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Restoring Broken Trust in the Work of School Principals

Benjamin Kutsyuruba, Keith Walker and Brian Noonan

Abstract: *Trust is a fundamental concept in our lives and language. As schools play a special role in our society, understanding trust dynamics in schools has an instrumental role in fostering the culture of positive relationships in schools. This gives rise to an immense set of responsibilities and challenges, all lying within the scope of school administrators' everyday activities. This article is a part of a more extensive study that examined Canadian school principals' perceptions of their moral-agency and trust-brokering roles in schools. This article takes a contextual and ecological perspective on the ebb and flow of trust in the relationships mediated by school principals. We reviewed the literature with respect to the restoration of broken trust in school settings before sharing our qualitative analysis of responses, based on the perspectives of Canadian principals (n=177) who participated in our study.*

Introduction: Shattered Jars of Clay

Trust is a fundamental concept in our lives, relationships, everyday social transactions, interactions and language. Although vital and necessary, trust is a rather fragile part of human relationships. 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: 204). The fragility of trust lies in its specific nature, built on two conditions: interdependence and risk (Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt & Camerer 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. Where parties are dependent upon each other for something they care about or need, trust is critical (Tschannen-Moran 2004). Interdependence, however, brings with it vulnerability, and trust may be understood to be the extent to which one is willing to rely upon and make oneself vulnerable to another (Baier 1994). In other words, where we have guarantees or proofs in relationships trust is redundant (O'Neill 2002).

It is well known that trust is essential for organisations (Lewicki, McAllister & Bies 1998; Donaldson 2001). Currall and Epstein emphasised the centrality and fragility of trust in an organisation: 'If properly developed, trust can propel [organisations] to greatness. Improperly used, trust can plant the seeds of collapse' (2003: 203). At the same time, however, we know that trust is often broken or violated. Because there are no guarantees, trust sometimes can be misplaced by one or the other of the parties, letting each other down. In such cases, trust and relationships can both be damaged (O'Neill 2002). When a violation occurs trust can be shattered, leaving distrust in its place (Burt & Knez 1996). Surprisingly little is known about the consequences of violating trust, and more work is needed to examine how trust actually

changes over time as a result of different types of violations and attempts to restore it (Schweitzer, Hershey & Bradlow 2006). Lewicki & Bunker (1996) and Lewicki & Wiethoff (2000) developed theoretical models that consider their view that trust violations may irrevocably harm relationships. In a similar vein, Slovic (1993) argued that broken trust requires a long time to rebuild and that, in some cases, lost trust may never be restored. As O'Neill summarily observed, trust is hard earned and easily dissipated, but it is a 'valuable social capital and not to be squandered' (2002: 6).

Schools play a special role in our society, and these organisations operate effectively on the good will of all learning community members and their flourishing relationships. Using a social-psychological perspective of trust (Lewicki & Bunker 1996), we emphasise the nature of trust in interpersonal transactions and contend that understanding trust in professional relationships is vital to the work of fostering healthy cultures of trust in school organisations. Creating, sustaining and fostering trust are imperative activities for school leaders, and cognisance of the fundamental importance of trust and trust dynamics is essential for a successful principalship. In their work relationships, the most serious issues that school principals face can be related to broken trust. In our attempt to understand the process of trust brokering in the lives of school principals, we considered trust to be much like a jar of clay (or any other fragile object) that can be broken into pieces by the act of violation by one or more of the parties. Although a time-consuming and difficult task, shattered pieces may still be put back together with glue and time; however, it is hard to conceal evidence of the marks from breakage (well represented by the 'scars' that are left when the trust has been broken between people). On the other hand, depending on the scrupulousness of those involved in its repair, and the nature of the bonding substance, the jar of clay may become even stronger than before. In this article, we will not deal further with the fragile nature of trust in relationships, but will look at the range of ways to repair broken trust in relationships; repair both led and mediated by school principals. We review the literature with respect to trust-brokering in school settings and then share our qualitative findings, based on the perspectives of responding Canadian principals (n=177). The purpose of the larger, exploratory study was to bring to description 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. Based on the principals' elaborations of the notion of trust, the inferred stages of trust development included establishing, maintaining, sustaining and recovering trust. In this article, we focus on the Canadian principals' responses related to the latter of these stages. We conclude that school principals need to be alert to the fragility of trust in schools and assume their agential role in the processes of trust brokering and restoration.

Breakdown of Trust

Trust is a difficult notion to define because of its complex and multifaceted nature. Despite the fact that trust had been studied by scholars for many years, there appears to be no consensus on a best definition of trust. What is common across most definitions of trust, either explicitly or implicitly, is the willingness to risk in the face of vulnerability. Through the synthesis of common definitions of trust, we have come to understand trust as the extent to which one engages in a reciprocal interaction and a relationship in such a way that there is willingness to be vulnerable to another and to assume risk with a degree of confidence that the other party will possess some semblance of benevolence, competence, honesty, openness, reliability,

respect, wisdom, and care (Mishra 1996; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy 2000; Tschannen-Moran 2004; Daly 2009; Day 2009). Moreover, as Bottery (2004: 101–102) argued, trust is a critical existential need for the functioning at the *societal, institutional, interpersonal* and *personal* levels. At the societal level, it is essential in building the relationships necessary for a flourishing society, as well as fostering good relationships between governments and school employees. At the institutional level, it is crucial in building better relationships within a learning community in which knowledge is socially created and shared, and in building the kinds of group relationships that boost student achievement. At the interpersonal level, it is central to individual integrity and good leadership. And finally, at the personal level, trust is vital to individual morale, self-esteem and self-worth, and is central to dealing with uncertainty, unpredictability and risk. Notwithstanding the impact of societal level of trust on the rest of the levels, in our overview of the literature and research on trust breakage and restoration we focus on a *relational* aspect of trust (Bryk & Schneider 2002) between *principals and teachers, students and others* at the institutional, interpersonal and personal levels in schools.

As a necessary, yet fragile, part of human relationships, trust in schools is often taken for granted. For example, when an entrusted person does as expected, one barely notices. Accordingly, as Govier puts it, 'One reason that we underrate the significance of trust is our strong tendency not to notice it until it breaks down' (1998: 5). There are a number of factors described in the literature that cause the breakdown of trusting relationships. Caldwell (2008) differentiated between trust in internal relationships, established in the immediate work environment, and external relationships, established at the intersection of education, economy and society. Loss of trust at the external or societal relational level is determined by the interplay between policy and practice, resulting in a high level of scepticism and suspicion in educational profession on its efficacy and low level of trust between policy-makers and professionals (Caldwell 2008). Discussing the two-way nature of distrust between teachers and governments at the macro and international levels, Bottery (2003, 2004) determined the presence of a vicious cycle of declining trust, based in part on increased frequency and detail of inspection, increased accountability and emphasis in training on assessed behavioural competence. School leaders, often seen as representatives and implementers of governmental demands, may find it hard to establish and maintain trust as they are caught in 'crossfire' situations between the policy-makers and teachers. As for the internal or institutional relational level, 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). A failure to follow up with what one promised to do might break the trust or completely arrest its development (Simons 2002).

Most often trust in schools is broken by betrayal, breach of confidentiality, deception, dishonesty, breach of integrity, corruption, coercion, overuse of power, exclusion of others or divisiveness among staff (Bies & Tripp 1996; Reina & Reina 1999; Marshall 2000; Solomon & Flores 2001; O'Neill 2002; Gimbel 2003; Cooper 2004; Tschannen-Moran 2004). Discussing the evolutionary phases of trust – namely, *building, maintaining and destroying* – Currall & 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. They have said, 'In cases when the loss is particularly great, trust can evaporate almost immediately' (2003: 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).

As stated, probably one of the most serious issues that schools face is the problem of broken trust and its necessary restoration (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy 1998). The breakdown of trust results in the emergence of two parties: the *violator(s)* and the *victim(s)*. This may occur at various levels of interpersonal relationships within schools. When trust is broken between the teacher and student, suspicion and punishment are the likely consequences; factors that are dysfunctional to cognitive and social-emotional development. When trust is broken between the principal and teacher, the probable consequences are hypervigilance, punishment and getting even; typically, these are destructive forces that undermine the effectiveness of the school. Tschannen-Moran & Hoy suggested that 'revenge does have a way of equalizing power differentials in the school, but it also can lead to escalation of the conflict and produce harm and violations that may be irreversible' (1998: 349). Furthermore, as Barber noted, 'when trust fails or weakens in small or informally organized communities, the members may use various means of informal social control – ridicule, ostracism, unhelpfulness and the like – to bring an untrustworthy actor into line' (1983: 22). In order to deal with such consequences, trust needs to be rebuilt or restored at the organisational or individual levels. However, the process of repairing broken trust is difficult and costly in schools as it is in all organisations (Tschannen-Moran 2004).

Initiation of Trust Repair

Reparation of broken trust is not an easy undertaking; it can be a long and difficult process of restoring the previously healthy and thriving trusting relationships between the violator and the victim (Slovic 1993; Lewicki & Wiethoff 2000; Bryk & Schneider 2002). Repairing trust is a two-way process in which each side must perceive that the short- or long-term benefits to be gained from the relationship are sufficiently valuable to be worth the investment of time and energy required by the repair process (Lewicki & Bunker 1996; Tschannen-Moran 2004). Each party must perceive that the benefits of repairing the relationship are worth the effort. Tschannen-Moran & Hoy (1998) argued that the initiative for the repair of trust begins with the violator, who must take four steps. The violator must:

- a. recognise and acknowledge that a violation has occurred;
- b. determine the nature of the violation and admit that he or she has caused the event;
- c. admit that the act was destructive; and
- d. accept responsibility for the effects of his or her actions.

The violator may also engage in the 'four A's of absolution' (Tschannen-Moran 2004: 155): 'admit it, apologize, ask forgiveness, and amend your ways'. There are then four alternative courses of trust repair to be chosen by the victim. The victim can:

- a. refuse to accept any actions, terms or conditions for re-establishing the relationship;
- b. acknowledge forgiveness but specify 'unreasonable' acts of reparation;
- c. acknowledge forgiveness and specify 'reasonable' acts of reparation; and
- d. acknowledge forgiveness and indicate that no further acts or reparation are necessary (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy 1998).

In addition, the repair of trust may be initiated by the victim.

Models of Trust Restoration

We know that the pathways to restoration of trust are as complex as the pathways into the breakdown of trust, and step-by-step approaches to trust-brokering are not always the best

solutions in various situations. However, some authors have provided helpful linear guideposts for the journey of restoration. We would simply like to provide these to our readers for whatever purpose they may serve along with our commentary, which will unearth the principles that underlie these more mechanical expressions.

Trust repair may be facilitated by working for good communication, being meticulously reliable and using persuasion rather than coercion. To add, 'it is also facilitated by constructive attitudes, clear boundaries, communication of promises and credible threats, and constructive conflict resolution strategies' (Tschannen-Moran 2004: 161). A leader may also restore trustworthiness through such practices as behavioural consistency, behavioural integrity, sharing and delegation of control, communication, and demonstration of concern (Whitener, Brodt, Korsgaard & Werner 1998).

Rebuilding of trust goes hand in hand with rebuilding of truth. Navran provided a three-point approach to rebuilding both of these notions for effective leadership. First, the leader must tell the truth. Navran said, 'there are no exceptions, no justifications and no rationalizations which suffice to deviate from the position that employees are always entitled to the truth. The fundamental basis of trust in an organization is truth telling' (1995: 132). Second, the leader must keep the promises. He said, 'Truth is the residue of promises fulfilled. One broken promise doesn't move you back to square one. It puts you in the hole' (1995: 132). Third, the leader has to back the employees. Being perceived as their greatest supporter becomes a basis for trust when two preconditions are satisfied. 'First, it must be deserved support. Their causes must be just, their needs legitimate, their grievances real. Second, it must be sincere. Your support must spring from a genuine desire to do what is right, fair and good. It cannot be seen as a facade or a sham' (1995: 133).

Galford and Drapeau (2002) outlined another model, called 'REPAIR', to help leaders bring out the best in their followers:

- recognize the intensity of the loss of trust, its depth and its breadth;
- examine where the breach occurred, and where the damage was done: personal trust elements (credibility, reliability, intimacy, self-interest) and organizational trust elements (aspirations, abilities, actions, articulations, alignment, resistance);
- place it out there: Fast! People already know when trust is at a low, or has been damaged. Ignoring it, or pretending it isn't so bad just doesn't help;
- acknowledge its impact on the individual, the group, and/or the organization at large;
- identify as precisely as possible, what you'll be doing in an attempt to rebuild trust; and
- raise the bar of performance: Over deliver on your attempt to rebuild. Reflect carefully on whether progress is being made, and what else needs to be done. Repeat the process for a good long time. (2002: 217).

In addition, Reina & Reina (1999) identified seven steps for healing from betrayal on behalf of the victim. The first step is to observe and acknowledge what has happened. Moving from betrayal to trust starts with self-discovery. We must consciously observe and acknowledge our thoughts and feelings before we can do something about them. The second step is to allow one's feelings to surface. The third step is to get support. Healing from major betrayal is like any major change process: it is difficult to do alone. Fourth, one needs to reframe the experience and put it in a larger context. The answers will allow the victim to gain clarity regarding the feelings, think about things in a different way, and reframe past experiences.

Step five is to take responsibility for personal role in the process. It is far more productive to accept responsibility for working things through than to place blame. The sixth step is to forgive oneself and the others: 'Forgiveness', they say, 'provides us with an opportunity to heal our wounds more rapidly' (Reina & Reina 1999: 56). And, finally, step seven entails reflecting on the experience, letting go and moving on.

In sum, as Tschannen-Moran argued, there is both good and bad news in the process of trust brokering: the good news is that in many instances the trust that has been damaged can be repaired; the bad news is that restoration of trust is 'an arduous process that requires humility and effort and may extend over a long period' (2004: 153). School principals as leaders and moral agents are called to model trust-brokering efforts in their schools, whether in a situation when they are rebuilding trusting relationships with other stakeholders or when they help others in this process. However, in doing so, they often find themselves between a rock and a hard place, seemingly having to play the needs of one constituent off those of another (Tschannen-Moran 2004). Administrators and other stakeholders in schools are dependent on each other, and it is the interdependency that makes involved parties vulnerable and in need of trusting relationships. An understanding of the conditions and processes that enable administrators and other stakeholders to learn to trust and co-operate is critical as schools increasingly face changing expectations. More than a decade ago, Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (1998) called for studies that examine the process of rebuilding broken trust in schools as necessary and essential to begin to break through the barriers of building more trustful school cultures. Following this call, our study elicited principals' perspectives on the restoration of trust. Our methodology and analysis of findings are presented in the following sections.

Trust Brokering in the Principalship: A Study

With this background to the restoration of trust, we now share our study of the trust-brokering function of school principals. Our 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 (Noonan, Walker & Kutsyuruba 2008; Kutsyuruba, Walker & Noonan 2009). A study of this nature adds value in a number of ways. 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. There are few descriptions and analyses of trust offered to school principals who regularly grapple with the issues related to decision-making, relationships and trust. Furthermore, only a few studies have considered how trust develops and little extant research has considered how trust might be recovered after it has been disrupted (Schweitzer et al. 2006).

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

For this exploratory study, principals from across Canada were contacted using email and mail addresses from the Canadian Education on the Web (2007) website. Hard copies of the 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 number of returns ($n=177$), a response much smaller than expected. We do consider the responses sufficient for the needs of this qualitative aspect of the study, but we are modest in our generalisations. We also noted the disproportionate responses from 3 of 13 Canadian 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 (spam filters, out-of-date addresses, etc.). While the economies of online surveys are attractive, reports of blocked emails and ease of dismissal of 'yet another survey' led to our poor response rate. Unfortunately, the study did not afford follow-up on either surface or online surveys; again, reducing response rate. With the exception of demographics, we abandoned our quantitative data and its analysis.

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 (See Table 1).

Table 1: Demographics of respondents ($n=177$)

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

Note: Missing values for variables are not included.

The participating principals fit into four different age range categories; the majority of them (79 per cent) belonged to the 41–60 age group. Gender representation was almost equal, with the slightly higher prevalence of male principals. While the majority of participants represented three provinces – Alberta (20 per cent), Saskatchewan (23 per cent) and Ontario (20 per cent) – 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.

Responses to open-ended questions were received by the researchers and coded according to the dominant themes recurring in the responses (MacMillan & Schumacher 2006). Codes were then combined into categories, and categories into patterns or concepts (Lichtman 2010). Analysis of open-ended responses provided rich descriptive data for the study.

Research Findings

Two open-ended questions were instrumental for research findings presented in this article:

- a. In your experience, what key factors help the successful resolution of low trust situations?
- b. What is one piece of advice you would give to a beginning principal about repairing trust?

Accordingly, participants' responses were grouped into two major themes:

- a. perceptions regarding restoration of trust, and
- b. description of major concepts necessary for rebuilding trust along with some recommendations regarding resolution of low-trust situations.

The subthemes within these categories are presented in the order of strength of expression and frequency of mention indicated by the respondents. With the aforementioned inadequacy of quantification of the principals' collective voices for this exploratory study, we use such descriptors as few, some, most, many, majority, and so on to indicate the frequency of mention assigned to each subtheme by the participants. To the extent that it is relevant, we provide certain demographic data with direct quotations.

Restoration of Trust

Analysis of the qualitative data pointed to the perception of participants that it was crucial for people to trust each other in school settings. The majority of the responses reflected the participants' belief that trust was a foundational aspect in working toward what is best for a school and, ultimately, children. Despite the fact that many principals acknowledged that trust should not be damaged in the first place, as it is hard to repair, they all seemed to recognise that trust violations were a common occurrence in their schools. Therefore, as a participant with extensive principalship experience stated, schools need to 'work at repairing and rebuilding [trust], because it is worth the effort in the long run'. Similarly, a rookie administrator highlighted the importance of trust restoration: 'Repairing trust is vital to ensure any kind of positive working relationship; schools are based on relationships.'

While some of the principals expressed some uncertainty and doubt that broken trust can be repaired, the majority of participants indicated the conviction that trust can be regained or rebuilt once it has been broken. There seemed to be further caution or reserve palpable in a subset of comments that principals should not count on trust being repaired to the original

state. One of the surest things that might be counted on, they said, was that trust restoration takes considerable attention, effort and time. One principal, with over 15 years of administrative experience, provided this piece of advice: 'Let it take time. You can cover a lot of ground by discussing the issue and agreeing to move beyond in the best interest of kids. If you are trustworthy, over time your actions will build the relationship back up.' Typical to all responses was the belief that an instrumental role in the process of trust restoration was assigned to the school leaders.

Most of the time, principals felt personal responsibility to make sure relationships among all stakeholders are restored. Responses suggested that principals need to admit the problem exists, offer to work on it, and follow it up. One recently appointed principal suggested that it is the principal's foremost responsibility and priority to start the process of reparation: 'Do so relentlessly – it is your job; don't wait for others to do it.' In addition to advocating expeditious action in response to need for trust breakage, an experienced principal expressed the need for being proactive: 'Admit that trust needs repairing, read about strategies to develop trust and repair relationships when strained. However, be prepared for when trust is strained.' In addition, a number of principals cautioned that, although it is important to try to repair trust as soon as possible, it must be done only when a principal is ready to make a sincere effort.

Moreover, the majority of principals felt quite confident in their ability to rebuild trust in their schools, whether in their own relationships or involving relationships of other stakeholders. To show their capacity and confidence to others, one participant suggested, 'all participants need to know in no uncertain terms that there is a strong link between responsibility and consequences and both will be consistently enforced'. Some other suggestions included being authentic, patient and positive, and demonstrating leadership abilities. Principals' responses indicated that past experiences with the individual (positive or negative), severity of the situation (high or low), reliability of the individual, personal integrity, and open sharing of information contributed to successful resolution of low-trust situations.

Trust Rebuilding Concepts

When asked about factors that were most significant in rebuilding trust, *communication* seemed to be the most vital requirement in this process identified. 'Effective communication and relationship building are necessary to attain a successful resolution of low-trust situations', commented one participant. Another piece of advice to fellow principals for re-establishing trusting relationships was to 'talk about the issue right away, apologize for any wrong doing or assumptions, and try to understand the perception of others'. Furthermore, principals strongly believed that honesty, integrity and openness in communication were crucial components of the reparation of trust as well. The most typical responses related to these aspects were: 'Be open, honest and up front – take charge and don't let others walk over you' and 'Work at it – don't give up – be honest with people and non-defensive – give people lots of information.' For communication to be effective, it was necessary to be truthful, forthright, 'uncover the truth', or, as one experienced principal stated, 'slaughter sacred cows – talk about things that people don't want to because it makes them uncomfortable'. One principal said, 'as school leaders, we need to run to the fire, not away from it'. Furthermore, it was recommended 'to communicate regularly and often to rebuild trust; make sure to find a way to pray, laugh, and cry together'. A number of principals emphasised the importance of being

approachable for communication. Other comments highlighted the centrality of keeping promises and 'walking the talk', involving others in open decision-making, and using research to support the decision-making process.

Communication itself, although important, seemed to be insufficient for the successful mediation of low-trust situations. Seen more as a 'vehicle' for the restoration process, communication without *volition* supported by authentic and genuine intentions, ability to listen, understanding, respect, caring, credibility and reliability was perceived to be ineffective in its goal to renew trust in relationships. As was suggested by many of the participants, principals should genuinely admit the slip-up, own the mistakes and show willingness to correct the situation where they have capacity to do so. Some useful recommendations from principals of varying age groups and experiences included:

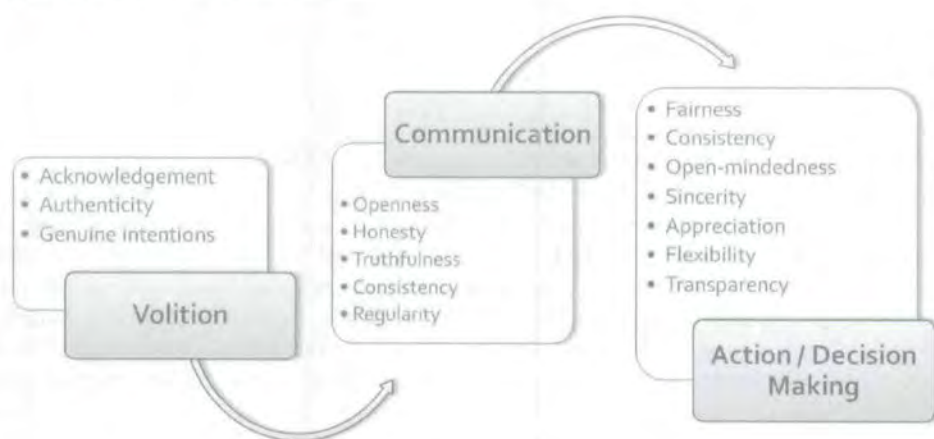
Take the time to reflect on the situation so that you are clear about what happened and as quickly as possible apologize and make genuine effort to modify your behaviour.

Acknowledge your humanity – to live is to screw up. Accept responsibility for mistakes, be sincerely apologetic and then make it right. People respect someone who acknowledges wrong doing and repairs it.

Be willing to say you are sorry when you are wrong. Deal with the issue not the personality.

Furthermore, communication was seen as the bridge between the volition stage and the action or decision-making of a trust broker. Consistency, open-mindedness, fairness, sincerity, appreciation, flexibility and transparency in decision-making were noted as characteristics necessary for the leaders to be effective in a decision-making process that leads to restoration of trust issues in schools. It appeared from participants that these and other aspects are extremely important in the actions necessary to bring trust to its intact state. Inferred trust restoration stages are depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Stages of trust restoration



It seems vital that principals keep these peer recommendations in mind when they are dealing with the restoration of trust in their schools. Whenever the participants shared stories or incidences where they did not trust others or had difficulty repairing trust, their advice was to continue working at establishing trust in their schools despite all the hurdles and disappointments. One experienced principal summed up his recommendation to: 'Work at [trust]. Don't give up. Be honest with people and provide as much information as possible.'

Discussion

The analysis of the research findings related to the restoration of trust in school relationships revealed several major themes. The importance of restorative processes for trusting relationships in the school setting as trust was perceived to be a foundational aspect in working toward what is best for a school and, ultimately, for children. However, the process of repairing broken trust was perceived as difficult and costly in schools, as it is in all other organisations (Tschannen-Moran 2004). Despite the fact that principals believed that the process of restoration required considerable amounts of effort and time dedication, they seemed to perceive that every bit of energy spent was worthwhile in trust-lacking situations. Principals' recommendations were to continue working at restoring trust in their schools despite all the hurdles and disappointments.

Repairing trust is a two-way process between the violator and the victim in which each side must perceive that the short- or long-term benefits to be gained from the relationship are sufficiently valuable to be worth the investment of time and energy required by the repair process (Lewicki & Bunker 1996; Tschannen-Moran 2004). By design, our study considered the instrumental role of principals in restoration of trust. We found that school principals as leaders and moral agents felt called and/or charged to model and lead trust-brokering efforts in their schools. This was true whether they were rebuilding personal failures in trusting relationships with other stakeholders or they were to help others in this process. The majority of comments of the participating principals referred to themselves as being the violators or acting as mediators on behalf of others who violated trusting relationships. In line with Lewicki & Bunker's (1996) argument, we found that principals, as violators, felt the need to start by recognising and acknowledging that a violation had occurred, continued by determining the nature of the violation and admitting to having caused the destructive event, and concluded by accepting responsibility for the effects. In their roles as mediators, principals followed the same steps in assisting violators to resolve the issues with those experiencing the violation. Most importantly, there seems to be an urgency to trust restoration on behalf of the school administration as well as an indication that restorative actions should only occur in the presence of sincere efforts and motives.

Principals felt personal or professional responsibility to make sure relationships among all stakeholders were restored, and were confident in their ability to accomplish this through open and honest communication, integrity, reliability, respect, caring, consistency and credibility. According to Tschannen-Moran (2004), trust repair may be facilitated by working for good communication, being meticulously reliable and using persuasion rather than coercion. A leader may restore trustworthiness through five factors, namely behavioural consistency, behavioural integrity, sharing and delegation of control, communication and demonstration of concern (Whitener et al. 1998). We also found that communication itself was perceived to be insufficient for the successful mediating of low-trust situations. Seen more as

a 'vehicle' for the restoration process, communication without authentic and genuine intentions, ability to listen, understanding, respect, caring, credibility and reliability had been experienced as ineffective in its goal to renew trust in relationships. Principals in our study believed in the benefits of facilitating the trust-restorative process through genuine care, authentic leadership, role-modelling ('walk-the-talk'), and transparent decision-making.

As Navran (1995) posited, rebuilding of trust goes hand in hand with rebuilding of truth. We also found that for principals, as moral agents, it was necessary to be truthful and forthright, and to uncover the truth; sometimes by talking about things that people don't want to hear or deal with. For these principals, one of the ways to be truthful was to genuinely admit the slip-up, own the mistakes, show willingness to correct the situation, and keep the promises to follow through with the restoration. Although these steps resemble the 'four A's of absolution' (Tschannen-Moran 2004): 'admit it, apologize, ask forgiveness, and amend your ways' (2004: 155), in our study principals emphasised the importance of promise-keeping and follow-through in the process of amending the situation. Similarly, a study by Schweitzer et al. (2006) highlighted the importance of promise-keeping in speeding trust recovery.

Understanding the dynamic nature of trust is an important undertaking for school administrators. Awareness of the issues involved in the repair of trust will help principals become *symbolic leaders* (Deal & Peterson 2009) involved in *leadership modelling* (Reeves 2002). In other words, modelling values through demeanour and actions is a way to initiate and encourage trust restoration, and project hope in uncertain times. As Gardner asserted, 'the first and the last task of a leader is to keep hope alive' (1990: 195). Similarly, Walker (2006) argued that school leaders need to foster hope for future generations of leaders in society. As mediators, principals can foster hope by modelling how broken trust and low-trust situations in school setting can be restored and trustworthy relationships can be rebuilt. Principals can instill hope as a transforming leadership concept though the realisation that, although it is a challenging and time-consuming process, broken trust and low-trust situations in school settings can be restored and trustworthy relationships can be rebuilt. 'Hope is a necessary element for leaders since it has implications for action – visioning, planning and the practical outworking of such plans – and for interpersonal relatedness and community building' (Walker 2006: 564). Hope-generating leadership creates positive images and actions directed toward possibilities of success in achieving personal and collective endeavours, goals and aspirations (Gardner 1990; De Pree 1997). Most importantly, as leaders, principals can build capacity and hopefulness for the restoration of trust by fostering 'warranted hope' (Walker & Atkinson 2010), a hope that is grounded in such leadership behaviours as diligence and mindful practice, sense-making and adaptive confidence.

Conclusions

The results of this research have made it possible to conclude that trust brokering is perceived as a crucial yet difficult task in the work of school principals. They often had to deal with trust-related matters, many of which had caused trustworthiness to be lost and trusting relationships to be broken. Most of the time, principals felt personal responsibility to make sure relationships among all stakeholders were restored, and indicated their confidence in their abilities to get this accomplished through healthy communication and demonstrating adequate levels of understanding, reliability, respect, caring, flexibility, appreciation and credibility. The study revealed that restoration of trust in school relationships was seen as a

complex process that required principals to spend energy and time, together with a good dose of leaderful consistency and persistence. There seemed to be a sense of hope and prevalent belief that trusting relationships, though fragile and often broken, were still subject to the possibility of restoration and renewal. Whenever the participants shared stories or incidences where they did not trust others or had difficulty repairing trust, their advice was to continue working at establishing trust in their schools despite all the hurdles and disappointments. This encouraging finding brings hope to the world of principals in a way that, although challenging and time-consuming, broken trust and low-trust situations in school setting can be restored and trustworthy relationships can be rebuilt.

Trust, with its fragility and need for restoration, is a complex construct for school communities. While, as indicated, there are both macro- and micro-levels of breaches of trust, the macro-level trust violations (e.g. systemic betrayal, disaffecting government policy) are often 'out of the reach' of the school principal's restorative acumen. In such cases, principals still have both objective and subjective responsibilities to help their local school community deal with such circumstances and minimise the ill-effects. This article and accompanying research focused on the micro-level of trust restoration and has offered the advice of practising principals and research to those leaders wishing to initiate, facilitate or mediate trust restoration means for the sake of their school community's well-being.

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