Leadership, Professionalism, and Overcoming Distrust  
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I. Trust Matters in Education

A. Glue
1. To be productive and to accomplish organizational goals, schools need cohesive and cooperative relationships. Trust is essential to fostering these relationships.
2. Trust binds leaders to followers. Without that bond, a manager can enforce minimum compliance with contract specifications and job descriptions, but that will not lead to high levels of professionalism and performance. [2,3]

B. Lubricant
1. Trust facilitates communication and contributes to greater efficiency when people have confidence in the integrity of other people’s words and deeds.
2. Without trust, friction and “heat” are generated that bog down the work of the school.
3. Energy is expended in making provisions such as lengthy contracts and written agreements against possible or feared betrayal by the other party.

C. A Choice [4]
1. Trust is also a choice. It is a judgment based on evidence, but it outstrips the evidence that would rationally justify it.
2. The trusting party makes this leap of faith out of care for the relationship.

D. Social Capital
1. Trust is a form of social capital that accrues very real benefits to those who have a network of high trust relationships.

E. The Holy Grail [5,6]
1. Trust is important because of its crucial role in fostering student achievement.
2. True education is much more than the dissemination of knowledge. To educate a student is to induct them into a community of practice such that they adopt the norms, values, and standards of excellence in that community. The teacher initially serves as a bridge to that community while the student, as a novice, begins to learn the skills of the community before adopting the standards as their own.
II. Challenges: What are the main challenges for today’s education systems related to trust?

A. Noticing Trust
   1. The philosopher Annette Baier (1994) observed that we tend to notice trust as we notice air, only when it becomes scarce or polluted. These days, it seems evident that trust in our society as a whole has indeed been damaged and is in scarce supply.

B. In-group and Out-group Biases

C. Breech in Civic Order - Lying, breaking promises, stealing ideas or credit, abusive exercise of authority, shirking job responsibilities, disclosing private confidences

D. Breech in Identity - Public criticism, wrong or unfair accusations, blaming others for personal mistakes, insults to oneself or to one’s collective

E. Social Media
   1. Because trust is only relevant in the context of interdependence and vulnerability, individuals tend to be more alert to negative information and prefer negative gossip to positive.
   2. Technologies, such as social media and e-mail, allow gossip to spread more quickly and can amplify the impact of broken trust.

III. Strategies: Which strategies have decision makers applied so far to tackle breakdowns in trust in education, and how effective have they been?

A. Bureaucratic Structure
   1. Bureaucratic Elements
      a. Division of labor with specialization
      b. Written rules and policies
      c. Standardization of processes (teacher-proofing)
      d. Hierarchy of authority
   2. Pitfalls of a Bureaucratic Culture
      a. Rules substitute for trust
      b. Constrained communication
      c. Problem hiding
      d. Micromanagement
      e. Rigid responses
      f. Working to the rule

B. Professional Structure
   1. Professional Organization
      a. Standardization of skills (through professional development and coaching)
      b. Common norms and ethics
c. Disciplined inquiry

d. Adaptive discretion in service of clients

e. Collective scrutiny and reflection

f. Shared decision-making

2. Benefits of Professional Organization

a. Adaptive responses

b. Collective press for excellence

c. Open communication

d. Culture of learning

e. Collaborative relationships

C. Optimal Trust

1. The “golden mean” of trust is prudent, measured, and conditional.

III. Development: Can education systems contribute to the development of trust among individuals and in institutions? If so, how?

A. Fostering Trust

B. Trust is … a willingness to be vulnerable

1. Benevolence - Unfailing mutual good will

2. Honesty – Integrity, truth telling, authenticity, accepting responsibility for your own mistakes and not blaming others.

3. Openness – in communication, sharing power, delegation, shared decision making

4. Reliability - Being consistent, Keeping promises, Diligence

5. Competence - Problem solving, conflict resolution

6. Different facets of trust may have different thresholds depending on the level of reliance in a particular area and the consequences of one’s expectations being disappointed.

C. Cultivating Trust

1. Empathy – The respectful understanding of another person’s experience.

D. Courtship

1. Leadership Coaching

E. Betrayal - is a voluntary violation of mutually understood expectations that has the potential to threaten the well-being of the trusting person

1. Rethinking student misbehavior through the lens of Attachment Theory

2. Teacher Aggression – Yelling, sarcasm, humiliation, group punishments for individual misdemeanors
F. Restoring Trust - Even in the midst of tension and conflict, trust can be fostered through the conciliatory initiatives of one party acting unilaterally, signaling the desire to establish trust without sacrificing the genuine need to protect his or her interests. ¹

IV. Our Students, Our Future ¹⁰,¹¹

As a society we invest much of what we most cherish in our schools. We send our children to schools, trusting that they will be safe from harm, as well as guided and taught in keeping with our highest hopes for them. Schools are also invested with a significant share of our collective resources in the form of tax dollars, school buildings, and local employment opportunities. In addition, schools are charged with keeping and promoting our shared values and ideals. They foster and protect our ideals of respect, tolerance, and democracy, as well as the vision of equity in our society. Our future depends upon the stewardship of our schools.

References