

The Centrality of *Trust* in Positive School Change

CREATE a Culturally Responsive Environment Conference

April 28, 2010
Green Bay, Wisconsin

Jeffrey Lewis
University of Wisconsin-Extension

Amy Hilgendorf
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Objectives

- Overview of our work in Beloit and our current study
- Discuss how relational trust has emerged as a key issue in a variety of ways with teachers and students
- Examine the consequences of having trust and or a lack of trust in schools
- Discuss what promotes trust or presents barriers to establishing trust, especially in critical relationships

Our work with the School District of Beloit (2005-2010)

- **Special education referral process (2005-06)**
 - African American storytelling project
- **African American boys' support for school (2007-08)**
 - School staff's perceptions of African American families
- **Transition to high school and middle school: the perspectives of students and teachers (2010)**
 - 5th and 6th grade teachers' views of successful transitions
 - Perspectives of 5th and 8th grade African American students

Exploring the transition from 5th to 6th grade

- 2 groups of teachers (1 elementary school, 1 middle school)
 - Self-selected and purposefully recruited
- Monthly group meetings
 - Progression from “What is a ‘successful transition’ and what does it look like?” to “What can we do now to better promote positive elementary-middle school transitions?”
- Individual interviews and observations
- School and district observations

Relational trust as key to school improvement (Bryk & Schneider, 2002)

- Why *trust* is essential to schools
- Discerning trust in schools:
 - Respect
 - Personal regard
 - Competence
 - Integrity

Trust in schools

- “Schools are networks of sustained relationships. The social exchanges that occur and how participants infuse them with meaning are central to a school’s functioning” (Bryk & Schneider, 2002, p. xiv).

Trust in schools

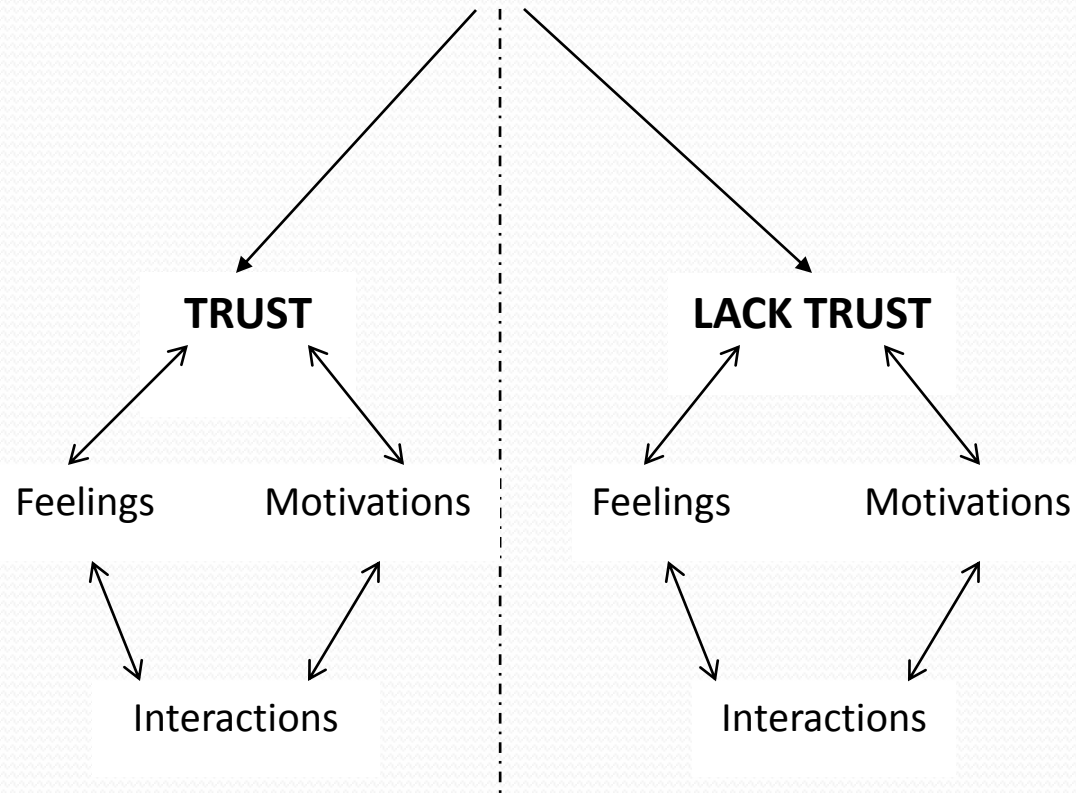
- Schools are complex webs of social exchanges
- Schools rely upon “mutual dependencies” to function well
- Structural dependencies can result in “feelings of vulnerability”
- Asymmetrical power relationships can heighten feelings of vulnerability
- When those in authority find ways to relieve the uncertainty and unease of others, this can create a meaningful bond among members of a school community

Adapted from Bryk and Schneider, *Trust in Schools* (2002)

Trust in schools

Establishing Trust	Definitions
Respect	Basic regard for the dignity and worth of others. In respect that leads to trust, people listen to what people have to say and are responsive to what others say.
Personal regard	Having an active interest in and concern for others and incorporating their views into the work of the organization or group (making the group's work an artifact of the members' lives).
Competence	The ability to carry out the formal responsibilities of the role, being perceived as competent, and having others interact with you as a competent person. This is the idea that we all have assets and strengths to contribute; we all have insight into the work of the group or organization.
Integrity	Working in ways that are congruent with the organization's core values. Integrity is also about being able to bring one's full self to the work—one's strengths and weaknesses. It is both about being able to be in one's "comfort zone" as well as being able to take reasonable risks and be vulnerable so as to grow and learn.

Can I Trust You?



When we *lack* relational trust...

LACK TRUST

Feelings

- Essentialized difference
- Doubted competence one's own and others'
- Blame, externalized fault

Motivations

- To control, make predictable
- Limit personal & group risk
- Prioritize one's own agenda

Interactions

- Avoidance
- Limited, specified roles and activities
- Limited communication ("need to know") and access to resources

When we *have* relational trust...

TRUST

Feelings

- Affiliation, commonality of values, goals, needs
- Confidence in competency, demonstrated or yet to be
- Mutual dependency

Motivations

- To create synergy
- Enhance processes and outcomes
- Prioritize a mutual agenda (or to shift priority to that of most need)

Interactions

- Frequent, sought
- Varied and flexible in roles and activities
- Frequent communication, shared time, energy and resources
- Element of personal intimacy

The Implications of Trust and the Lack of Trust

Consequences and Opportunities

- For school staff?
- For students?

What are your experiences of trust?



What are your experiences of trust?

Who do you trust most in your school?

What are the implications of this trust?

What in your setting promotes relations
of trust?

What are your experiences of lacking trust?

Who do you trust least in your school?

What are the implications of this lack of trust?

What in your setting makes relations of trust more challenging?

Where do we go from here?

How do we expand our relations of trust? Especially to move these 'critical relationships' from cycles of lacking trust to trust?

How do we create school cultures of trust? How do we institute school and district policies and practices that promote relations of trust?