COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

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Australia is a nation of contrasts. It is a young country, but also a very old country. One of the oldest continents on earth, Australia is the planet’s sixth largest country by landmass after Russia, Canada, China, the USA, and Brazil. It is the world’s largest island. Its indigenous people, Aboriginal Australians, have continuously inhabited the land for at least 50,000 years, developing a deep spiritual connection with it, not as one people but as many separate peoples, moving from place to place and teaching their young people the song-lines by which to navigate country and the skills by which to survive. And yet Australia is a young country by European standards. Caught up in European colonization patterns in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it could have quite easily been Dutch, or French, or claimed by a mix of colonizing powers as various maritime explorers passed by.

If you were to enter ‘the world by night’ into Google, you would no doubt soon find a map of the world showing the key population centres as patches of illumination at night. The USA, the United Kingdom, and much of Europe can be seen to be quite densely populated throughout. Australia on the other hand, for all its landmass, is characterized by isolated dots of light that are soon equated with the seaboard state capital cities. From its settlements in the early 1800s the nation grew not as a single entity but as a clutch of distinct colonies. As settlers, roads, and railroads pushed inland even the width of the railway lines varied between states, necessitating for many years a change of trains at the border. In this context of the emergence of disparate systems, early schooling was the province predominantly of the wealthy, with a strong connection to either the Church of England or the Catholic Church. The advent of mass public education in the 1870s and 1880s saw each of the states claiming responsibility under its constitution for school education. Each has vigorously maintained and defended that responsibility ever since.

New South Wales (NSW), the largest state by population, and Victoria, the second largest, established government school systems in
1880 and 1872 respectively, severing those states’ educational ties with the church. The Church of England schools, beyond a small number of prestigious schools that remained independent, threw their lot in with the government in NSW. The quid pro quo was that time would be set aside during the school week for Special Religious Education, wherein clergy or their nominees could lead scripture classes. The practice continues to the present. The Catholic Church, on the other hand, opted for its own system of low-fee schools staffed for the most part by nuns and priests.

The emphasis from the beginning in the public education systems was on the inputs to education. No matter where children attended school, whether it was in the inner-city or in a more remote rural area, the focus was on having a high quality school building, staffed by trained teachers, with equal provision of education resources such as desks, blackboards, and teaching resources. The grand, sandstone school buildings of inner Sydney are a testimony to the optimism of the 1890s and the beginning of the new century, and to the status of public education in the community.

It followed that to assure the quality of these inputs, centralized control and local surveillance were essential. Local surveillance was undertaken by Inspectors of Schools, who assured the quality of the inputs, monitored the learning outputs of students, and promoted teachers onto the relevant promotion lists. The content of the curriculum was prescribed. In New South Wales in 1965, for instance, all Year 4 students learnt the names of all the major rivers in the state and the towns on them. Class sizes were large. Textbooks were the link between the syllabus and the classroom.

For the purposes of this chapter, we can pick up the story after the Second World War, when both class sizes and the numbers of students completing secondary education grew exponentially. The Catholic system found it increasingly difficult to staff and maintain their schools without government support. A watershed moment was reached in 1962 when the Commonwealth government opened the door to what was termed ‘state aid’ for non-government schools. This was closely followed in 1967 by an announcement from the national Liberal Party that it would provide per-capita payments to students attending non-government schools. Thus it came about that the Commonwealth government, which did not and does not operate a single school, is the prime source of funding (alongside parental fees) for non-government schools in Australia. The state governments were and still are the principal source of funding for government schools.

There are several outcomes from these decisions. First, Australia now has one of the highest proportions of non-government schools in the world,
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despite the fact that these schools are also funded from the public purse. Around 34 per cent of students now attend non-government schools and pay tuition fees. The proportion of non-government schools is also growing at the expense of government schools. In 2009, 3.48 million students (including part-time students) attended school in 9,529 institutions across Australia. Of these, 2.29 million students (66 per cent of the total) attended 6,802 government schools, and 1.19 million students (34 per cent) attended 2,727 non-government schools. Of the non-government schools, 1,705 were classified as Catholic schools and 1,022 as independent (OECD, 2011).

Two very distinct paradigms characterized Australian school education after the Second World War: one typified by government-sponsored expansion, the other by free-market choice and competition. Schools in Australia up until the Second World War had been fairly well insulated from economic matters. The decades immediately following the war were, of urgent necessity, expansionist ones for Australia. Secondary schooling was made more readily available for all young people. Education was seen as the means of fuelling growth and expansion. Post-war reconstruction and a baby boom precipitated a burgeoning number of secondary schools. Governments were prepared to spend to stimulate and promote growth. A tangible expression of this expansionist mood was the encouragement of schools to make many more local decisions about curriculum (the ‘school-based curriculum’ movement). Funding for teacher professional development was ramped up accordingly. Progressive education philosophies became more dominant in primary schools, focusing on a better understanding of how children learn and on approaches that enabled student learning. The curriculum changed from being content driven to become more process oriented. The overall management of schools in the government and Catholic systems remained centralized. The local government school, which most students could be expected to attend, was seen as a cornerstone of the local community and community life. It was a high-trust environment for which, in retrospect, many principals and teachers found themselves unprepared. Then, almost dramatically, it all changed.

Moving into the 1980s, Australia (like other western nations) faced a major challenge: the age of splendid isolation was over. Due to the forces of globalization sweeping around the planet, Australia’s industries and companies needed to change and become more competitive. Education was no exception. Teachers, it was now said, needed to be more accountable for what it was that students were learning, and more subservient to economic need. Without teachers and schools adopting a more economic lens through which to view their profession, it was said that Australian students would
not be competitive on the global market. As a consequence teachers, and particularly government school teachers, were often disgraced and sometimes vilified in the public media under a ‘declining standards’ rhetoric, thus fuelling a drift of students to the independent (‘private’) school sector as middle-class parents in particular sought ‘the best’ for their sons and daughters.

In response to pressures for fiscal accountability, the curriculum was again centralized, changing to a more prescriptive, outcomes-based model. Management responsibilities were increasingly devolved to schools within the confines of a regulated and accountability-driven environment oriented on the one hand to competition, parental choice, and free markets and on the other to the surveillance of teachers and their work. Economic policy has increasingly determined education policy. The paradigm that was introduced then extends to this day. Economic rationalism led to a constant restructuring of organizations, including education bureaucracies, to make them more ‘dynamic’. Private sector discourse (with terms like ‘strategic planning’, ‘alignment’, and ‘performance management’) was introduced to public sector instrumentalities. At the same time, the prime responsibility for personal welfare shifted from the state to the individual in matters of health, retirement savings, and education. The market rather than the common good became the prime driver and definer of education policy.

One by one since the 1980s, these pieces of the jigsaw that constitutes today’s Australian education system have fallen into place, against a backdrop of what appear superficially to be competing centripetal and centrifugal trends. Australian education, always organized at the level of the states as we have seen, has now shown some tendencies to become more centralized at the national level in terms of the setting of standards for curricula and teacher quality. Prior to this development some states and territories had their own standards, but others did not.

After numerous failed attempts at developing a national curriculum (Reid, 2005), Australia now has one through the work of the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA). Established in 2009 under a Labor government, ACARA has taken (as might be expected) an understandably conservative approach to the design of the national curriculum, with English, Mathematics, Science, and History at the forefront, with students then moving progressively on to other learning areas (ACARA, 2014). A recent review of the national curriculum has made significant recommendations, not least of which is to reduce the sheer volume of curriculum content. While the idea of a national curriculum appears to have political and popular support, its efficacy has yet to be determined.
Of no small significance is the role that ACARA plays in national assessment. Australia, along with any number of other nations linked together economically in a globalized world, has been seduced into thinking that the quality of its schools, its teachers, and the learning of its students can be measured by standardized tests of literacy and numeracy and ranked on the proliferation of league tables that compare school with school and country with country. In Australia, the use of the high-stakes National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) has reached epidemic proportions, though the instrument is strongly criticized for the way in which it both distorts and narrows the curriculum (Dinham and Scott, 2012; Boston, 2009). In 2016, the tests will be based on the Australian curriculum for the first time. As far as the political process is concerned, angst and apoplexy are words that come to mind to describe our political leaders whenever Australia appears to be slipping down the international league tables (as it appears to be doing at present). In addition to this apparent general slippage for Australian students as judged by international measures (PISA, TIMMS, and PIRLS), the underperformance of Aboriginal students relative to the wider school population remains an ongoing issue and a social justice concern in Australian education (OECD, 2013). Teacher quality is often held to be the problem that underlies such slippage, rather than the quality of the educational service provided. The validity of using isolated test results to assess whole schools and indeed entire school systems is seldom questioned in the public domain.

Parents, in choosing a school for their child, are able to access details of every school in Australia via the My School website (www.myschool.edu.au). A glance at this website will show the weight that is placed on the outcomes of NAPLAN and in like-for-like comparisons between schools. Also featured is the funding base for each school. A major question with which Australia now grapples is just how self-managing a school should be. The issue of securing an ongoing fair and equitable basis for school funding in Australia remains unresolved as of this writing.

In giving a broad and generalized overview of these trends in Australian education, we would probably conclude that the centripetal and centrifugal tendencies, far from being contradictory, are mutually supportive. Outcomes-based curricula, assessment and basic skills testing, teaching standards and performance management schemes are all mechanisms that provide frameworks for teaching through which the individual work of
teachers can be placed under surveillance. While unquestionably they offer a degree of assurance concerning teachers’ work and student learning, they have a downside inasmuch as schools cannot compete on an equal basis, due to funding arrangements; we can also be concerned about the extent to which compliance, regulation, and reporting dominate and standardize school practice. It is not so much that such schemes exist that is a problem; rather we must consider questions about who uses them, for what purposes, and to what outcome.

Political philosophers may well argue that these building blocks have been put in place quite deliberately and systematically over time, utilizing windows of political opportunity (Mackinac Center for Public Policy, 2014). The public discourse, preoccupied by concerns about the economy and increasing societal change, has opened up spaces to create the neo-liberal paradigm of choice and market-driven schools. An outcome of this marketization of schools has been the shifting of the social perception of schools from public good to private, individuated service for personal advantage (Campbell et al., 2009; Connell, 2013; Thomson, 2013).

Interestingly, it would appear that teachers’ and principals’ reactions to and perceptions of these changed policy agendas are a crucial element for governments and educational jurisdictions. Until now, little has been really known about how these agendas are impacting on such educators’ senses of professionalism, resilience, creativity, and moral purpose as they go about their daily work. The following analysis of the data arising from the Australian sample in this international study gives some insights into this.

The trust study
The research conducted in Australia utilized two data gathering strategies:

- First, an international online survey (the Trust Connection Questionnaire) formed the substantial basis for this research.
- Second, individual email ‘interviews’ with a small number of selected principals were informed by the survey responses.

A total of 490 Australian educators responded to the international Trust Connection Questionnaire, of whom 333 (67.95 per cent) were school leaders and 157 (32.05 per cent) teachers. The respondents were predominantly public schools employees (88.08 per cent) and were relatively evenly split between primary and secondary schools, with the majority of respondents being female (see Table 3.1).
Table 3.1 Questionnaire cohort demographic information

<table>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
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</tr>
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</table>

To standardize the research, identical surveys were used internationally in each location studied. To explore the relationship between what should be happening in schools and what was actually happening in schools, the survey sought two responses to each item: respondents were asked to describe both the ideal situation (i.e. what should be happening), and the real situation (i.e. what is happening).

Following the collection and collation of the survey data, interviews were conducted by email with nine selected high-performing principals. Of these nine, six were male and three female; five headed primary and four secondary schools; and three worked in city, four at metropolitan, and two at rural locations. Each of these principals has been promoted by merit selection in the last five years. Five of the nine principals interviewed have recently been promoted to more senior positions, demonstrating the expertise of this particular interview cohort. Each interviewee had been recognized for their leadership capacity by either their state principals association or by a national professional association, and each one had been involved in an international leadership programme. Participation in the interviews was voluntary. Anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed.
The questionnaire
Relevant statistical techniques were used to analyse the data collected from the 490 respondents and to identify the relationships between the variables. The data was analysed using descriptive and comparative statistics. Correlation, factor analysis, and multivariate analysis were used to analyse the mean scores. The software used for the management, indexing, and searching of the data was the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 22.0 for Windows, 2013).

The interviews
Responses were assembled, sub-clustered, categorized, and organized to permit contrasting, comparing, analysis, and patterning. The analysis of this qualitative data rested on effective data coding (open coding, axial coding, and selective coding) that compressed and ordered data to permit the drawing of coherent conclusions.

Study results: The trust story ‘down under’
Declining levels of trust in Australian society
There appears to be a general perception that trust levels in Australian society are declining. When responding to the question ‘Do you consider that you operate in a high or low trust society?’ the majority of the ‘interview principals’ (66.6 per cent) indicated that they saw trust in Australia as being in decline. A female secondary principal declared that ‘there is declining trust in our society ... with a significant dose of cynicism’. A male primary principal added:

We live in a society where trust is being challenged at every level. Political events from broken promises ... to the exposure of corruption in politics has left the population disillusioned ... trust in significant institutions has also been damaged – the Catholic Church, the banks and associated financial industries, major supermarket chains, and land developers ... People of certain ethnic and racial backgrounds are openly distrusted.

(Male primary school principal)

Although the views represented here come from the relatively small number of principals interviewed in the study, they may well be representative of the general tenor of public discourse about trust within contemporary Australian society. Support for this perception comes from eminent social researchers
who indicate that people in Australia seem less certain today about who to trust and how far to trust (Mackay, 2007; Salt, 2007; McCrindle, 2009).

**Institutional trust ‘down under’**

‘Institutional trust refers to the degree to which an organization’s various constituencies continue to have confidence in its competence, integrity, and sustainability’ (Fink, 2015: 153). In Australia the institutional hierarchy above the school will usually be perceived as having two layers: the first is bureaucratic (i.e. the head/central office) and the second is political (i.e. the Minister for Education). The extent to which teachers and leaders trust either the educational bureaucracy or the educational ministry will demonstrate the level of ‘institutional trust’.

In this study, ‘institutional trust’ is explored through six core educational criteria: equity for students; professional autonomy for teachers; professional respect for teachers; the role of teacher unionism; the level of teacher remuneration; and the assessment of teacher professional competency.

**Equity and trust**

A significant aspect of the Australian cultural identity is grounded in the concepts of ‘mateship’, ‘equality’, and getting ‘a fair go’ (Mackay, 2007). Australians value these traits and see themselves as egalitarian. In education these values manifest themselves in terms of educational equity: a fair distribution of educational resources and educational opportunity irrespective of family background, socio-economic status, racial grouping, religious affiliation, or cultural heritage. The most recent national statement of the educational aspirations for all Australian students, *The Melbourne Declaration* (MCEETYA, 2008: 7), requires that ‘Australian schooling promote equity and excellence’. This concept of equity lies deep within the Australian psyche.

Against this cultural backdrop it is interesting to note the responses to the research question about whether ‘state government policies support quality public education for all, regardless of the family income’. Responses revealed a discrepancy between the *ideal* and the *real* situation. Somewhat surprisingly, around 30 per cent in the survey did not see equal support and opportunity for all as a very important ideal. This may well be an indicator of a growing neo-liberal philosophy that rejects the idea of wasting resources on those unlikely to benefit, and would appear to conflict with the more traditional Australian emphasis on egalitarian values. A majority of leaders (71.1 per cent) and teachers (61.6 per cent), however, did agree that, *ideally*, there should be equitable support and opportunity
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for all. When commenting on the actual situation in schools, the majority (61.9 per cent of leaders and 71.1 per cent of teachers) disagreed, or at best were uncertain, that equity in resourcing and opportunity existed. It would seem that whilst a majority of leaders and teachers support government policies/practices that espouse equity, these cohorts do not see equity as being delivered in the school setting. There is a basic discrepancy between the ideal and the real that was to be repeated in many of the findings of this research.

This finding would also seem to be validated by the national testing evidence which shows that significant equity-related differences exist between the performance of students from indigenous and non-indigenous groupings, from high and low socio-economic backgrounds, and from remote and city locations (ACARA, 2014; Dinham, 2011).

Professional autonomy and trust

As in many countries around the world, Australia’s education system currently espouses a philosophical commitment to having local schools and local principals exercise greater autonomy in relation to decision-making and financial control. The continuum that has total centralization at one end and total localization at the other has shifted well towards the latter. At present, the notion of local school autonomy is being touted by politicians (both state and federal) as the panacea for all that ails education. The argument supporting this movement is that local principals (and schools) want the greater flexibility in terms of resourcing and staffing that supposedly comes with greater local control.

In the context of this political agenda, respondents were asked to comment on the statement that ‘schools need complete autonomy to pursue a school improvement agenda’. The majority of leaders (64.8 per cent) and teachers (70.8 per cent) did not support the ideal that autonomy is needed in order to pursue school improvement. As the political dialogue is continually prefaced (and justified) by the comment that it is teachers and leaders who want this greater autonomy this finding runs contrary to that claim. Indeed this finding suggests that greater autonomy is not necessarily an ideal that Australian teachers and leaders crave at all.

When responding to the real situation in schools, the opposition to greater autonomy being a benefit for school improvement rose to 78.5 per cent for leaders and 84.6 per cent for teachers. There would seem to be little trust in government policies that espouse greater local autonomy as a process that leads to school improvement. Local autonomy would seem to be viewed as a political agenda implemented through a ‘top-down’ model,
and not (as is often claimed by political leaders) as a ‘bottom-up’ response to calls from the profession.

**Professional respect and trust**

The litmus test for institutional trust in Australia (and possibly globally) is the level of support that is forthcoming from the employing authority when a teacher/leader comes under external professional criticism (e.g. from the media). There is probably no more sensitive area in the institutional trust relationship. Therefore it is interesting to note the response to the statement ‘the school district (system) backs the teachers when their professionalism is questioned by the press and other media’.

In the ideal situation a small majority of leaders (56.5 per cent) and a minority of teachers (45.5 per cent) agreed support should be forthcoming. This is a surprising result. Even in the ideal world, agreement with this basic concept is low. When considering the real school-based situation the response was even more negative, with leaders (73.7 per cent) and teachers (81.5 per cent) indicating that there would be little likelihood of support for the teacher/leader from the system. Teachers and leaders appear to have very little trust that they will receive support in these circumstances. This lack of trust would seem likely to have a destabilizing and negative effect on confidence within the teaching profession.

**Unionisms and trust**

Trade unions have long been a core component of the Australian workforce. Teaching in Australia is a highly unionized profession, with teacher unions maintaining a high profile as strong industrial advocates for teachers’ salaries and working conditions. Teacher unions have also been vocal on professional and policy-related matters. Unlike in other countries, Australian teacher unions are inclusive, in that teachers and principals belong to the same union. Over the past two decades unions generally have been losing membership and political power, and have been subjected to increasing criticism and scrutiny. Teacher unions are no exception to this trend.

The survey sought feedback on whether ‘unions are an agency for school improvement’ (Question 4), and whether ‘unions protect all teachers’ (Question 5). As an ideal only a small majority of leaders (53.8 per cent) and a greater proportion of teachers (66.9 per cent) agreed that unions should be an agency for school improvement. When responding to the real situation in schools, leaders (77.0 per cent) and teachers (63.0 per cent) either disagreed or were at best uncertain that unions actually promote school improvement.
When responding to the proposition that ‘teacher unions protect all teachers regardless of their competence’, there appeared to be uncertainty about automatic support for teachers, with the most popular response category being ‘uncertain’ (leaders 32.9 per cent and teachers 46.9 per cent). There would seem to be a marginal level of trust that unions would support their members. This may indicate a growing view that incompetence should not be defended or protected, or it may simply indicate that unions are not trusted in such situations. Unions in Australia are under pressure to assure workers that they can effectively protect and advocate on their behalf.

**Teacher remuneration and trust**

Trust in the employing authority to deliver salary justice is very low, as indicated in the responses to the statement that ‘the State is prepared to pay for quality teaching’ (Question 10). Only 10.0 per cent of leaders and 10.3 per cent of teachers agreed with that statement. Both teachers and leaders exhibited a negative trust relationship with their employers in relation to salary justice.

**Professional competency and trust**

As in many other countries, standardized testing has in Australia become a major political and media issue. Rightly or wrongly, tests at both a national and international level are viewed as indicators of the efficiency of systems, schools, and teachers. In the ideal world both leaders (88.8 per cent) and teachers (90.8 per cent) strongly agreed that ‘teachers’ assessment (should) include more than just test scores’. However when asked about the real world, 62.8 per cent of leaders and 60.2 per cent of teachers saying by contrast that teacher assessments are in fact linked predominantly to student test scores.

Conventional wisdom and experience would indicate that assessments of principal effectiveness are also linked primarily to student performance in national standardized testing. The My School website (www.myschool.edu.au) includes, along with other data, detailed information about the basic skills test results of every school in Australia. The principal of any so-called ‘under-performing school’ is placed under pressure to improve results. Teachers and leaders appear to believe that their professional competency is now increasingly being assessed by students’ test scores; they simply do not trust institutional and political rhetoric to the contrary.

**Summary: institutional trust**

The findings from the survey indicate that teachers and leaders have deep concerns with institutional trust. If, as Fink (2015: 155) states, institutional
trust is measured by ‘the degree to which an organization’s various constituencies continue to have confidence in its competence, integrity, and sustainability’, it would seem that in Australia the level of trust that teachers and leaders have towards their institutions could be classified as low.

This low institutional trust may have its basis in the Australian culture, which gives preference to mateship over authority, to collectivism over individualism, and to cooperation over competition (Mackay 2007). This brings us to the other side of the trust-coin: relational trust. Are Australian schools faring any better in the relational (as opposed to the institutional) trust domain?

Relational trust ‘down under’
Fink (2015: 155) describes relational trust as comprising ‘the themes of honesty ... transparency, competence, and respect for others’. Relational trust is the heart and soul of people-centred organizations such as schools. The relational trust that now operates between teachers and principals (as ‘workers’ and ‘the boss’) in Australian schools is a complex issue, as the traditional values of mateship, egalitarianism, collectivism, and anti-authoritarianism attempt to co-exist with global movements towards privatization, marketization, individualism, aspirationalism, and competition. It is against this cultural context that we now explore the level of relational trust between teachers and leaders.

Teachers working in a high-trust environment
Both conventional wisdom and research (Hattie, 2009; Leithwood and Jantzi, 2008; Wallace Foundation, 2012) conclude that teachers working in high trust environments will be more professional and that the school will be more effective. This belief was re-enforced in the survey when the vast majority of leaders (96.0 per cent) and teachers (93.1 per cent) strongly agreed that in an ideal world, ‘working in a high-trust environment makes a teacher a more effective professional in promoting student learning’. However, when considering a real-world setting, the level of agreement decreased to 68.5 per cent for leaders and 61.5 per cent for teachers: hardly an overwhelming vote of confidence. Why would 30 to 40 per cent of respondents not agree that a high-trust environment produces higher teacher professionalism and higher student outcomes? This is one of the inconsistencies in the findings about trust in Australian schools that is worthy of further investigation.
**Teacher collaboration, teamwork, and trust**

Being cognizant of the literature (e.g. Wahlstrom and Louis, 2008; Stoll, 1998; Harris and Spillane, 2008) that supports teacher collaboration as an effective strategy that produces better outcomes than teachers working in ‘splendid isolation’, the researchers examined the result of three survey items. The first item asked: ‘to what extent is collaboration used by teachers?’. Just 11.3 per cent of leaders and 23.9 per cent of teachers believed that supportive time and space for collaboration was actually provided in schools. This finding seems to contradict the professional rhetoric claiming that teacher collaboration is highly valued and widely used. Might the global trends associated with neo-liberalism (i.e. the cult of competitiveness and individualism) be impacting negatively upon teacher collaboration?

The second, associated item explored teamwork. When considering an ideal setting there was strong support (from 71.4 per cent of leaders and 77.7 per cent of teachers) for the concept of teamwork. However when describing the real world, support for the statement that ‘teachers in my school work together in teams’ dropped dramatically to 38.9 per cent for leaders and 56.9 per cent for teachers. This finding aligns with the previous finding, such that in practice there seems to be less collaboration or teamwork happening in Australian schools than the literature recommends (Harris and Spillane, 2008; Harris, 2009), or that is desired by teachers and leaders.

The third area related to teachers’ support for each other. Not surprisingly, when contemplating the ideal-world situation, there was very strong agreement (leaders 90.4 per cent and teachers 98.5 per cent) that teachers’ ‘support of each other’s teaching is crucial to school improvement’. However once again, in evaluating the real world the level of agreement fell dramatically, to 54.4 per cent for leaders and to 63.1 per cent for teachers. It would appear that whilst teachers’ support for one another’s teaching is highly valued (by both cohorts), the reality is that in practice it happens far less than would be desired.

**Trust between teachers and leaders**

Relational trust between the leader and the teachers is generally accepted as a core determinant of trust levels within that school. But what should/does that trust look like? Blind trust in leaders (i.e. ‘it is best to trust the leadership of those in charge by going along with what they want’) would not usually be seen as a strong indicator of relational trust. Accordingly blind trust received support from just 14.4 per cent of leaders and 15.3
per cent of teachers. What, then, are the building blocks of relational trust between teachers and leaders?

There are certain role characteristics and personality traits of leaders (i.e. dimensions of leadership) that are commonly accepted in the research literature as being important in building relational trust (Robinson et al. 2008; Louis et al., 2010; Hallinger, 2011; Dinham, 2008; Darling-Hammond, 2011). This current research explored nine such qualities which teachers most desire in their leaders, in order to create high relational trust in their school.

**Leaders who are competent**

Teachers want their leaders to be competent educators. In the ideal-world situation posited in the survey, a very large majority (95.0 per cent of leaders and 92.3 per cent of teachers) agreed that ‘teacher trust of their leader [would be] conditional upon the leader’s competency’. In describing the real-world situation in schools, support for this statement fell to 69.4 per cent for leaders and 64.6 per cent for teachers. This almost 30 per cent drop-off would seem to indicate that leaders do not (or cannot) easily deliver on educational competency in schools.

**Leaders who show concern for teachers’ welfare**

When responding to the proposition that leaders need to ‘know and show concern for staff members’ personal circumstances’, there was a dramatic difference between the attitudes of teachers and leaders. In the ideal-world situation 44.6 per cent of teachers strongly agreed that leaders would need to show concern for teachers’ welfare. This appeared to be a surprisingly low support level. However the level of support from leaders themselves was even lower, at just 9.6 per cent. The discrepancy between the two cohorts was re-enforced in describing the real-world situation, where 60.1 per cent of leaders disagreed that there was a need to show personal concern for teachers, while 53.9 per cent of teachers strongly agreed that good leaders needed to show such concern. Something that teachers believe to be central to a trusting relationship was not seen as a priority by leaders.

**Leaders who are good ‘gate-keepers’**

Deeply ingrained in teacher folklore and supported by research is the need for a ‘good leader’ to protect and buffer the staff from the political and bureaucratic demands that teachers believe detract them from their core business of teaching and learning. Accordingly, in describing the ideal world, there was alignment between the cohorts, as 80.1 per cent of leaders and 80.7 per cent of teachers agreed that ‘good leaders are good gatekeepers’.
However in describing the real-world situation, just 39.8 per cent of leaders and 52.3 per cent of teachers agreed that leaders do actually provide ‘a buffer to protect teachers and children from the negative effects of some government and/or district policies’.

Leaders would appear to have difficulty in simultaneously being good gatekeepers and faithful deliverers of their political masters’ agendas. This dilemma would appear to be impacting negatively upon the building of positive, trusting relationships between leaders and teachers.

LEADERS WHO ARE KNOWLEDGEABLE ABOUT PEDAGOGY
Does the leader really know what he/she is talking about in relation to teaching and student learning? In considering the ideal-world setting leaders (77.7 per cent) and teachers (77.0 per cent) agreed that leaders should be ‘knowledgeable about effective teaching practices and contemporary learning theories’. In the real-world setting the level of agreement dropped consistently for both cohorts: for leaders to 59.5 per cent, and for teachers to 51.1 per cent, so that over half of the research participants did not see leaders as sufficiently ‘knowledgeable’. In an era that promotes the importance of instructional leadership for improved student outcomes (Hattie, 2009; Robinson et al., 2008) this is a major concern. The demands of the leadership role may well take the leader away from teaching/learning and much more towards management (Dinham, 2008) which would appear to be impacting negatively upon relational trust.

LEADERS WHO ‘WALK THE TALK’
Teachers want leaders to ‘walk the talk’. Leaders can often be seen as being strong on rhetoric but weak on integrity, action, and moral purpose. In the ideal world 90.8 per cent of leaders and 70.7 per cent of teachers agreed that leaders should ‘act with integrity: walk the talk’. However this situation changed dramatically when describing the real-world school setting, with just 66.4 per cent of leaders and 42.3 per cent of teachers believing that leaders do actually succeed in this challenge. This finding would seem damaging to relational trust as over 50 per cent of respondents do not believe that their leaders ‘act with integrity... (and)... walk the talk’.

LEADERS WHO ADDRESS TEACHER VULNERABILITY
Teachers tend to see themselves as being on the lowest rung of the educational hierarchy. Teachers are the foot soldiers, principals are local lieutenants, the bureaucracy is filled with lieutenant colonels, and the politicians are the major-generals. Teachers naturally see themselves as the most vulnerable in this chain and when times are tough teachers turn to their in-school leader
(the principal) for support. In an ideal world, 85.3 per cent of leaders and a much lower 55.4 per cent of teachers agreed, leaders should ‘address teachers’ feeling of vulnerability’. In the real-world situation however only 57.2 per cent of leaders and a very low 31.6 per cent of teachers agreed that leaders do actually address teacher vulnerability. This finding highlights two significant issues: (1) the sizeable gap between leaders and teachers on this important personal welfare issue; and (2) the fact that almost 70 per cent of teachers do not feel supported by their leader in times of vulnerability. This perceived lack of support must impact negatively upon relational trust.

**Leaders who are open and honest**

Honesty (incorporating openness) is a quintessential component in developing a trusting relationship. Every cultural group, religious group, friendship group, and family group knows the indispensable value of honesty in building and sustaining trust. Workplaces are no exception. In describing the ideal world, 92.7 per cent of leaders and 80.0 per cent of teachers agreed that ‘trustworthy leaders at all levels say what they mean and mean what they say’. However in describing the real world the agreement levels dropped dramatically, to 63.1 per cent for leaders and 47.7 per cent for teachers. This indicated that less than half of all teachers agree that their leaders are honest (‘say what they mean and mean what they say’). This finding would seem to have deep significance for the relational trust between leaders and teachers.

Equally disturbing was teachers’ assessment of their leaders’ openness. In response to the statement that ‘district and school leaders admit mistakes openly and promptly’, 42.2 per cent of leaders (a low self-ranking in itself) but just 10.0 per cent of teachers agreed that leaders admit mistakes openly. The fact that 90 per cent of teachers believe that school leaders do not openly and promptly admit mistakes must be a significant inhibitor to relational trust and consequently to effective and productive school relationships.

**Leaders who share decision-making**

Schools, like most modern organizations, have moved philosophically into a model that favours more distributed and shared decision-making (Harris and Spillane, 2008; Leithwood and Mascall, 2008). In considering the ideal world, this form of decision-making was fairly well supported, with 67.0 per cent of teachers and 76.5 per cent of leaders agreeing that ‘school leaders (should) share decision-making with staff members’. In describing the real-life school situation this changed dramatically, with only 53.1 per cent of leaders and a very low 31.5 per cent of teachers agreeing that shared decision-making actually happens. The perception is that real
decision-making power still resides with the leader alone. This finding raises significant questions about the true level of shared or distributed leadership and collaborative decision-making in schools.

Leaders who act on poor performance
Leaders taking direct disciplinary action against poorly performing teachers are often viewed as engaging in a risky behaviour. It is assumed that other teachers will defend and support any colleague who is under performance assessment pressure, and that this may negatively affect teacher–leader relational trust. However, the finding from this research would suggest something quite different. In fact the majority of teachers (61.5 per cent) believed that strong action by leaders on underperforming teachers actually enhances relational trust in the school setting. In a sign of growing professional confidence, teachers are apparently seeking stronger quality-control action. This is good news for school leaders.

Summary: Relational trust
Teachers look for leaders who are competent educators; show concern for the welfare of the staff; are good gatekeepers; display good pedagogical knowledge; walk the talk; address teacher vulnerability; are open and honest; share decision-making; and act on poor performance. In Australia leaders would seem to be showing a mixed capacity to deliver on these qualities. There are encouraging signs with leaders taking action on poor performing teachers.

School effectiveness and school improvement: The big issue
Like most countries, Australia is committed to school effectiveness and school improvement as driving philosophies. These agendas combine to form a highly visible educational and political mantra. What, then, is the impact of trust on school effectiveness and school improvement? This is obviously a question of the deepest significance for educational jurisdictions, governments, unions, teachers, principals, and principals’ associations.

On the issue of school effectiveness, there was very strong agreement (leaders 98.4 per cent and teachers 90.8 per cent) that in the ideal-world setting ‘schools [would] operate most effectively on behalf of children within a culture of trust’. But when describing the real world, the agreement level for both cohorts decreased significantly, to just under 70 per cent (leaders 68.4 per cent and teachers 69.4 per cent). Although it is disturbing that any teachers or leaders (let alone almost one in three) would disagree with the claim that schools actually operate most effectively within a climate of trust,
70 per cent agreement with this maxim is still a very positive affirmation that school effectiveness is seen as being aligned to a culture of trust.

On the issue of school improvement, there was a marked difference in responses between the two cohorts. As an ideal, the proposition that 'school improvement depends on the school leader's ability to build trusting relationships with all staff members' was supported by just 49.2 per cent of leaders but by 99.2 per cent of teachers. Teachers felt very strongly that high relational trust had to exist in order to create conditions for school improvement, whilst principals were not so convinced. This finding represented the largest difference of opinion between teachers and leaders on any of the 30 items in the questionnaire. When asked to comment on the real situation in schools most teachers (63.9 per cent of those who responded) continued to see this relational trust issue as having a greater impact on school improvement than did leaders (46.9 per cent).

Educational leadership literature abounds with statements of the need for the principal to build high trust and cultivate positive relationships with staff in order to facilitate school improvement (Hattie, 2009; Robinson et al., 2008; Wahlstrom and Louis, 2008; Hallinger, 2011; Wallace Foundation, 2012). Trust is seen as a prerequisite for building school improvement and as the glue that bonds the staff to the school's vision (for effectiveness and improvement). However this finding would suggest that it may in fact be the case that teachers in Australian schools value the effect of high relational trust on school improvement more than leaders do. Might teachers, through this value that they place on relational trust, be an untapped (and under-utilized) source for greater school effectiveness and school improvement?

Principals' perspectives: The interviews
Nine purposively selected principals engaged in a deep reflective email discussion with the authors to provide additional insights. The participants were chosen on grounds of their high performance and constituted a representative cohort (see above). Discussion centred on 10 questions. Four questions related to institutional trust and six questions related to relational trust. The questions were informed by the survey responses and were intended to capture aspects of institutional and relational trust from a principal’s perspective:

1. Do you consider that you operate in a high or low trust society?
2. Do you consider that you operate in a high or low trust education system?
3. Do you consider that you operate in a high or low trust school?
4. As a professional educator do you feel trusted?
5. As a professional educator, do you have any evidence that you are distrusted?
6. How does being trusted (or distrusted) affect your willingness to change your practice?
7. How does the profession need to regain or sustain trust?
8. What or who in your education system do you trust or distrust?
9. Do you consider the level of trust in your school affects student outcomes?
10. How should your efficiency be verified by your ‘supervisor’?

**Trust in Australian society**

The majority of these interviewed leaders (66.6 per cent) felt that trust was in decline across the nation, citing instances of loss of trust in politicians, the political process, political parties, religious institutions, financial institutions, corporations, unions, and schools. If trust is in decline, what might that mean for teachers and leaders in schools? The unquestioning trust that the community once placed in teachers, schools, and other institutions was not seen to exist in modern Australia.

**Principals feeling trusted by the system**

Responding to the question ‘Do you consider that you operate in a high or low trust education system?’ the majority (66.6 per cent) indicated that they saw institutional trust (between systems and schools) as being quite high:

I feel trusted within the education system. I feel that I have the authority to make most of the decisions I need to make to ensure I am doing the best I can for students ... I feel that when I am able to articulate my visions well and substantiate them with credible purpose and planning, the system supports me in the delivery of the vision.

(Male primary school principal)

The same cohort who indicated that trust in the Australian society was in decline was now indicating that the system trusted them to run their own school. This is a more positive response on the idea of institutional trust than was indicated by the wider ‘leaders’ cohort in the survey. It may be worth noting however that the survey leader cohort (333) included both principals (192) and deputy principals (141).
Principals feeling trusted within their schools

Principals were almost evenly divided on the question of the extent to which they felt their staff to trust them: 55.6 per cent felt that they had ‘high trust’ with the staff; 44.4 per cent that they had ‘low trust’:

Although I have given staff no reason to distrust me personally, an undercurrent of ‘us versus them’ and distrust sits just underneath the surface.

(Male primary school principal)

The leadership qualities that teachers identified in the survey as contributing to high trust (effective gatekeeping, knowledge of pedagogy, addressing poor performance, walking the talk, sharing decision-making, and, most importantly, openness and honesty) might be extremely valuable for leaders to consider when looking to develop greater trust.

Principals feeling professionally trusted

Although the survey did not ask leaders if they felt ‘trusted’, 100 per cent of the interviewed principals reported feeling ‘highly trusted’ by colleagues, parents, and educational authorities:

I feel that my school community trust me to ensure their children are learning in a safe and encouraging environment ... I feel my staff trust me to support their teaching and their own professional learning ... I feel students trust me completely ... I feel that the employer trusts me as a principal with educational practice and decisions.

(Male primary school principal)

Principals here in the interviews self-reflect that they felt trusted by various levels of the education community. Teachers and leaders in the survey indicate that a much lower level of trust is the reality.

Principals feeling distrusted

Although 100 per cent had indicated feeling ‘trusted’, 66.6 per cent also reported feeling distrusted. This seems contradictory, but when explored more deeply these feelings of distrust were found to relate primarily to groups outside the school:

Having spoken to colleagues, we are all increasingly facing a barrage of complaints and vilification on social media and comments in a community. They are often personal and attack
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decisions made that are made for the benefit of many. The general media often portray issues of poor academic results, sensationalise issues and demonstrate how teachers are not doing the right thing. They then often blame all who are connected with education for social ills.

(Female secondary school principal)

Although trusted within the confines of their school these principals reported a sense of distrust emanating from outside (i.e. from community groups, the media, and even the unions).

**Principals’ willingness to change practice**
The majority of this cohort (88.8 per cent) indicated that high trust towards them was a positive influence giving them confidence to take risks and to change practice:

As an educator, feeling trusted encourages risk-taking and reflective practice in a safe environment. Where educators feel unsafe about admitting areas for development, they will not change current practice.

(Female primary school principal)

It would seem that principals need to feel trusted by teachers before they take the steps to initiate change.

**Principals’ judgement on regaining/sustaining trust**
The interviewed principals identified nine desirable actions to build trust:

- eradicate nepotism in promotion systems
- confront poor teacher performance
- focus primarily on student learning
- focus on evidence-based teaching
- provide evidence-based advice
- articulate a clear professional purpose
- articulate a clear and consistent set of professional values
- confidently confront media-based ‘teacher bashing’
- confidently portray teaching as a high-quality profession.

**Who do principals trust?**
Principals indicated that there were three groups of people who they trusted:

- those whose actions matched their words (which correlates with teachers’ trust for leaders who ‘walk the talk’)
Warren Marks and Norman McCulla

- those with proven confidentiality, ethical behaviour, and moral purpose (which again correlates with teachers' expectation of leaders who can gain teachers' trust)
- principal peer colleagues (as opposed to staff or supervisors).

The latter was the group whom respondents said they trusted most.

**Principals and student outcomes**

All the principals in the interviewed cohort expressed the belief that high trust has a positive effect on student outcomes:

> The level of trust in a school has a direct impact on professional practice, teachers' abilities to engage in reflective practice and as direct result, impacts upon student's outcomes.

(Female primary school principal)

It is worth recalling that in the survey it was teachers (63.9 per cent agreement), not leaders (46.9 per cent agreement), who more strongly supported the view that high relational trust has a positive influence on learning. The 100 per cent agreement from the interviewed principals that high trust has a positive influence on student outcomes adds weight to the teacher responses as reported in the survey.

**Principals' performance assessment**

The employer's line supervision and performance assessment was seen by principals as 'a matter of trust'. They felt that such supervision must include qualitative face-to-face discussions in addition to the quantitative use of student outcome data:

> To verify such results the supervisor needs to be in the school to see the school in operation rather than merely relying on websites and newsletters.

(Female secondary school principal)

The interviewed principals were clearly indicating that trust needs to permeate all levels of the education process, including their own performance assessments. The principals believed that what might superficially appear to be a form of 'institutional trust' (i.e. the line supervision of the principal) should in fact be seen as falling within the domain of 'relational trust'.

In general, the principals interviewed indicated that they felt: (1) trusted by the education system, their peers, and most teachers; (2) distrusted by forces outside of the school (e.g. media and politicians); (3) confident to implement change when they were trusted; (4) insistent that performance
assessment should be based on relational trust; and (5) convinced that high trust in schools impacts positively to promote high student outcomes.

Summary
Supported by various political forces, the globalization movement of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have thrust a ‘splendidly isolated’ Australia into a highly competitive free-market world. This movement has permeated all sectors of society. Unsought by educators, the movement has created a measure of disquiet in the Australian education community. As a result (and as this study would indicate) Australian education appears to be undergoing a crisis of identity.

The once confident and comfortable professionalism of educators seems to be being replaced by a sense of professional uncertainty. Some would argue that under the previous ‘splendid isolationism’ the profession had become too confident, too comfortable, and too complacent, and that checks and balances needed to be restored. Australian education has certainly been ‘modernized’ by the movements towards privatization and marketization. There is little doubt that Australian schools have become far more dynamic, corporate, goal-centred, results-driven, and competitive. However it could also be argued, as from the findings in this study, that these changes have come at the price of a decline in the professional confidence of, and public trust in, the teaching profession.

In bringing about these changes, educators have not appreciated politicians (or media celebrities) posing as educational experts in order to continually discredit and devalue the profession. As this study has also shown, this tendency is eroding educators’ perception that they are trusted. Though trust is a key component of highly effective schools and of a confident, self-assured teaching profession (Day and Gu, 2010), it would seem that trust within the Australian education system has been a casualty of the changes. Trust has obviously ‘slipped down the rankings’ along with student outcomes.

In the institutional domain, the levels of trust that Australian teachers and leaders have towards their institutions are generally lower than might be expected, and are characterized increasingly by a lack of confidence in, a lack of co-operation with, and sometimes overt cynicism towards components within the hierarchy (e.g. politicians and bureaucrats).

In the relational domain, although trust levels are again lower than might be expected, there are some more positive signs, with leaders and teachers (in particular) articulating a commitment towards trust that they perceive as a vital element for improving school effectiveness and student
achievement. Much appears to hang on the extent to which principals ‘walk the talk’ with moral purpose, act with integrity, honesty, and openness, display pedagogical knowledge and leadership, support efficient staff, act on inefficiency, and succeed as gatekeepers who protect and buffer the staff from a somewhat hostile external environment.

Overall the data from the study provides mixed results. Clearly there are principals navigating changing political circumstances in ways that develop trust among their staff and in their local communities. Yet there are also principals who are distrusted by their staff, who distrust the institutions they work for, and who believe that trust in their teachers and relational leadership is not of high importance. These are contradictory messages indeed. They play out against the backdrop of an Australian education landscape characterized on the one hand by centripetal forces, which tend to centralize curriculum, assessment, and teacher standards, and on the other by centrifugal forces, which tend to devolve local school management. These forces operate within a marketplace that remains characterized by parent choice and positioning directed toward individual gain. Add to this the apparent reality that Australia is slipping down the international student performance league tables. The panaceas for this in the political debate focus on the development of human capital: improving the quality of teachers and the teaching of literacy and numeracy. This has becomes a complex mix indeed.

Key questions arise: How might policy frameworks enable trust to be cultivated between principals and their staff? How might principals be identified, supported, and developed so that they lead with moral purpose, developing strong and effective relationships with staff and community? Certainly there is evidence in the study that teachers on the ground are looking for this kind of leadership and are no longer prepared to work with other teachers who are not fully committed to their profession.

Conclusion
In 1947 Sydney artist Norman Lindsay published a novel entitled Halfway to Anywhere, a rollicking look at the frustrations and foibles of adolescence and growth to maturity. It seemed to us to be an appropriate metaphor on which to end our interpretation of the data and our reflections on current developments in Australian education.

Our analysis confirms that we are indeed at a tipping point concerning policies for the future of Australian education. Without a clearly defined and consistent moral purpose to schooling at the policy level, one centred on trust rather than surveillance, we could well be ‘halfway to anywhere’.
In the absence of such a clearly defined moral purpose, it is left to school principals to attempt to define one, to reflect it in school culture and ethos, and to interpret for their staff the ways in which external culture impacts upon their school and to adapt it accordingly. There is evidence in this study that the approaches adopted by principals are both variable and contextual, and that the policy frameworks in which they operate, as well as the sociocultural milieux in which they work, may well be inhibiting rather than enabling them in their efforts to develop the trusting relationships in which good schools are known to operate.

Despite these trends there are at the time of writing some encouraging signs emerging. There is a questioning of the ideal role of the Commonwealth in school education. There are moves to create a better architecture of professional standards, ones centred on aspiration and demonstration, at higher levels of professional performance,¹ and an interest in states such as New South Wales in linking teacher salaries directly with these standards. There is some willingness to at least discuss what a world-class curriculum actually might be: perhaps one that truly develops the human capital of all the nation’s young people. There are signs that principals in government schools are embracing greater levels of authority in making local decisions (Lazenby, 2015). There are, to be sure, issues still to be resolved in ensuring greater equity in funding to the nation’s schools. Yet perhaps there will come a day when the political process might sufficiently trust the teaching profession to self-regulate its professional standards and career path progression. There is a willingness to consult with and among the education community that remains a cornerstone of Australian education. In the short term, however, the litmus test of the state of trust relationships in education, as reported in this chapter, indicates that Australia is very much at a crossroads in education and indeed ‘halfway to anywhere’. Wise policy decisions are now called for.

Notes
¹ See the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership; http://aitsl.edu.au/.

References
(accessed 6 December 2014).


