). They remind us that trust is 'something that we find hard to put into words, something that we can more easily define by its absence than its presence' (p. 10). In addition to the fundamentals they describe the different contexts for trust, and these are helpful for the purposes of this review:

- Self-trust: the trust that people need to be confident of their capabilities and judgments in given situations.
- Relational trust: the trust a person puts in another person or group of people...a generalised type of trust usually established over time.
- Structural trust: trust that we put in entire institutions, companies and brands...for example, we may trust a country.
- Transactional trust: this is trust that is specific, often one-off and pertains to a particular context at a particular time. (Adapted from Bibb & Kourdi 2004, pp. 10–11)

Well-known writers on trust such as Francis Fukuyama (1995) refer most often to structural trust. As we shall see, most of the studies included in this review were concerned with relational trust.

While there is no single definition, there is an emerging consensus in the literature that a key aspect of relational trust is vulnerability (see Bryk & Schneider 2002; Daly & Chrispeels 2008; Hoy & Tschannen-Moran 1999). Walker, Kutsyuruba and Noonan (2011, p. 472) suggest that trust is defined as when one party is willing to assume a potential risk in their relationship, stating that 'where there is no vulnerability there is no need for trust'. This willingness to be vulnerable with one's peers or colleagues is generally based on normative expectations of how they will react. Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999) indicate that trust involves not only one party's willingness to accept vulnerability but also the confidence that another party will respond with five key elements, namely: benevolence, reliability, competency, honesty and openness. Trust within a school community, therefore, is based on the expectation that all members of the community will conduct their relationships in accordance with these expectations (Mitchell, Forsyth & Robinson 2008, pp. 119). It is this relational process that establishes a culture of trust.

Brewster and Railsback (2003) argue that in schools with a strong culture of trust between educators, the levels of vulnerability are lowered. Educators feel more assured about engaging in processes of reform and are more likely to engage in collaborative problem-solving. They suggest that in schools with a high culture of trust, educators understand their roles and fulfil them without leaders having to exert substantial pressure. This supports Bryk and Schneider's findings from their significant study of school reform in Chicago 'that a broad base of trust across school community lubricates much of a school's day-to-day functioning and is a critical resource as local leaders embark on ambitious improvement plans.' (Bryk & Schneider 2002, p. 5). A major issue with creating this broad base of trust, however, is recognised by Walker, Kutsyuruba and Noonan in their statement that trust 'takes years to develop and a moment to lose' (Walker, Kutsyuruba & Noonan 2011, p. 482)

Touchstones

There are two important points of reference or touchstones that have shaped this review. One derives from the evidence-based statements in two documents that lie at the heart of the work of the AITSL, each of which makes clear the importance of trust. The other draws on research by Caldwell and Harris (2008) that described the alignment of strategy, trust and passion if there is to be improvement in the performance of schools.

The Australian Charter for the Professional Learning of Teachers and School Leaders stipulates that 'a high quality professional learning culture will be characterised by... high levels of trust, interaction and inter-dependence'. The Australian Professional Standard for Principals (AITSL 2011) describes two capacities that are evident in the work of successful school principals:

- [They] foster trust and release creativity by developing leadership in others, building teams and working cooperatively to achieve school goals and build the capacity of the future workforce (Developing self and others) (AITSL 2011, p. 9).
- They are able to build trust across the school community and to create a positive learning atmosphere for students and staff and within the community in which they work (Personal qualities and social and interpersonal skills) (AITSL 2011, p. 7)

These capacities refer explicitly to trust. Other capacities are required to design and implement a range of strategies to ensure the effectiveness of their schools. Principals must know and understand these strategies. Successful implementation depends to a large degree on whether they trust others and others trust them. Caldwell and Harris (2008, p. 5) referred to this as the alignment of strategy and trust. They also highlighted the importance of passion. The best leaders motivate and inspire others, and the effectiveness of the various strategies in trusting relationships will be elevated when leaders are passionate in their endeavours. There should therefore be a three-way alignment of strategy, trust and passion, as illustrated in Figure 1. One or even two of these three is insufficient. A passionate leader who is clueless about strategies for implementation will be ineffective, and whatever trust that may have been present at the outset will quickly dissipate. The cause must be worthwhile, or have strong moral purpose as it is often described, and the work of all will be enhanced to the extent that there is a vision of what should be the outcome.

The alignment illustrated in Figure 1 is important not only in schools but in all fields of human endeavour, extending to the national and international spheres. Francis Fukuyama made this clear for the latter, distinguishing between low-trust and high-trust societies, contending that 'Widespread distrust in a society... imposes a kind of tax on all forms of economic activity; a tax that high-trust societies do not have to pay' (Fukuyama 1995, pp. 28–29). Covey suggests that 'this low-trust tax is not only on economic activity, but on all activity—in every relationship, in every interaction, in every communication, in every decision, in every dimension of life' (Covey 2006, p. 19).

Finland is a 'high trust' country as far as schools are concerned to the extent that there are no national tests of student achievement, and teachers and those who support them are free to use their professional judgment in approaches to learning and teaching. High levels of achievement for students from Finland have been an outcome of strategies that have been in place for several decades. These strategies include relationships of trust, cooperation and responsibility at all levels of the education system (Hargreaves, Halász & Pont 2007). This culture is highlighted in a statement by a representative of the Finnish National Board of Education, indicating:

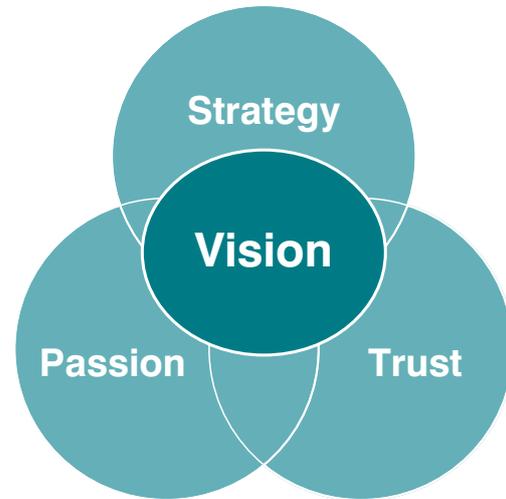


Figure 1: Alignment of Strategy, Trust and Passion (Caldwell & Harris 2008, p. 5)

“We trust the expertise of our principals and teachers. We respect that expertise and we try to understand what is happening in the everyday life of schools and what questions have to be worked with and we try to combine that with issues, interests and needs of the future at the national level.”

Hargreaves, Halász & Pont 2007, p. 18

Pasi Sahlberg described the 'culture of trust' in *Finnish Lessons*:

"The culture of trust meant that education authorities and political leaders believe that teachers, together with principals, parents, and their communities, know how to provide the best possible education for their children and youth. Trust can only flourish in an environment that is built on honesty, confidence, professionalism, and good governance... Public institutions enjoy high public trust in Finland. Trusting schools and teachers is a consequence of a well-functioning civil society and high social capital. Honesty and trust... are often seen as among the most basic values and building blocks of Finnish society."

Sahlberg 2010, pp. 130–131

Sahlberg described features of reform in other countries, including high stakes tests and detailed specifications of curriculum. He referred to these as characteristics of an often dysfunctional 'Global Education Reform Movement' or 'GERM'. It is an interesting point for discussion, channelling Covey, as to whether these characteristics constitute a 'low-trust tax' that limits 'educational activity' but also 'all activity – in every relationship, in every interaction, in every communication, in every decision, in every dimension'. Without canvassing the merits of the argument, it is sufficient to assert that much is at stake if there is a breakdown in trust and there is much to be gained if there are high levels of trust. As Hargreaves, Halász and Pont (2007, p. 25) stated that: 'Finland contains essential lessons for nations that aspire, educationally and economically, to be successful and also sustainable knowledge societies'. In contrast with Sahlberg's GERM, the tripartite foundations of the Finnish system of education of trust, cooperation and responsibility supports all schools in a systemic focus on support rather than intervention.

Trust as a form of capital

Fukuyama and Covey considered lack or loss of trust as a form of 'tax'. A more positive way to view trust is to see it as a form of capital, that is, a resource that has the potential to accelerate the performance of a school. This emerged in an international project undertaken by the authors.

The International Project to Frame the Transformation of Schools (Caldwell & Harris 2008) was conducted in the final year of a five-year project on the transformation of schools, with transformation defined as significant, systematic and sustained change that secures success for all students in all settings. The groundwork was laid from 2004 to 2007 in 73 seminars and workshops involving about 4,000 school and school system leaders from 11 countries. An important feature on most occasions was a series of short case studies from school leaders about how their schools had achieved or were making progress in achieving transformation, as defined above. The purpose of the workshops was to share and test ideas. It was an iterative program with findings from different events being reported at those that followed. Hypotheses were created to explain how transformation was achieved and these were tested in more focused case studies in secondary schools in Australia, China, England, Finland, United States and Wales in 2007 and 2008, with funding from the Australian Government and the Welsh Assembly Government. Schools that had been transformed or had made good progress in transformation were adept at strengthening and aligning four forms of capital: intellectual capital, social capital, spiritual capital and financial capital, and achieving this strength and alignment through outstanding governance. Trust was an important element in each form of capital and of governance.

Caldwell and Harris (2008, p. 10) described the four kinds of capital in the following terms.

- *Intellectual capital* refers to the level of knowledge and skill of those who work in or for the school.
- *Social capital* refers to the strength of formal and informal partnerships and networks involving the school and all individuals, agencies, organisations and institutions that have the potential to support and be supported by the school.
- *Spiritual capital* refers to the strength of moral purpose and the degree of coherence among values, beliefs and attitudes about life and learning (for some schools, spiritual capital has a foundation in religion; in other schools, spiritual capital may refer to ethics and values shared by members of the school and its community).
- *Financial capital* refers to the money available to support the school. Ten indicators of each form of capital were identified, with most of these evident in most schools in each of the six countries.

Trust is the lifeblood, so to speak, of each form of capital. If the community does not have trust in the school, it will not provide support (social capital). If the community and school have different values about life and learning, trust is likely to be low (spiritual capital). If trust between the community and school are low, then financial capital may be lower than it could potentially be. Furthermore, Brewster and Railsback (2003) found that when teachers feel they do not have access to all the necessary resources, it becomes more difficult to build trust within a school. The deployment of intellectual capital will be impaired when there is a lack of trust among staff. Trust is vital in governance.

Trust and social capital

There is a growing understanding of the importance of social capital for institutions and organisations, including schools and school systems, and this has been highlighted in the research and policy agenda in several countries. In 2006, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) released its first report on indicators of social capital, which it defined as 'a resource available to individuals and communities founded on networks of mutual support, reciprocity and trust' (ABS 2006). It noted research into the benefits that strong social capital could provide in a range of areas, including education. Leana, for example, indicates that when schools have strong social capital, as characterised by high trust and frequent interactions between teachers, student achievement scores improve (Leana 2011, p. 32).

Ten indicators of social capital were identified in the International Project to Frame the Transformation of Schools (Caldwell & Harris 2008, p. 60) as listed below. Evidence for all ten was found in one or more of the case study schools in each of the six countries in the project. Six marked with an asterisk (*) were illustrated in all schools. Four marked with a hash (#) were illustrated in the majority of schools.

1. #There is a high level of alignment between the expectations of parents and other key stakeholders and the mission, vision, goals, policies, plans and programs of the school.
2. *There is extensive and active engagement of parents and others in the community in the educational program of the school.
3. #Parents and others in the community serve on the governing body of the school or contribute in other ways to the decision-making process.
4. #Parents and others in the community are advocates of the school and are prepared to take up its cause in challenging circumstances.
5. *The school draws cash or in-kind support from individuals, organisations, agencies and institutions in the public and private sectors, in education and other fields, including business and industry, philanthropists and social entrepreneurs.
6. *The school accepts that support from the community has a reciprocal obligation for the school to contribute to the building of community.
7. *The school draws from and contributes to networks to share knowledge, address problems and pool resources.
8. *Partnerships have been developed and sustained to the extent that each partner gains from the arrangement.
9. #Resources, both financial and human, have been allocated by the school to building partnerships that provide mutual support.
10. *The school is co-located with or located near other services in the community and these services are utilised in support of the school.
11. Each indicator suggests strategies that may be adopted or adapted by principals and other school leaders. Each is underpinned by trust or provides an opportunity to build trust.

An illustration of priorities for development of social capital was reported by Caldwell and Harris (2008, pp. 76–79) who described a workshop at the 2008 conference of the Western Australian Primary Principals Association (WAPPA) on the theme 'Primary schools: investing for tomorrow'. A noteworthy feature of the three-day event was the invitation to business leaders to attend the second day where the featured presenter was Stephen Covey cited earlier. More than 200 accepted the invitation.

The workshop was attended by 82 principals. Each completed a survey on the social capital of their schools. They were invited to make three ratings for each of the ten indicators: importance, performance and priority for development. The indicators listed as priorities most often were:

- Indicator 1: There is a high level of alignment between the expectations of parents and other key stakeholders and the mission, vision, goals, policies, plans and programs of the school (17.1 %).
- Indicator 4: Parents and others in the community are advocates of the school and are prepared to take up its cause in challenging circumstances (15.4 %).
- Indicator 2: There is extensive and active engagement of parents and others in the community in the educational program of the school (14.9 %).
- Indicator 5: The school draws cash or in-kind support from individuals, organisations, agencies and institutions in the public and private sectors, in education and other fields, including business and industry, philanthropists and social entrepreneurs (11.0 %).

Participants in the workshop were also invited to identify the major constraints that are / will be experienced in their efforts to build the social capital of the school and 59 of the 82 participants provided a response, as summarised in Table 1.

Constraint	Examples	Number of responses	Percentage
Time	Lack of time, lack of tenure, impending retirement, overcrowded curriculum, lack of support	25	42.4
Context	Geographic distance / isolation, mining community, high Indigenous population in community, lack of confidence in community	15	25.4
Mindset	Lack of trust and resistance of some staff, apathy, not core business	10	16.9
Policy	Government / Department of Education and Training policy on sponsorships	4	6.8
Capacity	Lack of knowledge and limited capacity of staff and community to work in this area	3	5.1
Partners	Mindsets of potential partners in business about the value of partnerships	2	3.4
Total		59	100.0

Table 1: Constraints in strengthening the social capital of schools as reported by primary principals in Western Australia (n = 59)

Priorities for strengthening social capital lay mainly in the area of parent engagement rather than forming partnerships with business, with the most significant constraints being time to devote to related activities (42.4 %) and context (25.4 %), with the latter reflecting the large distances and relative isolation of many schools in Western Australia as well as the nature of the community. Noteworthy is the mindset constraint: 'lack of trust and resistance of some staff, apathy, and not core business [strengthening social capital].

Trust and spiritual capital

Much of the emerging research on spiritual capital appears to build on current understandings of social capital. In his influential work on social capital, Putnam (2000) found that shared religious beliefs and practices accounted for more than half of the social capital identified in his study. Coleman's seminal study on social capital in schools also noted that religious beliefs were one characteristic of the community that had an influence on the level of social capital (Coleman 1988). Malloch (2003), the Founder and Chairman of the Spiritual Enterprise Institute, indicates that the notions of social and intellectual (or human) capital are themselves 'based to a large extent on the existence of 'good faith, trust, stewardship, a sense of purpose and other moral characteristics'.

Malloch's descriptions suggest that some form of spiritual capital is inherent in our understandings of both social and intellectual capital. When looking at schools, high levels of social capital, including the involvement of the community, networks with other schools and relationships with other organisations, would not function effectively without trust and 'other moral characteristics'. Similarly, a school's intellectual capital cannot be effectively implemented to support the success of all students without a strong moral purpose and shared understandings and beliefs about life and learning. The influence of spiritual capital on social and intellectual capital demonstrates the need for alignment of all resources in the school. Outstanding governance, which strengthens and aligns the four forms of capital, can assist efforts to achieve significant, systematic and sustained change that secures success of all students in all settings.

Schools in the International Project to Frame the Transformation of Schools used a number of practices to develop and harness their spiritual capital. Many are implied in the ten indicators for spiritual capital listed below. Evidence for all ten was found in one or more of the case study schools in each of the six countries. Four marked with an asterisk (*) were illustrated in every school. Five marked with a hash (#) were illustrated in the majority of schools.

1. #There is a high level of alignment between the values, beliefs and attitudes about life and learning held by the school and members of its community.
2. *The values and beliefs of the school, including where relevant those that derive from a religious foundation, are embedded in its mission, vision, goals, policies, plans and curriculum.
3. #The values and beliefs of the community are taken into account by the school in the formulation of its mission, vision, goals, policies, plans and curriculum.
4. *The school explicitly articulates its values and beliefs in publications and presentations.
5. *Publications and presentations in the wider community reflect an understanding of the values and beliefs of the school.
6. #There are high levels of trust between the school and members of its community.
7. #Parents and other stakeholders are active in promoting the values and beliefs of the school.
8. *The values and beliefs of the school are evident in the actions of students and staff.
9. Staff and students who are exemplars of the values and beliefs of the school are recognised and rewarded.
10. The values and beliefs of the school have sustained it or are likely to sustain it in times of crisis.

Trust and school improvement

At the heart of this review of literature is the relationship between trust and school improvement. Brewster and Railsback (2003) argued that while it is 'generally assumed that trust is a core criterion of successful school improvement efforts' (Brewster & Railsback 2003, p. 7), it is important to examine the issue in more depth. One of the most frequently cited studies of the relationship was undertaken by Anthony Bryk and his colleagues in Chicago, reported originally in Bryk and Schneider (2002) and updated in Bryk, Bender Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu and Easton (2010). Indeed, it is the only study cited by Hattie (2012, pp. 70–71) and Hargreaves and Fullan (2012, pp. 90–91). The latter described Bryk and Schneider's Trust in Schools as 'a modern classic'. The Chicago study was conducted through most of the 1990s, with surveys of teachers in 400 elementary schools in 1991, 1994 and 1997.

The context for the study was the school reform movement in Chicago in the 1990s that included the formation of school councils with important policy powers and an increase in parental engagement. Researchers monitored outcomes in 400 elementary (primary schools) and gathered information through surveys on a range of factors including trust. They selected 100 schools that showed the largest improvement and another 100 that showed the least improvement. They found a strong association between the level of trust and the extent of improvement. Conducted in several iterations over most of the decade, this was a robust study that warrants the attention given to it in the literature.

The concept of 'relational trust' was a feature of the study, described by Bryk et al. (2010, p. 1472) in the following terms:

Embedded within all the social exchanges in school communities is an interrelated set of interdependencies. This observation is key to understanding the significant function served by relational trust in school improvement. Regardless of how much formal power attaches to any given role in a school community, all participants remain dependent on others to achieve desired outcomes and feel efficacious about their efforts. These structural dependencies create a sense of vulnerability for all involved.

The components and outcomes of relational trust are illustrated in the *Best Evidence Synthesis* of Robinson, Hohepa and Lloyd (2009) as illustrated in Figure 2 (below).

Bryk et al. (2010) conceived of trust in terms of relationships between teachers and parents, teachers and principals, and teachers and teachers. Twenty-nine items were included as measures of relational trust, as illustrated in Table 2 (below).

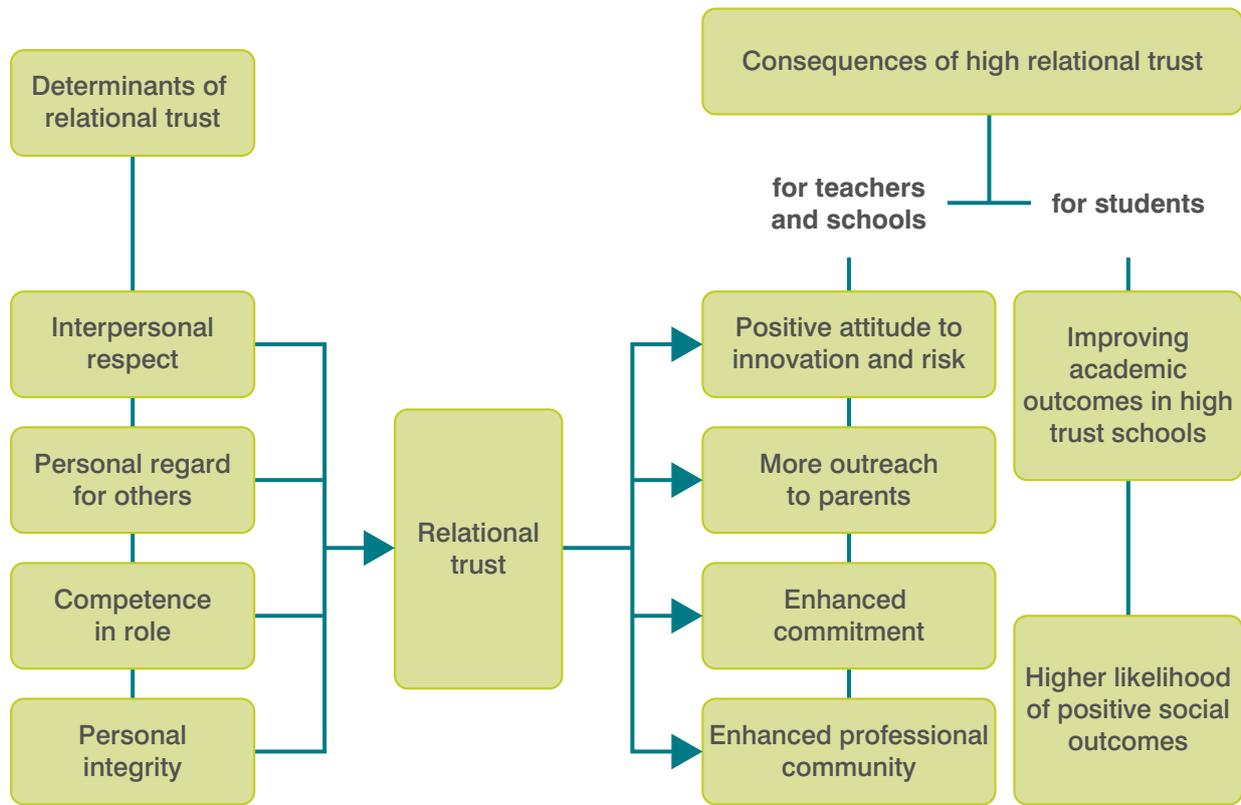


Figure 2: How relational trust works in schools (Robinson, Hohepa & Lloyd 2009, p. 184)

Element	Number of items	Sample items
Teacher-parent trust	14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How many teachers in this school feel good about parents' support for their work? To what extent do staff at this school respect students' parents?
Teacher-principal trust	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I trust the principal at his or her word? The principal has confidence in the expertise of teachers?
Teacher-teacher trust	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers in this school trust each other? Teachers respect other teachers who take the lead in school improvement?

Table 2: Survey items on relational trust in the Chicago study (1991, 1994, and 1997) (adapted from Bryk et al. 2010, p. 2483)

Bryk et al. (2010, pp. 1496–1508) described three ways in which trust supported school improvement in Chicago in the context described above: (1) teacher and parent commitment to reform occurs most readily when there is a high level of trust, (2) trust is a strong motivating force in the difficult aspects of reform, and (3) take-up among teachers is high and deeply embedded when trust is high. The authors were careful to point out that trust, in and of itself, is not the cause of improvement.

“In pulling all of this together, it is important to recognize that relational trust among the adults in a school community does not directly affect student learning. Rather, it creates the basic social fabric within which school professionals, parents and community leaders can initiate and sustain efforts at building the essential supports for school improvement.”

Bryk et al. 2010, p. 1508

A modified version of the elements described by Bryk et al. (2010) is used to structure our exploration of how research and policy literature has characterised the relationship between trust and various measures of school improvement. In response to emergent themes from our environmental scan, we have expanded the element of ‘teacher-parent’ trust to include the relationships between the school and all members of the broader community. Furthermore, the vital element of trust between students and teachers has been added. Our four categories of relationships include (1) school-community trust, (2) principal-teacher trust, (3) teacher-teacher trust, and, teacher-student trust. These categories are similar to those proposed by Van Maele and Van Houtte (2011), who stated that parties in each of these relationships have an idea about the obligations of their own role but also hold expectations of normative behaviour from other parties’ roles. Levels of trust are developed and determined by the extent to which all parties meet these mutual expectations. It should be noted that we have only opted to use these elements of relational trust to frame our discussion for the purpose of clarity. These elements are necessarily interrelated and only when each is in place could we describe a school as having a culture of trust.

School-community trust

The relationships between schools and the wider school community, including parents, individuals, external agencies and other organisations, form an integral component in schools' social capital. This form of social capital may be referred to as 'bridging' (Putnam 2000) social capital as it draws together parties from different social groups and or organisations to develop a network. Caldwell and Harris (2008) drew on case studies from six nations to demonstrate how schools that successfully establish this bridging social capital can draw on the resource in order to support their governance, intellectual capital, spiritual capital and financial capital. Hargreaves, Halász and Pont support this finding, stating that 'leaders of the most successful schools in challenging circumstances are typically highly engaged with and trusted by the schools' parents and wider community' (Hargreaves, Halász & Pont 2007, p. 9). It is believed that without engaging all members of a school community in a common mission, efforts towards school reform cannot be truly successful (Character Education Partnership, n.d., p. 2).

A high level of engagement with the community is vital for schools, particularly schools in disadvantaged contexts, so that they can offer students a broad range of supports and opportunities. Leithwood, Louis, Anderson and Wahlstrom (2004) indicated that, depending on the level of trust in these relationships, this type of social capital may offer schools access to information, provide reciprocal obligations or support normative concepts of behaviour both within and outside the school. Schools, therefore, can benefit from these relationships by engaging in collaborative endeavours and forming a common goal that all members of the community can work towards. Leana (2011) found that the school leaders in her study spent relatively little time, around 14 %, on developing relationships with parents, members of the community and organisations that could improve school resources. She suggested that rather than 'bonding' (Putnam 2000) or *internal* social capital, it is this type of bridging or *external* social capital that makes the difference for schools.

When school leaders focused on developing these types of bridging social capital:

“...the quality of instruction in the school was higher and students’ scores on standardized tests in both reading and math were higher. Conversely, principals spending more of their time mentoring and monitoring teachers had no effect on teacher social capital or student achievement. The more effective principals were those who defined their roles as facilitators of teacher success rather than instructional leaders. They provided teachers with the resources they needed to build social capital—time, space, and staffing—to make the informal and formal connections possible.”

Leana 2011, p. 35

The common goal of many school reform efforts, particularly in the context of increased school accountability, is to increase student performance. Mees (2008) suggested that the goal of improved student achievement can be reached when parents and teachers work collaboratively towards the goal. Frequent contact between the school and parents can support the development of common expectations for student performance and establish a relationship of trust between parents and the school. Furthermore, strong relational ties between parents and the school have been found to increase students’ identification with the school (Mitchell, Forsyth & Robinson 2008). Identification as a member of the school community, in turn, can support student engagement in a range of school activities and has been found to be related to improved academic performance. Mitchell, Forsyth and Robinson go on to state that when parents place their trust in a school, students are more likely to ‘value school as something that is worthwhile for them’ (Mitchell, Forsyth & Robinson 2008, p. 121).

The establishment of trusting relationships with parents and wider communities, however, is not an easy task for schools or school leaders. Walker, Kutsyuruba and Noonan (2011) reported that in their study they saw several instances in which parent-school relationships were dysfunctional due to parents’ mistrust of the ‘education system’. Negative or distrustful relationships between parents and schools can be reciprocal. School principals in Walker, Kutsyuruba and Noonan’s study reported that administrators had a similar distrust for some parents, believing that they lacked ‘moral integrity, honesty and sound judgement’ (Walker, Kutsyuruba & Noonan 2011, p. 488). They found that any level of distrust in relationships between schools and parents can impede collaborative efforts towards a mutual goal. Tschannen-Moran (2004) highlights the vital role that school principals need to play in overcoming any issues of distrust and developing a culture of strong, positive relationships with members of the broader community.

Teacher-principal trust

School principals and other school leaders play integral roles in developing a culture of trust in schools (Hargreaves, Halász & Pont 2007; Rhodes, Stevens & Hemmings 2011; Walker, Kutsyruba & Noonan 2011). The culture of an organisation can wield powerful influence over the nature of their work. As Rhodes, Stevens and Hemmings state: 'school culture influences how teachers, school administrators, students, and other school actors render schooling into meaningful and actionable practices' (Rhodes, Stevens & Hemmings 2011, p. 83). A substantial amount of education research appears to align with the view that the development of a culture of trust relies not only on the institutional mechanisms, policies and procedures that a leader implements but also the behaviour and attributes of the school leader (O'Brien 2011).

School leaders who are successful in developing a culture of trust make relationship-building a priority in their leadership (Brewster & Railsback 2003). These relationships may be described as internal social capital, which brings together two different parties to the relationship. School leaders who make themselves available for school staff and encourage open communication help establish the trust on which this internal social capital is based (Brewster & Railsback 2003). Mees (2008) indicated that when a principal focuses on establishing strong relationships between members of the school community, it builds the capacity of all to work for the common good of the student through increased collaboration (Bryk & Schneider 2002; Daly & Chrispeels 2008). In this context, all members of a school community tend to accept greater responsibility for the role that they play in students' education. It is, therefore, unsurprising that the development of trust in the relationships between the principal and the school community has been linked to increased school effectiveness (Daly & Chrispeels 2008; Mitchell, Forsyth & Robinson 2008).

In addition to the purposeful cultivation of relationships, the actions of school leaders are also integral to the development of a culture of trust. O'Brien found that school staff 'observe their leaders to discern whether it is safe to trust them and the decision whether to trust, or not, is influenced significantly by the leaders' actions in situations of uncertainty or adversity'. (O'Brien 2011, p. 105). Those leaders who demonstrate personal integrity, commitment and honesty are reported to develop stronger and more trusting relationships with teachers and the broader school community (Brewster & Railsback 2003). Furthermore, O'Brien (2011) found that school leaders can build trust by openly sharing and engaging teachers in their vision for the school. This finding aligns with Brewster and Railsback's view that school leaders working in a culture of trust 'empower teachers and draw out the best in them' (Brewster & Railsback 2003, p. 19).

When school leaders trust their staff and engage them in shared decision-making processes, it results in increased staff satisfaction, engagement and morale (O'Brien 2011). These opportunities can enhance the culture of trust in the school and encourage the school staff to collaborate in the improvement of school performance (Brewster & Railsback 2003). School leaders can use this culture of trust to establish a 'psychologically safe environment for staff where they can initiate and trial new ideas and practices without fear of criticism or retribution' (O'Brien 2011, p. 105). Staff can then authentically participate in school decision-making processes and feel that their decisions

are supported. In this way, school leaders can draw on the culture of trust to establish a culture that promotes engagement, flexibility and innovation (Brown 2004). Strong collegial cultures of 'mutual trust and support', driven by a belief in the capability of every student, are recognised as key elements of school improvement (Masters 2012). Mees reports that in one school, 'as the degree to which these types of collaborative leadership behaviors increased, student achievement also increased' (Mees 2008, p. 135).

One difficult aspect of creating a culture of trust between school leaders and teachers is that it raises tensions with the increasing context of accountability. Education research suggests that effective school leaders are supportive of their teaching staff and trust their professional judgement (O'Brien 2011). In Finland, where the system of education is regularly ranked in the top five of international benchmarking assessments, 'teachers enjoy considerable trust and autonomy' (Hargreaves, Halász, & Pont 2007, p. 15). Finnish schools are not subject to national examinations or inspections. Rather, the education system is based on an ethic of trust, professional judgement and self-evaluation. The focus in Finland is on improvement rather than accountability.

The focus of the Finnish education system on trust and autonomy may seem remarkable in the larger context of the 'Global Education Reform Movement' or 'GERM' (Sahlberg 2010). Researchers in other nations, however, remind school leaders that even in a context of high stakes testing and public scrutiny, they can establish relational trust with their teachers. In fact, Bryk and Schneider (2002) suggest that it is vital for teachers to feel supported, valued and trusted. Authoritarian control of a school, micromanagement or abandoning staff without support can all diminish trust in school leaders (Walker, Kutsyuruba & Noonan 2011). In order to sustain a culture of trust, school leaders need to cultivate a delicate balance of providing their staff with autonomy and trusting their professional judgement while also offering them support.

This type of support can be offered in a number of ways, including engaging teachers in collaborative decision making, as described above. School leaders can establish trust by creating conditions that enable all members of staff to continuously improve their teaching practices (Department of Education and Training, Victorian Government 2005, p. 7). A culture of trust can be further supported by providing opportunities for teachers to engage in collaborative learning, innovative practice and self-assessment.

Walker, Kutsyuruba and Noonan (2011) argued that school leaders also need to be aware of the fragile nature of trust. 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' (Walker, Kutsyuruba & Noonan 2011, p. 475). When trust between school leaders and school staff has been broken, it can have significant implications for the culture and work of the school. Daly and Chrispeels (2008) suggested that an absence of trust in a school can lead to feelings of anxiety, insecurity and isolation. Furthermore, organisations with low-trust cultures can be extremely difficult to change (Walker, Kutsyuruba & Noonan 2011). School leaders, therefore, need to maintain a consistent focus on building relationships with their staff and school community in order to both establish and, importantly, sustain a culture of trust.

Robinson, Hohepa and Lloyd (2009) identified contextual factors that may affect the level of relational trust, including community diversity ('developing trust is more difficult in diverse communities because people find it easiest to trust people who seem similar to themselves'); school size ('the Chicago study found that trust was more likely to develop in small schools'); enrolment stability ('building positive relationships with a constantly shifting parent community is hard work'); voluntary association ('relational trust in a school is greater when both staff and students feel they have some choice in the matter'), capacity to deal with incompetence ('it is critical, therefore, that leaders address any staff incompetence in a timely, fair, and effective manner'); and imbalances in power ('teachers can feel vulnerable to their principal's decisions, including, for example, those that relate to class allocation and supervisory duties') (Robinson, Hohepa & Lloyd 2009, pp. 186–187).

The authors illustrated some of these factors, especially the first, in the context of schools serving Maori and South Pacific Islanders (New Zealand) and Indigenous students (Australia). A case study with relatively detailed illustrations of how leaders create 'educationally powerful connections' through relational trust was provided (Robinson, Hohepa & Lloyd 2009, pp. 236–241).

Teacher-teacher trust

Relational trust between teachers within a school is an example of what Putnam (2000) describes as 'bonding' social capital. This type of trust provides a foundation for social structures that engage teachers, support their understanding of their role within the school and strengthen their moral purpose in working towards school improvement (Brewster & Railsback 2003). Leana reported that 'when the relationships among teachers in a school are characterised by high trust and frequent interaction—that is, when social capital is strong—student achievement scores improve' (Leana 2011, p. 32). A culture of trust can enhance the performance of all teachers by supporting the sharing of ideas and collaborative learning.

Brewster and Railsback (2003) indicated that the responsibility for building trust between teachers is shared by both principals and teachers. School leaders need to create the organisational conditions necessary for teachers to engage in collaborative relationships. This often requires additional time for teachers to meet and spaces in which they can interact and share ideas (Rhodes, Stevens & Hemmings 2011). Additionally, teachers need to be active in establishing collaborative, collegial relationships. Moran and Hoy state that 'the behaviour of teachers is the primary influence on trust in colleagues' (Moran & Hoy 1998, pp. 348–349 cited in Brewster & Railsback 2003, p. 21).

Leana (2011) found that teachers are more likely to seek information or advice about their professional practice from their colleagues. In fact, the teachers in her study were found to be twice as likely to seek advice from their peers rather than from an expert and four times more likely to seek advice from one another than from the principal. She reports that one teacher explained that 'it's dangerous to express vulnerability to experts or administrators because they will take your professional status away' (Leana 2011, p. 32). When there is a strong collegial culture within the school, however, all members of staff become involved in discussions of ongoing improvement (Masters 2012). This relationship was described in New Zealand's *Best Evidence Synthesis*:

“Teachers must be able to count on others, particularly their leaders, if they are to succeed in their work, so they care about competence... Allowed to persist, gross incompetence corrodes trust and undermines collective improvement endeavours... Since school improvement requires sustained, collective endeavour, teachers become demoralised and reduce the level of their commitment if they discern that their leaders cannot deal with those who (wittingly or unwittingly) undermine their efforts.”

Robinson, Hohepa & Lloyd 2009, p. 185

Teachers working in a culture of trust can exchange ideas, share knowledge and work together to improve the professional practice of all. As such, building strong relationships based on trust between colleagues is essential in developing a strong collaborative culture within a school that may have a positive effect on all areas of the school (Leana 2011; Mees 2008; O'Brien 2011). The positive relationship of trust on teachers' practices is clearly described in Hattie's synthesis of influences on learning.

Hattie (2012, p. 71) invited readers of *Visible Learning for Teachers* to score themselves on five items in Bryk and Schneider's Teacher Trust Scale:

1. 'Teachers in this school trust one another'.
2. 'It's OK in this school to discuss feelings, worries and frustrations with other teachers'.
3. 'Teachers respect other teachers who take the lead in school improvement efforts'.
4. 'Teachers at the school respect those colleagues who are expert at their craft'.
5. 'Teachers feel respected by other teachers'.

Hattie believes that trust is central to the effective implementation of the 138 'influences' on learning that he identified in his synthesis of findings in more than 800 meta-analyses. He gave particular attention to the association of trust and willingness to make errors:

“Consider the key elements of successful learning throughout this book [Visible Learning for Teachers]: a common denominator is feeling comfortable about making errors. By knowing what we do not know, we can learn; if we were to make no errors, we would be less likely to learn (or even to need to learn)—and we probably are not involved in challenge if there is not an element of being wrong and not succeeding. This is not deficit thinking if the teacher and the student see errors as opportunities. Climate and trust are therefore the ingredients of gaining the most from making errors, and thus enabling students to be more impacted by our teaching.”

Hattie 2012, p. 71

It is important to note that trust is not one of the 138 'influences' included in Hattie's synthesis. In this sense, building or strengthening trust is not a 'stand-alone' strategy. This suggests that a principal or other school leader who sets out to build trust as a discrete strategy may fail; indeed, such an effort may result in a loss of trust. There is an analogy here with what Andy Hargreaves has described over the years as 'contrived collegiality'. He and Michael Fullan distinguished between arranged collegiality and contrived collegiality:

"Contrived collegiality is collaboration of steroids. In the end, the drawbacks and benefits of arranged collegiality (at its best) and contrived collegiality (at its worst) are not to be found in whether or not particular structures or practices are suddenly introduced—such as planning times, protocols, or procedures for analyzing data. The differences between merely arranged and artificially contrived or forced collegiality are to be found in whether there is already enough trust, respect, and understanding in a culture for any new structures or arrangements to have the capacity to move that culture ahead."

Hargreaves & Fullan 2012, p. 125

Vulnerability and the potential for risk is recognised as a key element in establishing relational trust (see Bryk & Schneider 2002; Daly & Chrispeels 2008; Hoy & Tschannen-Moran 1999). In order to identify areas ways to improve their practice, teachers need to be able to open themselves up to potentially risky conversations (Daly & Chrispeels 2008). Effective conversations about school improvement require all school staff to be honest and open about their skills, knowledge and areas in which they believe they can improve (Bryk & Schneider 2000). The concept of public discussion of teachers' knowledge and skills may at first glance appear to contradict the notion of trust and teacher autonomy and seem counter-intuitive in a climate of accountability. Developing this type of honest and open culture is a complex and gradual process that 'is in conflict with the norm of autonomy that has historically characterised the work of teachers' (Department of Education and Training, Victorian Government 2005, p. 9).

Nonetheless, developing trusting, collaborative relationships between teachers holds a range of benefits for their professional practice, their engagement with the school and for the school as a whole. When a culture of trust has been established, teachers can allow themselves to be vulnerable, safe in the knowledge that they will be supported by their colleagues (Brown 2004). They can engage in open and honest conversations to reflect on their practices and identify ways in which they can improve. Like the Finnish system of education, the focus of talk about teachers' professional practice can shift from management to continuous improvement. The safe space within schools is key to developing innovative, creative and collaborative practices that have been shown to have a direct result in increasing student achievement (Leana 2011; Mees 2008).

Student-teacher trust

Research into trust in schools has increasingly focused on the relationships between teachers and students and the potential for these relationships to enhance student performance (see Bryk & Schneider 2002; Mees 2008; Mitchell 2004). Despite this focus, there has been limited evidence to suggest that trust between teachers and students has a direct positive influence on students' academic outcomes. The research literature on this element of relational trust in schools, however, demonstrates that schools with a culture of trust enhance student performance in a range of other measures. Van Maele and Van Houtte (2011), for example, described teacher-student trust as integral to the quality of school life.

The relationships between school staff and students could be described as a form of internal 'bridging' social capital (Putnam 2000). These relationships form a vital link between two significant groups in the school community. High quality relationships between teachers and students offer teachers insights into the attitudes and life worlds of their students. These relationships also provide students with insights into adult behaviour and can support their enculturation into the normative expectations of the school (Mitchell, Forsyth & Robinson 2008; Van Maele & Van Houtte 2011). Research has indicated that reciprocal trust relationships between students and teachers can increase students' identification as part of the school community, support student engagement, enhance student wellbeing and raise the bar for all students.

Positive relationships between students and teachers have significant implications for the overall wellbeing of members of the school community. Brewster and Railsback (2003) indicated that when there is a high level of trust and cooperation with teachers, students report that they feel cared about and safe within the school. Another group of students reported that, when they are trusted and treated fairly by school staff, they are more likely to ask an adult for help (Colorado Trust 2008). Research in Colorado suggests that the establishment of a culture of trust between students and teachers can support schools in reducing bullying (Colorado Trust 2008) and supporting students to 'conform to rules associated with schooling' (Mitchell, Forsyth & Robinson 2008, p. 121).

Students who do not engage or identify with the school may face a range of educational and social problems, which may include school failure, absenteeism and behaviour issues (Mitchell, Forsyth & Robinson 2008). A possible counterbalance to these issues could be offered by positive teacher-student relationships (Van Maele & Van Houtte 2011). Mitchell, Forsyth and Robinson (2008) found that the level of trust that students and parents had in the school was strongly correlated with their identification as part of the school community. They posit that when students identify with the school, they are more likely to be engaged in a range of school activities, adhere to expectations of behavioural norms and, in some cases, improve their academic performance (see also Mitchell 2004). Rhodes, Stevens and Hemmings (2011, p. 83) describe this relationship well when they state that 'positive school cultures are imbued with norms that encourage behaviors'. Students in a positive school culture, therefore, are presented with a range of norms to which they can choose to engage and adhere.

Relational trust is described as a 'reciprocal phenomenon' that is 'mutually reinforcing because each party then has a built-in incentive to be trustworthy' (Van Maele & Van Houtte 2011, p. 97). Trusting relationships between students and teachers are no exception.

While the discussion in this section has focused on the trust that students place in teachers, research has also indicated that teachers' trust in the abilities of students plays a substantial role in developing high expectations for students. Van Maele and Van Houtte (2011) found that student-teacher trust is strongly related to teachers' perceptions of the 'teachability' of their students. Teachers' expectations for students were increased when they perceived their students to be more 'teachable'.

It is widely observed that the development of a culture of trust in schools is a complex and frequently difficult undertaking. Sustaining such a culture, on the other hand, may not be as daunting. The normative expectations established in a culture of relational trust can have a powerful influence on how students behave. Van Maele and Van Houtte (2011) suggested that this reasoning supports the view that an academically-oriented student culture may support teachers' expectations of the students' 'teachability'. Moreover, if students see members of their peer group involved in positive trusting relationships with teachers, for example, their trust for those teachers is likely to increase.

Studies of school reform acknowledge that schools that have either successfully achieved transformation or are well on the path to continuous school improvement, share the characteristic of holding high expectations for student behaviour, attitudes and academic achievement (see Caldwell & Harris 2008; Masters 2012). Furthermore research suggests that where students have strong positive relationships with their teachers, they strive to meet the expectations that their school holds for them. It is interesting to note that, while there is a common assumption that teachers hold lower expectations for students in low socio-economic status (SES) contexts, the significant effects of SES disappeared in Van Maele and Van Houtte's (2011) study. A similar effect was found for teachers' relationships with students from immigrant backgrounds. When they controlled for the SES contexts of these students, they found that their social class background and not their immigrant status was the key variable. These findings suggest that the seemingly lowered expectations for immigrant students and students in low SES contexts can be explained by the fact that teachers believe that students at these schools are less teachable' (Van Maele & Van Houtte 2011, p. 95). Their findings suggest that increased student-teacher trust in low SES contexts may be able to mitigate some of the perceptions held by teachers in these schools.

While the research on teacher-student trust appears to be overwhelmingly positive, there are some indications that developing these relationships may not be a simple process. It has been noted that students in the early years and primary years of schooling are more likely to develop these relationships with their teachers. After the primary years, however, students begin to withdraw from these adult relationships (Colorado Trust 2008; Mitchell, Forsyth & Robinson 2008). As a result, it is recommended that teachers focus on establishing trust with students early in their school years, rather than waiting until secondary school when it may be more difficult to develop these types of trusting relationships.

In addition to the age of the student body, research has found two other structural factors of schooling that may have a negative influence on the development of positive trusting relationships between teachers and students. Van Maele and Van Houtte (2011) found that the size of a school may have an impact on the establishment of positive relationships between teachers and students. They found a tendency for larger schools to have lower levels of trust between the two groups. It is interesting to note, however, that they also found that the more contact teachers have with students the less likely they are to hold high levels of trust. They suggested that 'the more hours teachers instruct, the more the pool of trust-based evidence on which teachers rely points out that students are not to be trusted' (Van Maele & Van Houtte 2011, p. 97). The concept that teachers' familiarity with students may breed distrust has significant implications for school policies to consider the potential for teachers' workload to negatively impact on their relationships with students.

Trust and school governance

Adapting an operational definition from one developed by the Governance Working Group of the International Institute of Administrative Sciences (1996):

- Governance refers to the process whereby elements in a society wield power and authority, and influence and enact policies and decisions concerning public life, and economic and social development.
- Governance is a broader notion than government, whose principal elements include the constitution, legislature, executive and judiciary. Governance involves interaction between these formal institutions and those of civil society.

The foregoing suggests that descriptions of governance should go beyond accounts of how policies are determined and decisions are made, and by which institutions. The notion that governance is concerned with the interaction between these and civil society suggests a broader approach. Civil society is considered here to be the network of mutually supporting relationships between government, business and industry, education and other public and private sector services, community, home, and voluntary agencies and institutions.

Applying this to a school, governance involves a relationship between those who make decisions for and on behalf of the school, as permitted or mandated in a legal framework, and the network of individuals, organisations, agencies and institutions in the public and private sectors that have the capacity to support or be supported by the school as it seeks to fulfil its mission. The connection between governance and social capital is immediately apparent. Indeed, Caldwell and Harris, based on the findings in the International Project to Frame the Transformation of Schools described earlier, concluded that 'governance is concerned with the process through which the school builds its intellectual, social, financial and spiritual capital and aligns them to achieve its goals' (Caldwell & Harris 2008, p. 10). Relational trust is critically important if governance understood in these terms is to be effective.

Governance and structural trust

Bibb and Kourdi, cited at the outset of this review when definitions were considered, distinguished between relational and structural trust, with the latter describing a situation when trust is embedded across a large organisation or institution, even a whole country. Structural trust is high in a country like Finland, which is invariably included in lists of 'high trust' countries, and this extends to education in general and schools in particular. Here is how Sahlberg described trust in Finland, especially in relation to the often-noted approaches to accountability:

“Educational accountability in the Finnish educational context preserves and enhances trust among teachers, students, school leaders, and education authorities, and it involves them in the process, offering them a strong sense of professional responsibility and initiative... [This] is possible only if parents, students, and authorities trust teachers and school principals... Trust can only flourish in an environment that is built upon honesty, confidence, professionalism, and good governance... Trusting schools and teachers is a consequence of a well-functioning civil society and high social capital.”

Sahlberg 2010, pp. 130–131

It is beyond the scope of this review to enter a debate about approaches to accountability, with Finland being relatively 'loose' and Australia relatively 'tight' in the matter. It is sufficient to observe that a high level of trust may mitigate the need for a relatively tight approach. However, as suggested in the research cited below, there can be a high level of trust irrespective of the approach to accountability.

Governance and accountability

A study of school accountability in Norway (Christopherson, Elstad & Turmo 2012) found that high levels of relational trust can be achieved irrespective of how loose or tight are approaches to accountability. School systems in Norway vary in their approaches to accountability. This study surveyed secondary teachers in 18 schools in Oslo, where there are demanding approaches to accountability and teachers in Folk High Schools (FHS) across the country, where such approaches are largely absent. The approach in Oslo was described as a 'results-oriented external accountability system that makes each school principal responsible for attaining specific targets in terms of the school's activity' (Christopherson, Elstad & Turmo 2012, p. 2). The approach in FHS could hardly be more different: 'since there are no exams in an FHS, it is simply not possible to control learning outcomes using the results-based control carried out in other types of educational establishment without changing the whole nature of this kind of school' (Christopherson, Elstad & Turmo 2012, p. 3). The researchers tested several hypotheses that included the concept of relational trust.

There was no association between indicators of relational trust and approaches to accountability, which the researchers found surprising:

“The analysis undeniably provides some surprises given the underlying theoretical assumptions. The largest surprise is that statistical associations between teacher commitment and the fostering of effort are clearly stronger among Oslo teachers than among FHS teachers.”

Christopherson, Elstad & Turmo 2012, p. 10

The researchers surmise that relational trust stands apart from assessment-based accountability: 'This can mean that relational trust is a strong potential inherent quality attribute in schools despite the presence of new management forms based on assessment-based accountability' (Christopherson, Elstad & Turmo 2012, p. 10).

Despite the robust approaches to the analysis of data and the soundness of the findings cited above, the researchers acknowledge the limitations of the study and the need for further research. Nevertheless, there are important implications for school leaders and policymakers:

“The significance of relational trust appears as a complementary factor to those which are the popular chorus of today: accountability repercussions, target management and control. Inherent in this is an acknowledgement that tough management systems in the educational sector can have limitations in spite of attempts to extend the areas of control and measurement of the schools’ processes and product.”

Christopherson, Elstad & Turmo 2012, p. 12

Assuming these findings and implications apply also to Australia, where it may be argued that there are relatively demanding approaches to school accountability, there is no reason why there cannot be high levels of relational trust among key stakeholders at the school level. It may be argued that it is harder to achieve this than in systems where there are less demanding approaches and this may be so. Nevertheless, utilising all of the strategies of good leadership and trust building can achieve a good outcome.

Trust in public and private schools

Governance arrangements differ between public and private schools in Australia. For the former, there may be parent associations or advisory committees or, in some jurisdictions, a school council with varying degrees of power to make policy and approve budgets. The most powerful governing bodies in public schools in Australia are in Victoria and the increasing number of government schools in Western Australia that are 'independent public schools'. There are differences within the non-government sector. Independent schools tend to have powerful councils or boards of representatives of the church, where they are faith-based, old scholars, current staff and experts invited to serve. Such bodies employ the principal. In general there are two kinds of Catholic schools, those that are part of a Catholic system and those more independent schools that are controlled by religious orders. The former have relatively strong governing bodies that are parish or regionally based. There is a need for research on differences among these types of schools and the levels of trust among stakeholders.

There is limited evidence in the international domain that trust tends to be higher in private schools. One such study was conducted in Flanders among public schools and private Catholic schools. Teachers in 84 secondary schools were surveyed with measures of trust based on scales developed by Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999). In general terms it was found that 'organizational trust is partly explained by organizational value culture, organizational size, and organizational group composition' (Van Maele & Van Houtte 2009, p. 582). Specifically in respect to the differences between public and private schools, the researchers cited the influential study of Coleman and Hoffer (1987) to explain the differences:

“The organizational value culture of schools has a clear impact on faculty trust in colleagues. Teachers at private (Catholic) schools share higher levels of trust in their colleagues compared to teachers in public schools. Because trust relations form an integral part of an organization’s social capital...the presence of higher levels of shared values in private (Catholic) schools versus public schools (Coleman and Hoffer, 1987) may be reflected in our results relating school sector to faculty trust in colleagues. This outcome is thus in line with the social capital theory proposed by Coleman and Hoffer (1987) and with the proposition that a sense of community among teachers is more likely in private Catholic schools as compared to public schools...”

Van Maele & Van Houtte 2009, p. 579

As often mentioned in commentary, findings such as these are not so much a reflection of Catholicity, but of features such as common values and powers that are held by governing bodies. They may be explained by two of the contextual factors cited by Robinson, Hohepa & Lloyd 2009, pp. 186–187), listed earlier in this review: community diversity ('developing trust is more difficult in diverse communities because people find it easiest to trust people who are similar to themselves') and capacity to deal with incompetence ('it is critical, therefore, that leaders address any staff incompetence in a timely, fair, and effective manner'). Expressed simply, many private schools, including faith-based schools, may have relatively low community diversity and relatively high capacity to deal with incompetent staff. These circumstances may also exist in many public schools that may have powerful councils, especially those of long standing and that are selective as far as student enrolment and staff employment are concerned. Relational trust may be relatively high under these conditions, but not necessarily so.

Conclusion

It is concluded that there is ample if not overwhelming evidence to support the hypothesis that was addressed in this review, namely, that 'a culture of trust enhances performance in schools'. While there is surprisingly little research in the Australian setting, the evidence summarised in this review is international in scope and there is no reason whatsoever why it ought not to apply to Australia. Specifically, in relation to the Australian Professional Standard for Principals (AITSL 2011), the evidence supports the two statements in the Standard that explicitly refer to trust:

[They] foster trust and release creativity by developing leadership in others, building teams and working cooperatively to achieve school goals and build the capacity of the future workforce (Developing self and others) (AITSL 2011, p. 9).

They are able to build trust across the school community and to create a positive learning atmosphere for students and staff and within the community in which they work (Personal qualities and social and interpersonal skills) (AITSL 2011, p. 7)

There are two especially noteworthy conclusions. The first is that trust does not stand alone as a discrete capacity: it is the lifeblood of success in virtually every structure and process that involves the principal and other school leaders. It is for this reason that one-off efforts to create trust are unlikely to succeed. Similarly, a contrived project, even if sustained, may breed distrust.

Second, while a headline finding is that the quality of relationships is central to the creation of trust, the extent of that quality is influenced by many factors, including the competence of the leader: trust will be lost very quickly if a leader is perceived to be incompetent. It is therefore important to build strength in and draw on intellectual or professional capital in establishing relational trust.

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