

## Original Research Reports

# Social Representations of Trust Among Teachers and Principals in Cameroonian, Indian, and Finnish Schools

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## Abstract

Quantitative studies on trust often attempt to measure levels of trust, while neglecting local meanings of trust. These studies are usually based on Eurocentric models in Western cultures, though the models may have limited ecological validity. As a result, this study sought to investigate trust as locally produced structures and practices in Cameroon, Finland and India. In each country, teachers and principals were interviewed individually, while nineteen focus groups among teachers were also conducted (N = 111). The theory of social representations provides the methodological framework for the study. Our analyses suggest that in Cameroon understandings of trust were anchored in complementarity, in Finland in contracts, and in India in social hierarchies. We suggest that the Cameroonian representations were more fluid than in the other two countries, which may be due in part to the working arrangements there. In all of the national contexts, numerous metaphors and imagery helped to solidify trust as phenomena built in everyday practices. Cooperation was an important element in the data from all of the country contexts, although it had particular and varying meanings in each. Finally, we interpret culturally embedded dichotomies, or themata, that participants draw upon to imbue workplace trust with meaning. We discuss the analyses and interpretations in terms of local practices and the concrete conditions in which the participants worked.

**Keywords:** qualitative, emic, constructionist, grounded theory, organizational trust, social representations, school, Cameroon, Finland, India

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Trust is a complex and versatile phenomenon, and interest in it has been vast and variant. In a recent study, Todorov, Pakrashi, and Oosterhof (2009) reported that we can infer a person's trustworthiness in around 100 milliseconds. In this line of research, study participants' evaluations of trustworthiness were linked to their perceptions of valence of the human faces that were presented to them (e.g., Oosterhof & Todorov, 2008). The numerous studies investigating generalised trust on international and global scales (e.g., European Commission, 2005; Inglehart, 1999) are well-known among social scientists. In the public realm, some level of trust is arguably foundational for successful interpersonal relations and cooperation. Moreover, there is extensive investment of resources

in a growing audit industry, which points to both the need felt for external controls as well as an implied lack of trust.

Studies dealing with trust in various spheres of life are also abundant. The workplace is an arena where trust has been studied perhaps the most, probably due to its clear positive effects on workplace wellbeing and productivity (e.g., Connell, Ferres, & Travaglione, 2003; Davis, Schoorman, Mayer, & Tan, 2000; Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Mayer & Gavin, 2005; McAllister, 1995; Tan & Tan, 2000). Several reviews and meta-analyses on organizational trust (e.g., Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Fulmer & Gelfand, 2012; Kramer, 1999; Lewicki, Tomlinson, & Gillespie, 2006) have brought together the variety of ways that trust has been conceptualized. Perhaps the most widely used definition of trust in this context is:

the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995, p. 712).

According to Mayer and colleagues, trust is preceded by the evaluation of the target's trustworthiness on three dimensions: capability, integrity and benevolence.

Following McAllister (1995), Dirks and Ferrin (2002) differentiate in their meta-analysis between cognitive and affective forms of trust. The former refers to such issues as the other person's reliability, integrity, honesty and fairness. The latter refers to a special relationship that may lead the other person to demonstrate concern for the welfare of the other. Dietz and Den Hartog (2006) have identified five bases of trust in their typology. The first of these—deterrence of trust—refers to distrust rather than trust. The others are calculus-based trust (suspicious, but the benefits of trust outweigh the costs), knowledge-based trust (positive confidence based on prior predictability), relational-based trust (a stronger positive confidence based on shared affection) and identification-based trust (extremely positive confidence based on converging interests). They assume that the strength of trust increases from deterrence-based to identification based trust. However, there is no direct empirical evidence for this assumption and we suggest that the relationships are more complex.

We believe that there are numerous and varying grounds for trust, which can also co-exist. We also believe that those working within the dominant research paradigm on trust in the workplace have often used the models and instruments as if they were universally applicable, which we do not think is the case. It is not surprising to us that inconsistencies and difficulties have arisen when the models and scales that have been constructed in Western countries are tested elsewhere. For example, Wasti, Tan, Brower, and Önder (2007) report that Mayer's model and scale (e.g., Mayer & Davis, 1999; Mayer et al., 1995) do not apply as such to collectivist countries.

In their data from the U.S., Turkey and Singapore, the trust scale had poor psychometric properties, making invariance analyses useless. Of the predecessors of trust, the three trustworthiness dimensions, only integrity had acceptable metric equivalences in the data. The authors suggest that the respondents from different countries possibly used different frames of reference when evaluating their supervisors' benevolence and ability. They further suggest that there may be differences in whether the supervisors' benevolence is seen to be restricted only to the professional domain or whether it applies also to the personal sphere. Also, ability may be seen as a more task specific or context specific phenomenon, which they see as dependent upon the cultural context. In an attempt to resolve these difficulties, they propose the formation of multinational teams, who could build decentered scales together. They argue that the items would then be applicable in many nations in terms of choice of expression.

Comparative studies that allow respondents more freedom when answering have found both similarities and differences in trust related concepts. For example, [Bürger, Lukeš, and Šindelářová \(2007\)](#) found that subcategories of trustworthiness (e.g., reliability) were similar among their German and Czech respondents, but there were still differences in their use. For example, the Czechs more easily accepted excuses and apologies for unreliability, but the effects of unreliability were weaker for them and depended more on personal relationships of the actors. In [Nishishiba and Ritchie's \(2000\)](#) study, U.S. respondents emphasised individual integrity in evaluating trustworthiness, while Japanese respondents emphasised organizational commitment. Comparative studies have usually focused on some aspect of trust, most often trustworthiness.

Despite the enormous number of studies on trust in general, and the increasing number specifically of cross-cultural and cross-national studies on trust, [Dietz, Gillespie, and Chao \(2010\)](#) have noted that “we know surprisingly little about how people from different cultures understand this complex and enigmatic construct, and how they go about building, maintaining and repairing trust in their own culture and across cultural divides” (p. 5). [Marková, Linell, and Gillespie \(2008\)](#) have pointed out that even though researchers and theorists have acknowledged that trust and distrust take on different forms and qualities depending upon context, measures of trust have continued to be based upon the idea of unidimensionality. They stress that “individuals develop the meaning of ‘trust’ through the process of socialization and communication, acquiring locally relevant systems of social knowledge” (p. 8). Similarly, and in accordance with [Wright and Ehnert \(2010\)](#), we suggest that the only way to adequately understand trust and its implications is to regard it as a social construction.

This paper is an emic examination of meanings given to workplace trust in urban areas of southern Cameroon, southern Finland, and northern India. The rationale for the country selection is described below. Schools have been selected as the institutional setting for the study and teachers as the main respondents. Teachers as a profession have relatively similar functions in each country, acting as important socialising agents who are expected to transmit central cultural values and knowledge to future generations. We therefore started with the assumption that it is crucial to understand conceptions of trust amongst educators due to their potential intergenerational and societal implications. Principals were also included in the study, due to the effect they may have upon the teachers' workplace environment and to bring the often studied manager/subordinate dimension into the research design. We analyse how trust between teachers and between teachers and principals is conceptualised and practiced according to three frames of talk in each country context: (1) How the teachers talked about trust amongst teachers, (2) how the teachers talked about trust between teachers and principals, and (3) how the principals talked about trust between themselves and the teachers.

By studying how trust is talked about and understood in workplaces in different situational and national settings, our aim is to contribute to discussions on trust as a process, whose meaning is entangled in the context in which it is produced and reproduced. We believe that meanings of trust can have shared elements in different contexts, but can also – and likely will – have particularities that are linked to cultural- or institutional-level norms and salient every day practices.

## Using Social Representations Theory to Study Trust as Situated Processes

We use the theory of social representations as a framework to examine local and institutionally specific conceptions of trust. Social representations have been defined as:

systems of values, ideas and practices with a twofold function; first, to establish an order which will enable individuals to orientate themselves in their material and social world and to master it; secondly, to enable communication to take place among the members of a community by providing them with a code for social exchange and a code for naming and classifying unambiguously the various aspects of their world and their individual and group history (Moscovici, 1973, p. xiii).

Social representations are interpersonally and collectively constructed networks of classifications and meanings that allow people to make sense of their worlds (e.g., Jodelet, 1991). They are embedded in collective memory, social practices, history and culture. Yet, social representations are open to transformation due to differences in the ways that individuals position themselves when drawing upon them and using them in interpersonal interactions (e.g., Jovchelovitch, 2012).

Social representations are shared knowledge that are formed in interaction when people are confronted by something new, abstract or unfamiliar, as well as socially salient or important. A search begins to try to locate the phenomenon amongst those things whose meaning has already been negotiated. The ongoing process of social representation results in social representations as artefacts; as shared knowledge that constitutes and updates cultural and social contexts. In his seminal work, Moscovici (1961/2008) characterised and empirically exemplified some of the processes of social representation. Two of the primary processes of social representation are anchoring and objectification.

Anchoring involves an attempt to locate an unfamiliar phenomenon by comparing it to something already known. Anchoring is a process of classification that is never neutral. It gives meaning to that which is abstract and unknown by naming it and attaching it to familiar, value-laden categories (Moscovici, 1984). For example, in Moscovici's (1961/2008) study on social representations of psychoanalysis, he found that Catholics in France anchored psychoanalysis in confession. The interrelated partner process of anchoring is objectification, which locates the unfamiliar in symbols, icons and images, and thus concretises the conception. Objectifications bring the abstract phenomenon to life by bringing it into everyday practices and images. In Jodelet's (1991) classic study on social representations of mental illness in a small village in France, she found that mental illness was objectified in images of curdling butter and souring milk.

Social representations are formed out of debate, disagreement and sometimes conflict, while the meaning of an object, phenomenon or concept often encompasses dialogical oppositions and inconsistencies (Moscovici, 1961/2008; see also Jovchelovitch, 2007; Marková, 2000). Another main concept in social representations theory is that of themata (Moscovici, 1992). The concept of themata theoretically explicates oppositions in everyday thinking and language that are contained in collective memory and have become, at some point or another, thematised. What was, for example, clean/dirty, edible/inedible, democratic/undemocratic, moral/immoral for one person or group at a particular point in time, may not be so for another at a different time. These oppositions become thematised when the meaning of moral/immoral, for example, is expressed in terms of some social position such

as religion, class, cultural habit, or politic. During times of negotiation or upon contextualisation, the meaning of these taxonomies can fluctuate or change (Marková, 2000).

We suggest that studying trust from the perspective of social representations theory opens new viewpoints on previous research on trust, for example, with respect to claims of context-independent and universal meanings and functions of trust in the workplace. Following this logic and the framework outlined above on social representations theory, we examine trust as a situational, institutional and sociocultural phenomenon. We consider how it is classified and made sense of in our participants' talk. We do this by analysing primary objectifications of trust, as well as anchors and themata. We also examine the similarities and differences in the social representations of trust in the school work place environment, by comparing our interpretations according to country context. We therefore consider how trust is socially represented in relation to the socio-cultural contexts in which they are produced and in the everyday practices of the workplace upon which they are dependent.

We use the theory of social representations as the framework in this study because it focuses on people's everyday understandings of issues that are relevant to them. Unlike the models and frameworks used in the vast majority of studies undertaken in the dominant paradigm of research on trust, forcing pre-determined categories on the phenomenon under investigation is antithetical to some of the basic premises in the theory of social representations. Rather, social representations research usually starts with questions around locally embedded meanings and functions of the phenomenon. The primary processes of social representation described in the theory – that is, objectification, anchoring and themata – can also be used as methodological tools for exploring everyday understandings and constructions of trust. Explorations of the processes of social representation implicates potential insight into wider social and cultural phenomena.

## The Research Settings

On a national level, India, Cameroon and Finland vary in ways that previously have been shown to or arguably can have an effect on workplace trust. Firstly, whether or not trust is higher in collectivist or individualist nations has been an area of investigation (e.g., Yamagishi & Yamagishi, 1994). Previous research has shown that individualist nations are more prone to fostering both organisational (Huff & Kelley, 2003) and generalised trust (Gheorghiu, Vignoles, & Smith, 2009). These researchers argue that while trusting other people is important in collectivist nations, this usually refers to in-groups only, which can give rise to antagonism and distrust towards out-group members. Although these studies have shown consistencies in their results, qualitative studies comparing trust conceptions in individualist and collectivist nations are lacking. It is important to consider not only levels of trust, but also the particularised understandings of trust itself, as it is problematic to compare levels of a concept that can have different meanings for different groups of people.

In Hofstede and Hofstede's (2005) analysis, which included 74 countries, Finland ranked 21<sup>st</sup> in individualism, India 31<sup>st</sup>, and West Africa occupied positions 56-61. However, this study has been criticised, for example, for assuming cultural homogeneity, for equating nations with cultures, and for extending the findings from one company to entire nations (see Jones, 2007). These are valid criticisms. We take Hofstede and Hofstede's study as a cross-national investigation that can be used as a starting place for sampling choices in studies that include participants from different countries. One of our research questions, then, is whether there are differences in how

our Finnish, Indian and Cameroonian participants talk about trust in schools that seem to be linked to relations and dynamics between the personal and professional spheres in our participants' everyday lives.

Our study was conducted in urban areas. In Cameroon, our target area was the capital of Cameroon, Yaoundé, which is a university city and at the time of data collection had about 2 million inhabitants. Yaoundé belongs to the central area of Cameroon, where collectivism has been shown to be lower than in the Western and Northern parts of the country (Pirttilä-Backman, Kassea, & Ikonen, 2004). In Finland, we focused on the Helsinki Metropolitan area (which includes the urban core of three cities and one town and surrounding commuter towns). There are four universities and around 1 million inhabitants living in this area. Even though there are regional differences, Finland is often described as being relatively culturally homogenous. In India we collected data in the city of Patna (around 1.5 million inhabitants), which is the capital of Bihar – the poorest state in the country. While there are clear differences in terms of poverty and literacy between the rural areas of Bihar and the university city of Patna, traditional values and structures of caste, for example, are nevertheless typical in Patna (Wagner, Duveen, Themel, & Verma, 1999); just as they are in many other parts of India.

In all of the countries, the school sector is regulated by the state. In Finland, the teachers' union is one of the biggest trade unions in the country, and the collective labour agreement regulates the working conditions (e.g. hours per week, holidays, salaries) of the teachers in detail. In Cameroon and India, rather than relying on trade unions, the teachers operate more as individuals who must negotiate their working conditions and salaries with the principals. The average pupil teacher ratio at the primary school level in 2009 in Finland was 13.65 and in Cameroon 46.32, and in 2011 in India it was 35.15 (UNESCO Institute for Statistics [UIS], 2014). The data is not available for India for 2009.

## Procedure

### Participants and Methods of Data Collection

The data was gathered using semi-structured individual and focus group interviews that focused on the theme of trust. Focus groups are an appropriate method for gathering material for studies on social representations (Sakki, Mäkinen, Hakoköngäs, & Pirttilä-Backman, 2015; Wagner, Duveen, Farr, et al., 1999). The method can be helpful in efforts at creating discussion contexts in which participants are able to express, support and contradict viewpoints, as well as tell their own versions of points already discussed. However, we thought that there may also be sensitive issues that participants did not feel comfortable bringing up in group contexts. We were particularly concerned that since the interview topics dealt with trusting relations in their workplaces – upon which their livelihoods depend – that they may not trust the other participants enough to discuss distrust due to, for example, fear of jeopardizing their jobs. We also thought that socially and politically polemic issues, such as those dealing with caste, ethnic, cultural and class differences may be difficult topics in potentially diverse focus groups. For this reason, we also conducted individual interviews. We therefore interviewed teachers both individually and in focus groups. Contrary to our expectations, however, focus group participants often seemed to be openly discussing those issues that we thought might be sensitive. Principals were interviewed only individually, because their busy schedules made focus groups almost impossible to coordinate.

The interviews took place between February and June of 2009. Six individual teacher interviews, six individual principal interviews, and six focus groups with teachers were conducted in Yaoundé, Cameroon as well as in a

city in southern Finland. In Patna, India, five individual teacher interviews, six individual principal interviews, and seven focus group interviews were conducted. Only teachers were interviewed in focus groups. In Cameroon there were four interviewees in each focus group. In India, there were two interviewees in one focus group, three in another, and four in five of the focus groups. In Finland, the number of interviewees varied from three to six.

The sex distribution of the teachers and principals that participated in our study is as follows (the first number represents the number of females while the second represents the number of males): 10/26 (Cameroon), 28/10 (Finland), and 25/12 (India). Although there were imbalances in the schools with respect to the female-to-male ratio, they are indicative of the distributions in the teacher and principal populations in each country. The average length of the individual teachers' interviews was 42 minutes in Cameroon, 81 minutes in Finland and 85 minutes in India. The respective lengths for the principals' interviews were 50 minutes in Cameroon, 88 minutes in Finland and 85 minutes in India. The focus groups lasted on average, 70 minutes in Cameroon, 79 minutes in Finland, and 105 minutes in India.

The semi-structured individual and focus group interview guide (see [Appendix](#)) that the interviewers used consisted of six parts. The interview guide was the same for the individual and focus group interviews. The procedure was piloted in all three countries, which subsequently resulted in small changes. Interviewer-interviewee exchanges that dealt with the topic of trust in the school context comprised the main portion of the interviews, which started with open and broad stimulus questions (e.g., 'What is trust between teachers based on?'). The interviews gradually proceeded towards more specific topics for discussion (e.g., asking for possible reasons in fictive cases where a previously trusted principal or teacher was no longer trusted). These more specific topics about trust in the workplace were also theory-driven, yet maintained the open-question format. Distrust and losing trust were also discussed in the interviews. The discussions of distrust are significant to our participants' understandings of trust – and thus to our results – to the extent that we see meaning making as a process that includes drawing boundaries between what something is and what it is not (e.g., [Bourdieu, 1984](#)). In other words, our research position is that the participants draw boundaries between trust and not-trust, and between trust and distrust, in the process of imbuing trust with meaning. Although we do not feel that distrust or mistrust and trust are simply two sides of the same conceptual coin, we argue that – at least in our study – processes of social representation of trust are necessarily entangled with conceptions of distrust/mistrust to the extent that they rely on each other for their meanings. Nevertheless, in our analyses we restrict our discussions of participants' talk about distrust to instances when it was clearly integral to their understandings of workplace trust.

In Finland, all of the interviews were conducted by a Finnish research assistant in Finnish, which is the main language used in the country. In India, all of the schools had English as a compulsory subject, while both Hindi and English were the everyday languages used. Both Hindi and English were used in the interviews, which were conducted by the third author and research assistants. In Cameroon, the interviews were conducted by the fourth author primarily in the French language, although in very limited portions the participants switched spontaneously to English. French is the main official language used in the country. All sessions were transcribed and translated into English by bi-lingual research team members before the analyses. The Hindi word used for trust was *vishwas*, the French word used was *confiance*, and the Finnish word used was *luottamus*.

In Cameroon, all interviews were conducted on the school premises (office or classroom), except for one individual case, in which the interview took place in the garden of the city cathedral for the convenience of the teacher. In Finland, all principals were interviewed in their offices. The teachers were interviewed either in their own school,

at the university of Helsinki or a local institute of a higher education, or in a community center. One teacher was interviewed in his/her home according to her/his wishes. In India, all the principals were interviewed in their own offices. The teachers were interviewed either at their schools or, in the case of the mixed focus group, in a participating teacher's home.

Our aim was to have participants from typical schools in each location. In Cameroon and India, the majority of the schools are private, while in Finland there are very few private schools at all. Therefore, all the teachers and principals included in our study were from private schools in Cameroon and India, and from public schools in Finland. In Cameroon, the National Baccalaureate Board (Office du Bac) publishes an annual ranking of the schools, from which two of the highest, two of the middle, and two of the lowest ranking private schools in our target region were selected. There was no school ranking information available in India and Finland, although when making the selections we nevertheless aimed for diversity in terms of how well established the schools were, as well as in terms of intra-city school location.

## Interview Analyses

Our analyses began by reading through the transcripts a couple of times each, while all subsequent phases of coding and analyses were facilitated by the Atlas.ti (Friese, 2014) computer-assisted data analysis program. This computer program was developed for use with research based upon grounded theory, but can also be used in a wide variety of other qualitative research methods. In all of the stages of coding and analysis we followed basic tenets of grounded theory, such as creating and refining qualitative codes on the basis of what we saw in the data, and abductive reasoning. Abductive reasoning entails formulating theories about the data by starting from the data, while continuously comparing and moving back and forth between the researchers' emerging theories and interpretations on the one hand and the data on the other (see e.g. Charmaz, 2006, pp. 103-104). The material was coded primarily by the second author of this paper, although preliminary (structural and demographic) codes were done by a research assistant. Although the second author has never visited Patna or Yaoundé, he familiarised himself with basic aspects of the historical and cultural contexts there prior to conducting any coding, by reading academic, local literature. Furthermore, all interpretations were made tentatively, and the local researchers in the team were consulted throughout the analyses and interpretations. In each phase of the analysis, the first two authors had regular meetings to discuss the codes and coding processes. The first two authors identified the main themes (that could consist of several codes) in each country according to the frame (teachers' talk about trust between teachers, teachers' talk about trust between teachers and principals, principals' talk about trust between principals and teachers).

The second author of this paper wrote summaries of all of the interviews. The purpose of the summaries is that they can help in preserving "the meaningful relations that the respective person deals with in the topic of the study" (Flick, 2009, p. 318). Such summaries can help to ensure that unique or counter conceptions do not get obscured by hegemonic ones. The summaries and preliminary interpretations were discussed and modified by the whole research group during a week of face to face meetings. This phase was crucial in our efforts at making culturally understandable and competent interpretations from the perspectives of both the local and foreign researchers in each country context. In our discussions, we aimed to establish shared understandings and interpretations of the focal phenomena that the participants dealt with in their talk about trust. In subsequent phases of the analysis, the relevant local members of the team were always consulted when new issues or questions came up.

The conceptual tools explicated by the theory of social representations (i.e., anchoring, objectification, and themata) guided the next phases of the analysis. Focusing on the salient conceptualizations of trust in each context, we started by conducting an extensive examination of the objectifications that were formed both metaphorically and non-metaphorically in the participants' talk. Themata are explicated as being historically and culturally embedded; they are basic oppositional categories that are drawn upon when building the representation. Anchors are processes that are also longstanding and culturally embedded. Themata and anchors are not necessarily explicit in language (see Sakki, 2010). The manner in which we utilised the tools of anchoring and themata was therefore interpretive. In making our interpretations, we took into account the sociocultural contexts, our own cultural knowledge, and previous, relevant country specific studies in relation to the main themes that we found in the participants' talk. This means that we went outside of the data to make our interpretations of anchors and themata. The research team and authors of this article include one local Cameroonian, one local Finn, one local Indian and one local North American (USA). Having one local from each country involved in the research and one who was not a local in any of these countries provides diverse sociocultural perspectives that include both local insight and non-local questioning and clarification.

We were also open to considering that anchors, objectifications, and themata may not have been present at all. All of these elements and processes were collected together, which then constituted our preliminary interpretations of the social representation of school-place trust in each country. During the final phase of our analyses, we returned to the uncoded interviews and read through them again, while evaluating the comprehensiveness of our analyses and interpretations. Finally, during the write-up phase, the researchers once more interacted with both the raw and coded data. These final phases led to some minor modifications in the interpretations that we discuss in the following sections.

In presenting our results, we first give a brief snapshot of the general ways that teachers and principals conceptualised trust in each country context. We then move to the three frames of talk described above. Here, we discuss the contents and objectification processes in each frame of analysis. In doing so, we present exemplary excerpts that demonstrate the primary themes and how trust was understood. Due to space limitations, we do not deal with exceptions in reporting our results. The exceptions in our data were not salient or recurring. In the discussion section, we move to more general interpretations, in which we also discuss the anchors and themata in each country context.

## **Social Representations of Workplace Trust in the Patna, Indian Schools**

Participants' talk about trust in the school context in Patna, India, focuses on the themes of reciprocation, commitment and competency. Hierarchical teacher-teacher and principal-teacher relations seem to provide the framework for building social representations of trust. Amongst the teachers, these hierarchies were related to competition for the principals' attention. For the principals, hierarchies seemed integral to their understandings of workplace trust in the schools. These hierarchical relations seem to have been an available and institutionalised means for at least some teachers to establish trusting relations with the principal. However, the hierarchies also seemed to have a negative effect on trust between teachers, while simultaneously creating a prevalent need for teacher-teacher trust in order to be able to navigate their work within those hierarchies.

## Indian Teachers' Representations of Trust Between Teachers

For the Indian teachers, talk about trust between teachers focuses on themes of help and reciprocation, cooperation, and feelings of interpersonal closeness. In order to be able to trust each other, it seemed important to the teachers that they felt supported and that their best interests were looked after by their colleagues. They needed to be able to ask the other teachers for help without fearing that their 'weaknesses' would be reported to the principal. The following excerpt is a good example of how the Indian teachers talked about trust between teachers in terms of being able to ask for help and support. It comes from a focus group discussion and was formulated in response to the interviewer asking what trust between the teachers is grounded on.

FG7\_2<sup>1</sup>: [...] If there is something, if there is some shortcoming, if you are not able to handle the children properly so any senior teacher should be able to give you a guideline [I2: hmm, hmm] as to where you are wrong, and you should do it like this, so this is something very nice. The other teacher's impression comes good on you. You think he/she is my well-wisher only. [I2: hmm] Secondly, you should be helping each other; this is a big deal. [I2: hmm] Because look when we studied.., I... passed out my matriculation nine years back. [I2: hmm] And now...if there is someone who did his/her graduation only a couple of years back then he/she is automatically very ...new. [I2: hmm, hmm] And now there are many words in the book which I don't understand, so I go and ask that from anyone. There should be no hesitation like - look I am a teacher and he is a teacher too - if I ask something then my shortcoming will be known, that I don't know anything. So it is very important that if you have a doubt anywhere you are able to ask your colleague and make it clear.

Trust between the Indian teachers thus deals with exposing and validating vulnerabilities, and feelings that others' support is adequate and well-intended. Trust means working through 'shortcomings' together, for example with other teachers who may have more experience. This type of reciprocal teacher support seemed to require that they be able to trust that their colleagues not expose their vulnerabilities publicly, particularly to the principal. They simply needed to be able to ask each other for help—to share their knowledge, expertise and even their teaching materials—without having to suffer any negative consequences.

Many of the teachers also reported that trust is visible when one is able to share and ask for help not only with their professional problems, but also with their personal problems. Representations of trust in their workplaces often included elements of interpersonal trust that extended into the private realm. Trusting relations in the school context were sometimes objectified in family metaphors. For instance, one teacher from a focus group interview explained that the positive environment in her/his school was evidenced by the fact that the other teachers treated her/him "just like their own daughter...or similar, behave very well with me." (FG2\_3).

In general, there did not seem to be a strict separation between trust in professional life and trust in their lives outside of the schools. They seemed to have to organise their professional lives such that their personal lives were not neglected. This was most evident in that the teachers often reported having family obligations that required their absence. Because of this, they needed to organise a stand in for their classes. The teachers thus reported their having many obligations inside and outside of the school context, for which they seemed to receive little support from the infrastructure of the institution. As a result, they needed to turn to each other for support. Teachers' conceptions of trust were often objectified in covering classes for each other, as demonstrated below.

FG4\_T1: Sometimes a problem arises... [...] ok say I have gone to take my class and it is during the class period that a message comes in that I have to leave the class urgently. In that case the teacher on whom

I have my full trust, and if she has a leisure period then I could tell her that please take care of my class. In that case, what happens is that the relationship between us improves and second, that the children who are in the class room do not suffer either.

Very shortly after the talk presented above, FG4\_T1 additionally expressed a metaphorical objectification of trust as being ready to do and die for one another. Trust meant doing practical things for one another in such a way that neither their personal nor their professional lives suffered. In addition to the teacher that produced the above excerpt, other teachers also mentioned that helping each other in confidence is important for the students' wellbeing. Thus, helping relations between the teachers served the purpose of their being able to uphold their responsibilities in both the schools and in their families.

Lastly, power imbalanced social relations shaped the prevalent themes in our Indian teachers' talk on trust between teachers. The atmosphere in which they worked was often seemingly wrought with suspicion and teacher hierarchies. Some teachers were simply described by our teacher participants as being favoured and close to the principal, and as negatively affecting trust between the teachers themselves.

P3\_1: ...I have seen few people around uh..., [I: yea yea] Mam, [I: the coterie] ((laughing)) yea, a coterie [P3\_2: chamchas<sup>ii</sup>] chamchas, those who are, they, those who think that they are [P3\_2: buttering]...whom we call super teachers [I: ok, very nice]. So they have very close, intimate relationship betw-, with the principal. [I: In what sense, intimate?] Intimate means, in administration [I: uh huh], they can do or undo anything, they can uhh... criticise any teacher in front of the principal Mam [I: I see]. They can spoil the image of any teacher [I: uh huh], and they can put anybody in trouble [I: yea.]

The importance of support and interpersonal closeness in teachers' social representations of trust between teachers was therefore seemingly often motivated by the suspicions and insecurities that resulted from those teachers that they reported as being close to the principal. The teacher hierarchies that shaped the teachers' conceptions of trust between teachers were also objectified in metaphors such as playing politics, backbiting, to raise the finger on each other, to put someone to loss, leg pulling, and buttering. The practice of teachers looking after each other's best interests was therefore an important aspect of the Indian teachers' social representations of trust between teachers, which is evidenced in all of the excerpts in this section.

## Indian Teachers' Representations of Trust Between Teachers and Principals

For the teachers, the principal seemed to be an authoritative figure who was the motivational reference point for proper teacher conduct. S/he was both looked up to and feared, and the teachers rarely discussed the principal in a negative manner. When the direction of teachers' talk about teacher-principal trust was geared towards their understandings of the principals' trust in them, the themes focused on the principal recognising and appreciating their efforts, commitment, competencies and potential. The following focus group discussion was stimulated by the interviewer asking whether trust between the teachers and principal 'just exists' or is built.

FG1\_T3: There is one thing that exists; there is an initiative....because how are we appointed? [I: Yeah] It is through our degree, mark sheet, [I: Yeah] interview, [I: Yeah] demo classes, whatever... [I: Yeah] so this builds one level of relationship in the beginning itself. [I: Right...Trust] She takes me...meaning trust...she takes me because she thinks I am the best of the lot [FG1\_T4: Lot, yes] [I: Yeah, yeah] ok...then we have to prove...that what you have found in me [I: Yeah] is up to date and I can improve it with your help. [I: Yeah, very sensibly answered]

FG1\_T4: Yes, I will try to do my best...we tell them I will try to do my best! We try to convey that have trust in me that I can do better. What else...

The demonstration classes mentioned by the teacher (T3) in the above excerpt were a frequent objectification of trust between the teachers and principal. The teachers reported that having their competence and potential recognised in the demonstration classes—most explicitly evidenced by being given the job—provided the support and impetus for them to improve their professional skills, and for the principal to trust them. They thus conceptualised that trust from the principal's perspective meant that they were committed and competent, for example by having updated knowledge.

When their talk was framed in terms of their trust in the principal, the teachers reported that it is based on whether they felt supported by her/him in their professional and personal lives. When the teachers discussed trust in the school context in relation to their ability to fulfil family obligations, they often expressed that the principal should be understanding about these needs and grant them leave, particularly when they felt that they deserved it because of their work performance. The teachers' conceptions of a trustworthy principal were therefore often objectified in being granted leave. The teachers also expected their salary to be raised regularly. In public schools in India, employees receive a regular inflation allowance ('dearness allowance' or 'increments'), although in private schools this practice may or may not be implemented by the administration. Salary increments were also an objectification of trust between the teachers and the principal.

### Indian Principals' Representations of Trust Between Principals and Teachers

As with the teachers' conceptions of the principals' trust in them, the principals seemed to agree that principal-teacher trust was based in the teachers' competency and commitment, which the principals reported being important for properly 'caring for' the students. The following exchange comes after the interviewer asked what makes the principal able to trust a teacher.

P3: They must have a focused...approach that they are only...concerned with the betterment of the students. Nothing...else, apart from that.

I: So basically it will be around your [P3: Performance.] teacher's performance.

P3: Performance and their capability.

The principals also talked about how their own conduct—such as support or discipline—affected principal-teacher trust. It seemed that the power inscribed in the principal's position in the school institution was easily transferred into their conceptions of principal-teacher trust. A principal produced the following excerpt in response to a question about the level of trust between the teachers and the principal.

P4: It is good. It is good. [I: How could you say it?]. It is good. [I: ok.] Because whenever I really... mmm... ask them to come in school, even on a Sunday or holidays [I: yes.] and they use to come on my command. And whenever they like to get some sort of privilege [I: uh huh...] for their family members [I: like...] I use to, sanction. [I: ok. Privilege like, they want leave? or..] leave, leave like sometime, if they are getting any phone call from the house [I: ok.] and I use to relieve them at that time. [I: ok. that's no problem.]

In general, the principals seemed to associate trust with the teachers obeying orders and being complacent in their inferior positions. However, who should hold the power was not always expressed so explicitly by the principals,

and one principal actually talked about the need to show concern for the teachers and to allow them to have a voice.

## **Social Representations of Workplace Trust in the Southern Finnish Schools**

Our Finnish participants seemed to have quite congruent conceptions of the meaning of trust within the school context. For both the teachers and principals, trust was based in negotiating and fulfilling both formal and informal contracts. They reported that in a trusting work environment, agreements, plans and individual duties were to be negotiated in an egalitarian and participatory manner by the larger group. At the same time, the agreements and duties were to be carried out independently. The successful negotiation and fulfilment of contracts required open and transparent communication, cooperation, self-direction and reliability. Cooperation meant being able to participate and agree in the decision-making process. Our Finnish participants' conceptions of trust, based upon negotiating and fulfilling agreements and contracts, also included a pervasive element of conforming to the predominant manner of workplace methods and practices.

### **Finnish Teachers' Representations of Trust Between Teachers**

The Finnish teachers reported that teachers' participation in staff discussions and decision making is important for their ability to trust one another. They thought that all teachers should contribute in planning and negotiating formal agreements and school activities. They also seemed to think that those who did not uphold the agreements were bothersome, and by one teacher were even likened to children as they were thought to require monitoring. This seemed to mean that they are able to work as a team and communicate well, cooperate in decision making, and independently fulfil their agreed upon duties. They used metaphors such as being in the same boat, being on the same side, and team spirit in relation to other teachers (as well as the principal). Important to these negotiations, in addition to cooperation and communication, are feelings of openness and comfort.

The following excerpt, taken from a focus group interview, demonstrates the important elements in Finnish teachers' conceptions of trust between teachers.

FG5\_T3: ...we had a situation where we had agreed on something, [...] and then this teacher, wanted to go solo. And then this teacher had kind of informed people, about this that they will be doing it differently and then, th-, this is my first year there, in this, community, I listened out and there the people who've been here said that because we agreed on this in last May the whole school will be doing it like this so, it won't fly that in a school of four hundred and fifty students one class does this thing on another day because all the meals and everything were, the people in charge of the schedule they had planned it. So this teacher, had to kind of back off. [...] So, I've sometimes thought that this happens in a lot of schools, I mean are those teachers trying to assert themselves...their skills somehow that look at me, I'm better at this than the others I want to shine with my [FG5\_T1: Yeah.] class [FG5\_T1: Mmm.] I don't want to be part of the masses. You could shine in some other moments but that, it, really it eats away at the sch-, [FG5\_T1: Yes.] at the way the whole team does things.

FG5\_T1: That's a good word, "to go solo", that's, it's kind of...really... [FG5\_T3: Mmm.] If we have agreed on how to do things [FG5\_T3: Mmm.] then, if someone deviates from that then it's clear, that it is...

The above excerpt also demonstrates another main component of our interpretations of Finnish social representations of workplace trust in the school context: Finnish teachers' conceptions of trust between teachers were shaped by the assumption that interpersonal social relations—i.e. the communication, negotiation and teamwork that are important in their representations of teacher-teacher trust—are, or should be, egalitarian. Teachers were generally expected to psychologically place themselves on the same level as others, and to not try to 'be better than the rest'. When describing deviant and non-conformist, or non-cooperative teachers, teachers used metaphors such as flying solo, making a mountain out of a molehill, and making noise. Teachers' understandings of trust between teachers were thus linked to interplay between egalitarian social relations and conforming to norms and rules. Those who did things differently, therefore, were seen as "showing off" and placing themselves above others.

### **Finnish Teachers' Representations of Trust Between Teachers and Principals**

As with their conceptions of trust between teachers, the teachers reported that smooth social interactions and negotiations were important for trust between themselves and the principal. The teachers seemed to have a dialogical understanding of teacher-principal trust, such that both teacher voice and principal leadership were important. They wanted the principal to be a "skipper who steers the ship" (T2), yet in many ways they wanted their leader to consider them as colleagues who simply had different roles and responsibilities than those of the principal. They wanted to be heard, such that even if "the principal would still make a decision that was ((laughing)) not what the teachers wanted, it still generates more trust than just announcing decisions from above" (T5). The teachers considered it their right to participate in decision-making, while also reporting that the principal should be competent and decisive.

T2: ...The principals' job, in our school, in her own words is, is to make the teachers' work easier. And I agree with this completely. [...] And, she maybe isn't the kind, like sufficiently, I would like to have a more assertive superior who does listen to her subordinates, it's like this or like this or this but then she decides that okay, but this is what we're going to do now. But she...she's not a sufficiently strong person, for this job. [...]

The Finnish teachers' representations of trust between the teachers and principal concern how the principal enacts his/her position of authority. As one participant put it, "does he come [to meetings] playing God or as one of us" (T4). Their conceptions of teacher-principal trust revolved around how egalitarian and democratic they thought the principals' methods were. This seemed to be particularly true in terms of the teachers feeling that the principal should create a climate for them to express their ideas and opinions, acknowledge and, at least sometimes, put their voice into action. Unless asked directly, the teachers rarely framed their principal-teacher trust talk in terms of the principals' trust in them. However, when framed in that way the teachers reported that the principals' trust in them was simply based upon the principal's perceptions of the teachers' competency and fulfilment of their agreed-upon duties. For the teachers, being heard seemed to mean that the principal had confidence in their professional skills.

### **Finnish Principals' Representations of Trust Between Principals and Teachers**

We found that the Finnish principals' talk about trust between themselves and the teachers was very much in line with the teachers' talk. The central themes in Finnish principals' talk about trust between themselves and the

teachers were: having open and transparent communication, cooperating with each other, negotiating school activities together, and the teachers fulfilling their agreed-upon duties in an independent and reliable way.

P3: That's, in my opinion the basic foundation for this work and the profession include that you trust your colleagues. And...that's just how it is. And for example when we recruit new teachers, for me it's a non-negotiable condition that we can work as a community, I mean for each teacher to work in their own little sphere, the time for that in schools is over. So I expect new teachers to have co-operation skills, that's like the basis for, for how the school works. But of course it's, there's many things we can, we can do to develop it and, and, and one, one thing that I think is important is for example, our school is so big that we have almost in all subjects there's more than one teacher, so for example we do the planning together and, there's, there's a lot of carrying it out together there is.

The principal who produced the above excerpt categorized the teachers as her/his colleagues. The principals were often working to discursively dismantle the hierarchies that are imposed by the workplace structures in which they operate. Thus, as with the Finnish teachers in our study, the principals also expressed an interest in sidestepping the formal hierarchies inherent in their job positions. Some of the principals also seemed to have some internal conflicts with their roles as principals. One of the Finnish principals reported that trust between themselves and the teachers meant that they “face each other as human beings, at the point when we are talking privately like we are doing here now, the role disappears. And that is what I aim at, to make it disappear” (P1). At the same time, they accepted their formal role as ‘the skipper’ such that “the principal is member of the work community in the same way as teachers are but s/he also has her/his management duties (P2)”. They therefore sought to fulfil their responsibilities, yet simultaneously had an interest in being an equal participant in the workplace community.

## **Social Representations of Workplace Trust in the Yaoundé, Cameroonian Schools**

Cameroonian conceptions of workplace trust in the school context differ from those formulated by the Finnish and Indian participants. Not only do the contents differ, but our Cameroonian participants' understanding of workplace trust in schools appears to be more diversified and dialogical. At least the Cameroonian teachers seem to imbue representations of workplace trust with meaning by taking themselves out of the workplace context, on a psychological level. Our analyses suggest that, for the teachers in particular, social representations of trust in the Cameroonian school context are inseparable from the sphere of mutuality and close interpersonal relations. At the same time, the participants' conceptions of trust in the workplace also necessarily – perhaps in part due to the research topic and interview scheme – deal with the professional sphere. This is especially true for the principals, who seem to more easily conceptualize workplace trust in the psychological space of the professional realm. Our analyses suggest that a power gap and lack of interaction between the principals and teachers affects the ways that they imbue workplace trust in the school context with meaning. That gap is reflected in the incongruence in their representations of trust.

## Cameroonian Teachers' Representations of Trust Between Teachers

For the Cameroonian teachers, trust between them means collaborating, communication, and solidarity. Also important for teacher-teacher trust are competency, knowledge, and feelings of closeness and respect. The following excerpt is a good example of how the Cameroonian teachers conceptualised trust between them. It was formulated in response to the interviewer asking what kinds of things make the interviewee feel that s/he is trusted, or not trusted, by her/his colleagues.

T6: A first clue is the sense of collaboration, meaning that colleagues come to you to ask certain questions, not about social issues, but about pedagogy, which is very important. And [...] they don't hesitate to come toward you and pose certain problems, and they feel reassured that they find in you someone who always has something to offer toward improvements of academic competence, of relations with the administration as it is what often frustrates teachers.

The Cameroonian teachers often objectified trust between teachers in concepts related to friendship, family, and collaboration. The following excerpt is a good example of how our teacher participants in Cameroon talked about trust between them.

FG1\_T3: Yes because part time teachers who arrive, [I: yes] right? They ah, they ah, they have the spirit of the house, [I: yes] and [FG1\_T2: They find the spirit], and since the trust is already total, as he said earlier, they ah, they adapt to it. [FG1\_T2: Yes.] [I: Right.]

FG1\_T2: They find a certain spirit [P3: yes] and they adhere to that spirit [FG1\_T3: to that spirit ((simultaneously))]. [FG1\_T3: Yes]. And we all therefore ah, we have the same objectives. We converge towards the same objective... That [I: Yes?] are assigned to us, aren't they, by the hierarchy. [I: Right]. Mhmm.

I: Other opinions? Do, do, do you agree with them? Or do you -

FG1\_T1: Yes I do agree with them [I: yes] because, in the family, we are in the family. [I: Okay.] We trust and we know each other [I: okay], as in, even if they are permanent or p- p- p- [I: part time] part time [I: yes] or temporary teachers. [I: Mhmm.] All of us work like hand in glove. [I: Mhmm].

FG1\_T4: Well me I... ((uncomfortable laugh)) I would rather... measure my, my statements, because the, the- I don't think, ah, that trust is total. [I: Yes.] Because it's, it's true to say that it's professional relations that link us. But there are nonetheless also relations beyond the professional. [I: Yes.] But they are always between us, and on this point here, personally there are people I don't trust. [I: Right.]

The metaphorical objectifications of trust in the phrases "the spirit of the house" and "like hand in glove" are interesting as they symbolise how trust was often made sense of through positive emotions and conceptions of interdependency, closeness, and completing each other. The teachers also reported that trust in schools where teachers work on a part-time basis is more difficult to build because they meet each other less. They seemed to feel that because of this, communication and interaction were also important for building trust between teachers.

For our Cameroonian teachers, trust between them seems to depend upon a type of camaraderie that is less central in the other two countries' contexts. The text produced by participant FG1\_T4 in the above excerpt is also interesting in the sense that it demonstrates the ease in which our Cameroonian participants conceptualised trust in the workplace by relating it to the private sphere and close relations. While the participant accepted that there were professional links between the teachers, s/he at the same time did not unambiguously relate these links to

workplace trust. S/he found some difficulties with the non-professional relations in the workplace that s/he seemed to base conceptions of trust upon.

In Cameroon, teachers often imbued the concept of trust between teachers through talk about its lack. Thus, teachers' social representations of trust between teachers in the school context were often envisioned, rather than congruent with the experiences they had in their daily lives in the workplace. When teachers reflected upon trust and strategies for improving trust, the focus of their talk was often on teacher collaboration. The discussion presented below demonstrates this.

FG2\_T1: () there is a proverb that says to me that a... single hand can't tie a... [I: parcel], that union makes strength [I: yes], meaning that if everyone tries to change at their level [I: yes], yes, it will also change the character and comportment of the establishment that it could perhaps bring to life trust between us, and when we understand we come from many origins and cultures, right? [I: yes], those are the fruits of, and the product of the society who determines what we say [I: yes]. Yes. But we are educated according to our opportunities, according to our capabilities, them and me, according to this, so we should manage to be in certain people at one level how we are, so that we can be true - ah, before our colleagues. A single- everyone has a job to do. Who is a part of this establishment. And it's this trust, this personal work that we have done, that lead us already to conduct that ah- before our colleagues and before, ah, the administrators, and before the founders, and it's that that can change the level, that could elevate [I: mmhmm] [FG2\_T2: mm, ah-] uh huh.

The teacher (T1) uses metaphors “a single hand can't tie a parcel” and “union makes strength,” which help concretise the role of collaboration in the meaning of trust. The teacher seemed to think that trust can be built when teachers are able to supersede their cultural differences, focus on their capabilities, and work together. For the Cameroonian teachers, collaboration seemed to act as a conceptual bridge between the personal and professional. The teachers also often talked about commitment to the development and well-being of the students. Collaboration seemed to play a central role in these discussions as well. The motivation to collaborate was based in an acute concern for the students, and the teachers' conceptualisations of trust in the school context were often expressed in terms of completing each other.

### **Cameroonian Teachers' Representations of Trust Between Teachers and Principals**

Cameroonian teachers' understandings of trust between the teachers and principals focuses on themes of carrying out their responsibilities, teacher competency, student success, respect, and an open and non-authoritarian working environment. The teachers seem to value their capabilities and efforts being appreciated by the principal, and being treated well. They reported that student results, job stability, and financial compensation are both the basis, and outcome, of trust between teachers and principals. The teachers often objectified their understandings of the principals' trust in them in the renewal of their employment contract. As one participant puts it, “the clue of the principal's trust is when he allows you to continue, when he renews the contract, it means he trusts you” (T4). It also seems that being paid on time – or being paid at all – is an issue that is not self-evident. Being paid is important for teachers' trust in the principal.

They also expect the principal to be caring and treat them respectfully, despite the principal's superior role. Conversely, authoritarian principals are seen as disrespectful and untrustworthy. One of the Cameroonian teachers discussed this difference in methods and trust between the current and a previous principal.

T2: [...] When I arrived here, the first principal, I don't mean to be a backbiter, rebuked teachers yelling at them, shouting as the word says. This principal is like a father, even when he really has a criticism. He calls me, tells me "Daughter, please sit down. The prefect brought up this problem, but what is really happening"? [...] Trust is there as he wants to hear your version. Trust is based on this style of communication. [...] I first try to see how he manages the school. In advance, I hope he does not bark too much, because you know big persons do not like to be scolded, yelled at. I hope he does not frustrate and that he is not arrogant. That he does not tell himself "I am the principal so I am god almighty." I tell myself there is no training school for principals. I hope he will consult us about certain things, because it may not be obvious but we are the ones in the classrooms and he sits in his office.

The teachers wish for the principals to foster a supportive working environment that boosts their morale and motivates them to do their jobs well. They seem to conceptualise teacher-principal trust largely in terms of this type of work environment, which they reported as fostering both teacher commitment and having a positive effect upon the students' learning and development. Reciprocally, they also conceptualise the principals' trust in them as being based in their competence and in their teaching having a positive influence on student results; on their level of learning as indicated by year end student exams. They reported that if the teaching conditions are supportive and financially rewarding, the result is increased teacher motivation, which subsequently has a positive effect upon the students. The 'success' of the students was a frequent objectification of teachers' understandings of teacher-principal trust; it solidifies the representation and imbues it with a figurative component.

### Cameroonian Principals' Representations of Trust Between Principals and Teachers

The Cameroonian principals' talk about trust between themselves and the teachers focused on the principals' trust in teachers. They seemed to understand principal-teacher trust primarily in terms of the teachers' behaviour; their commitment, performance and competence, and fulfilling their responsibilities. From the Cameroonian principals' perspectives, principal-teacher trust was conceptualised in terms of students' academic development and achievement. The principals' talk on trust differed somewhat from the teachers in that it did not habitually refer to solidarity or the closeness of relationships in conceptualising workplace trust in the schools. Among the principals, this type of talk focused on the effect of teacher commitment on student success, as demonstrated by the text below.

P3: When I presented, right, to the BEPC<sup>iii</sup>, I had almost ((a certain number of)) students and I got less than ((a certain % succeeding)). It was bad [I: mmhmm]. Well, the second year, I got ((a higher number)) percent success, didn't I. It was a project [I: right] ((Indistinct – talking over each other)). Last year- [I: that's a lot more than ((...)) percent] last year- last year I got, got ((...)) percent from, from BEPC [I: yes], it's still a project. So it's a lot more effective, right, already, right because people feel that we're serious. We don't take the students as students, but as our children. [...] Everyone who knows us, we are the best, the best, even if we didn't institute it. We have a great reference don't we here. Eh? [I: Mm.] Because we, we are serious. And we do not cheat. We even work, even on Sundays we're here to work, to help the children, and without asking for any compensation.

Although the above text deals with elements from the professional sphere, such as the school ranking and results, there is also a reference to the success of the students, with objectifications in family members. It is interesting that the principal positioned himself as the subject when discussing the success of the school, but used an all-inclusive 'we' when discussing the students as family members. This concurs with our finding that while the teachers focused upon the positive effects of teacher-principal trust on students' learning, the principals seemed to be just

as concerned with school prosperity and the school ranking at the end of the year. As another principal put it, “The consequence of trust is the good results of the school. Everything done in the institution is for the results to be good” (P6).

Most of the principals also seemed to think that their trust in the teachers required maintaining a sense of control over the teachers. In the principals’ talk it seemed that this sense of control was maintained by monitoring them and their classroom conduct. Many of the principals also reported that evidence of the teachers trusting them was that they supported the principals’ authority and decisions: “Indicators of trust come from a majority of teachers supporting a decision I have taken” (P1). The principals also talked about collaboration in relation to trust. However, here, ‘collaboration’ seems to mean teachers obeying rules and fulfilling the obligations and tasks set by the administration and principal; it is conceptualised as a helper in the project of student success.

## Discussion

Although there were similar elements in the social representations of workplace trust in the school contexts in Cameroon, Finland, and India, the differences in the three countries’ representations are nevertheless more striking. The representations are at least partly understandable by considering the way in which the teachers’ work is organized, by how the larger social system in which the schools are situated is structured, and by the intra-institutional differences in the qualifications of the teachers.

### Interpretation of our Main Findings According to Country Context

In the Indian schools, trust was actively conceptualised within the hierarchical relations and competitive environment that our interviewees seemed to work in. [Sinha \(1990\)](#) discusses the tendency for Indians to organise everything in the entire cosmos – for example plants, rivers, animals and human beings – hierarchically. We interpret the cultural basis, or anchor, of social representations of workplace trust in the Patna, Indian schools as being within the social hierarchies that have evolved from the caste systems in India. The principal was clearly an authority figure for whom the teachers worked. There was also an unofficial, but seemingly common, practice of the teachers reporting others’ mistakes or perceived shortcomings to the principal. This was done either in order to fulfil the role of being a teacher that was ‘close to the principal’, or otherwise in an attempt to get the principal’s attention. When considering our analyses and interpretations as a whole, we conclude that the main themata used to build social representations of trust amongst our Indian participants is help/harm. The Indian teachers materialised the conception of trust through their need to receive help from one another in order to navigate through the formal and informal interpersonal hierarchies in the workplace, particularly in order to fulfil their family responsibilities outside of work. Trust was also objectified most often in relation to reciprocation and helping.

In Finland, the social representation of trust in the school context was firmly anchored in the contract. Conceptions of trust were often objectified in processes of negotiating and fulfilling duties, practices which were intricately linked to both egalitarianism and conforming to established practices. Our participants wanted everyone to participate equally in decision making, yet dissenting voices were seen as troublesome. These interpretations are in line with other recent Finnish studies. For example, [Törrönen and Maunu \(2005\)](#) show that their participants had a strong distaste for those they thought were ‘standing out’ or ‘showing off’. Such people were seen as placing themselves above others. [Menard \(2016\)](#) has also shown that both the historical path and some contemporary

discourses on Finnish equality are entangled with elements of non-conflict, moderation, and sameness. Thus, the boundaries between equality and continuity of traditional practices are often fluid in Finland.

The relationship of authority between the teachers and the principal seemed to be somewhat ambivalent. On the one hand, the teachers wanted to be heard and the principals were ready to listen to them, while on the other, the teachers were aware of the principals' right to make certain decisions. They also wanted the principal to be able to take the lead and make the final and best decision for everyone involved. In this sense, the Finnish participants' talk exemplified what [Billig et al. \(1988\)](#) have referred to as one of the basic ideological dilemmas of our time, which is that between equality and authority. [Sulkunen \(2010\)](#) describes late modern societies in terms of a new contractualism, in which the agency of managers, as well as their subjects, are stressed. It also stresses transparency. Moreover, the social bond has taken on characteristics of the contract, such that negotiations and agreements seem to be the only permissible way for us to submit to authority. These arguments are in line with our Finnish results. From our analyses, and in consideration of the above discussion, we conclude that the main theme operating in our Finnish data is egalitarianism/authority.

In Cameroon, teachers commonly hold teaching positions simultaneously in more than one school. The Cameroonian teacher participants in our study seemed to be constantly coming and going. This means that face-to-face interactions among the same teachers are inconsistent. The mobility in their work may also be related to the seemingly fluid conceptual boundaries between the professional and personal spheres that seem to operate in the Cameroonian teachers' representations of trust. These fluid boundaries are also reflected in the objectifications of workplace trust in images of hands-on collaboration and interpersonal solidarity. There is a sense of physical closeness and togetherness that is unique in the Cameroonians' talk of trust. We suggest that in Cameroon trust in schools is anchored in precolonial, yet enduring, traditions of complementarity, which refers to the idea that different parts complete each other and form a harmonious whole (see also [Sakki & Salminen, 2015](#) for their interpretation of the thematic importance of complementarity in the ongoing stabilisation of gendered dichotomies between domestic and political realms in Cameroon).

Cameroonian teachers' conceptions of teacher-principal trust focuses on the one hand on principals' trust in them as being based in their own knowledge and skills. On the other hand, it focuses on their trust in the principals as being grounded in the principals' methods of executing their authority. The power gap between the teachers and principals is evident in both the teachers' and the principals' talk. The principals' talk about trust focused on teacher commitment and competency, which seemed related to their interest in student results being competitive with other local schools. A primary motivation of the teachers' commitment lied in the development of the children. For the principals, commitment and competency were tied to both student success and the prosperity of the school.

Commitment to work and competency may be concepts that people in individualist, market-oriented nations often associate with personal success and achievement. Yet, our Cameroonian participants link commitment and competency to notions of success and achievement that clearly extend into collaborative community development. Taking into account the main themes and meaning making processes in the Cameroonian material, as well as our knowledge of the sociocultural context in Yaoundé, we have interpreted the main themata operating in the Cameroonian participants' talk to be family/not-family and solidarity/distance. Numerous authors (e.g., [Kassea, 2006](#); [Marie, 1997](#); [Mpofu, 1994](#); [Pirttilä-Backman, Kassea, & Ikonen, 2004](#)) have suggested a socially relevant co-existence of pre-modern and modern cultural practices in Cameroon. We propose that the objectifications of trust in collaborative practices works in decreasing psychosocial distance between the personal and professional,

the family and the extra-familial, and pre-modern and modern cultural practices. The objectification is therefore very pragmatic and functional.

Common in the Indian and Cameroonian teachers' talk about teacher-principal trust is the issue of fair wages and being paid. They seemed unable to count on any agreements they may have had defining their salary or wage. This, in turn, seemed to create a both a sense of insecurity and a saliency regarding salary and payment in their conceptions of teacher-principal trust.

### **Cooperation: Similar Element, Divergent Meanings**

Cooperation is a common element in the data from all three countries in our study, particularly among teachers' conceptions of teacher-teacher trust. Yet, the meaning of cooperation takes shape differently in the three country contexts through the teachers' day-to-day school place interpersonal interactions. In Finland, cooperation means something akin to 'independent teamwork'. The participants expressed that agreements were to be negotiated in a participatory manner but executed independently. It also meant conforming to the majority voice and to pre-established methods. In Cameroon, cooperation means collaboration. The teachers reported doing hands-on work together, such as grading exams and constructing the course syllabi. In India, cooperation means that the teachers literally construct amongst themselves a support network – explicitly exclusive of spying on or betraying each other – that provides them with the capacity to fulfil their duties both in the workplace and at home.

The different everyday practices and processes attributable to the common element of cooperation reflect the individualistic versus collectivist historical cultural contexts of the countries. However, our interpretations extend past such dichotomies as the teachers and principals articulated the practices and processes where trust was negotiated, built, and evaluated in the schools in each country. Our analyses have highlighted these processes as crucial elements of the social representations of trust in the school context in Cameroon, Finland, and India.

### **Structural Constraints on Social Representations of Trust in Schools**

Social representations do not come from nowhere. Rather, they are strained by their social and cultural embeddedness, as well as by institutionalised structures. Schools are a specific type of workplace. Teaching as a profession has a long history, and educational institutions are often relatively well established and regulated. The ultimate goal of schools is to transfer to, share, or jointly build collective knowledge and skills with younger generations; a task of high importance in any society. These factors, as well as the ongoing interaction and collaboration of the staff, may contribute to the formulation of predictable relationships. These are among the reasons why we began our qualitative studies on trust in the school place context – we thought that common understandings of workplace trust may be more likely here than in many other types of workplaces.

In all of the country contexts there is evidence of institutionally determined hierarchies between teachers and principals. Similar principal–teacher trust building elements in all of the national contexts are teacher commitment and competence. Beyond this, the differences between the national contexts in social representations of workplace trust in schools are more apparent. In Finland, common negotiations and maintaining common agreements are important for both teachers and principals for building and keeping trust. However, the principals must also negotiate their double role. On the one hand they are positioned by the teachers, and take up the position, of being co-equals with the teachers. On the other hand, their job description positions them with authority and obligations. In India and Cameroon, trust conceptions between principals and teachers are built more consistently through hierarchical structures of viewpoint. In India, the formative moments of building trust take place in the context of

pre-hiring demonstration classes. In both India and Cameroon, the renewal of the teachers' work contracts is important. Particularly important in India are teachers' expectations for principals to understand and be responsive to their needs. In Cameroon, the emphasis is on principals treating teachers with respect. In both of these countries, teachers' structurally inferior positions in relation to the principals seemed to more often frame both teachers' and principals' talk about trust than they did in the Finnish interviews. It is evident that the structural hierarchies and economic arrangements, which are part of the local institutional practices and cultures, are significant in conceptualising and building trust.

## Future Directions

Social representations are formulated through people's interactions. Differences in the interpersonal practices involved in building trust are likely to result in differences in how social representations take shape. Finnish culture is often argued to be relatively homogenous, although the extent of that homogeneity is debatable (see e.g. [Häkkinen & Tervonen, 2004](#) on the concept of Finnish homogeneity as a mythical product of nation-building projects). Nevertheless, immigration rates in Finland have been historically and comparatively low. Additionally, the building of the welfare state included policies aimed at universality in policies and public services. Working practices in the standardised Finnish public school system are likely comparable from region to region. We thus suspect somewhat similar representations of workplace trust in schools in other parts of Finland; such that negotiations and contracts are likely salient in meanings and implementations of trust among teachers and principals. It is worth emphasising that the contracts that teachers formulate and carry out among themselves, and with the principals, are not legally binding. Neither are they 'psychological contracts' (see e.g., [Robinson, 1996](#)), which have been studied extensively by organisational psychologists and described as employee expectations of employers due to implicit or explicit employer promises. Rather, our Finnish participants described a type of contract that was made together in order to organise and fulfil the everyday requirements of the job. As discussed earlier, [Sulkunen \(2010\)](#) has conceptualised late modern societies as being saturated by contractual processes, which leads to the question of how our Finnish results would compare with other national contexts. We wonder if the contractual processes of negotiating and being heard are more salient in the Finnish context, due to the historical and contemporary strength of trade unions there, as well as the transformation from an authoritarian government to the current social democracy.

In India, we gathered data in the capital of the least developed state. The cultural characteristics of the city of Patna have been summarized by [Panda and Gupta \(2004\)](#) as "patronizing". In comparison to some other Indian cities included in empirical studies, in Patna high importance is given to status and power. Family and social obligations are regarded as more important than work obligations. The organisational climate has been described as boss-oriented, with juniors attempting to develop personalised relationships with superiors with the aim to become protected or promoted. Organisations are seen as both familial and exploitative ([Panda & Gupta, 2004](#)). Rather than claiming that social representations of trust would be similar in Indian schools throughout the country, we suggest that further studies should be continued in various regions of India – perhaps starting with those that are described very differently in the literature. For example, Ahmedabad has been described as "growth-oriented professional" ([Panda & Gupta, 2004](#)) and, in many respects, is quite different than Patna. It would therefore be worthwhile to explore the differences between social representations in Patna and those formulated in a different setting such as Ahmedabad, where the social contexts and workplace practices could be quite different.

The Cameroonian interviews were conducted in the capital Yaoundé, located in the centre area of the country, which is less collectivistic than the northern and western areas (Pirttilä-Backman et al., 2004). Locations in northern Cameroon, where collectivism was the highest of the three regions studied and which is more isolated than other parts of the country, would offer additional unique settings to study trust in the school context. We assume that the social representation of trust would be even more strongly grounded in complementarity than they were in Yaoundé. In Cameroon and India, a comparison between public and private schools is also an area in which further studies should be conducted.

## Limitations

It is important to address the potential limitations of the study. Our research is situated in three specific locations, in which trust is imbued with meaning in terms of the historically embedded, local, and cultural practices of those locations. As such, our findings cannot be generalised or considered indicative of any global understanding of work place trust. However, our findings provide a generalisable argument for why trust needs to be approached as a social representation. Furthermore, we interviewed only teachers and principals, while there are also many other staff members working in schools. Parents, administrators and pupils, for example, also contribute to constructing trust in schools. Including contributors such as these was beyond the scope of our study, but could nevertheless be considered a limitation. Our school and participant samples were not selected randomly, which also makes our study open to criticism. However, qualitative methodologies – particularly those used to conduct social representations research – do not typically call for randomisation, which relies on the assumption that the research team aims at statistical generalisability. Social representations are never generalizable but are rather locally, culturally, and socially specific. However, we conducted purposeful sampling which is in line with our aims, research questions, and the epistemological assumptions in our approach to social representations (see Marková, 2008). Nevertheless, we maximized the heterogeneity of the respondents in each country to the best of our ability.

In Finland we included only public schools in the study, while in Cameroon and India all the schools were private for reasons that we explained above. Thus, comparing public and private schools could be considered another limitation. However, we find this issue of little significance to our findings when accounting for the vast social and cultural differences between the national contexts. In other words, we were not trying to find ‘similar’ types of schools in the country contexts as we do not believe that such comparative contexts exist. Rather, the schools that we included in our study reflect the types of schools that are typical in each country. Lastly, and incidentally, as with any research whether it be qualitative or quantitative, the findings are interpretations of the authors. Another research team may have come to somewhat different conclusions. However, we have made our methodology as transparent as possible.

## Contributions and Concluding Remarks

Our study offers an alternative way to understand and study trust. First of all, it indicates how trust is embedded in the social context in which it is created, maintained, lost, and repaired. If we take, for example, Mayer et al.’s (1995, p. 712) definition of trust as the willingness to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, we can say that this definition also corresponds to our interpretations. However, in our study, the grounds for willingness to be vulnerable differed in each socio-cultural context. For the Indian teachers, it is based in reciprocal helping with demands that come from both work and family. For the Finnish participants, the grounds for that willingness are built in making plans together and following through with those plans. In both cases, when everyday activities are built on positive ex-

pectations of the actions of others – i.e. when actors operate on bases of trust – they put themselves in positions of vulnerability. Yet, even when fulfilling the relatively universal task of passing knowledge to younger generations in schools, the core processes involved in making oneself vulnerable can be quite different. They can be anything from fulfilling a common school project together to being able to take care of family responsibilities outside of the school.

We claim that without understanding the kinds of tasks and practices in which the foundations for trust are built, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to formulate general trust scales that would work well enough in all work contexts. Similarly, as the predecessors of trust, trustworthiness evaluations are based on different kinds of merits. In one case trustworthiness can mean a high level of conformity – in another it can mean a lack of backbiting. We suggest that instead of taking as a starting point a model that is argued to be more or less universal, one may want to consider a more constructivist approach when beginning research in a new context. Improving trust relations in socially and culturally diverse workplaces will be difficult if one does not understand the relevant processes and conceptual elements in building trust in that specific context.

Our results clearly support approaching trust as a versatile concept. More than having just cognitive and affective forms as [McAllister \(1995\)](#) and [Dirks and Ferrin \(2002\)](#) have suggested, more extensive typologies, such as that of [Dietz and Den Hartog's \(2006\)](#), are more compatible with our study. Specifically, our analyses indicate that trust that can be categorized as knowledge-based, relational-based, and identification-based and can easily co-exist among co-workers, as well as within individuals and within one narrative. At the same time, when studying trust as a contextualised and locally produced phenomenon, it is difficult to neatly compartmentalise findings into a typology – regardless of how extensive the typology may be.

It seems that our analyses resonate with [Dietz and Den Hartog's \(2006\)](#) model while simultaneously pointing to some of its shortcomings. For example, knowledge-based trust (positive confidence based on prior predictability) was important in each national context, regardless of whether the interpersonal context was between teachers, or between teachers and principals. At the same time, we saw that predictability was built into processes that varied in each national context. In terms of relational-based trust, our analyses suggest that in one place the principal talking about a teacher like his or her own child can be an indication of very high trust. In another context it could be seen as too intimate, unprofessional, and thus suspicious or untrustworthy. Therefore, in order to understand trust more comprehensively it is vital that we account for the practices and interpersonal processes in which its meanings are entangled, and what the locally and situationally constructed meanings consist of.

In this study, we have tried to show that research on trust needs to be concerned not only with magnitude, but also with the manner in which trust is conceptualised and understood. Social representations of trust are formulated in the various context-dependent processes and practices of specific people's interactions. Without taking into consideration these processes and practices, the manner in which they are intricately linked to conceptions of trust, as well as the conceptions themselves, will likely result in difficulties in attempts at building or improving trust. In other words, there must be a common point of reference in order for those involved to be able to deal with the topic without encountering a continuum of misunderstandings. Our study offers valuable insight to researchers and practitioners whose aim is to promote workplace trust; perhaps particularly those with workers from different cultural backgrounds.

## Notes

i) The participants are identified as follows: FG = focus group, T = teacher, P = principal, I = interviewer, and the numbers refer to either the focus group number or the participant number. It is important to point out that the teacher numbers in the focus groups never correspond to the numbers given to the teachers that were interviewed individually. For instance, a teacher identified as FG7\_T1 would not be the same participant as T1. The rounded number of students and exact success percentages presented by one interviewee were changed to NNs to protect the anonymity of the interviewee.

ii) *Chamcha* is a derogatory term that refers to people who aspire to get close to authorities, and which can be translated into English as 'ass kisser'.

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## Competing Interests

The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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## Author Contributions

The first two authors have contributed equally to the article.

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## Appendix

All of the semi-structured interview questions were first presented in terms of trust between teachers. The frame then switched and the questions were then given again in terms of trust between teachers and principals. "How do you feel about the level of trust between [teachers / teachers and principals] in your own school (high, low, good, bad, something else, compared to what, etc.)?"; "Is trust among [teachers / teachers and principals] something which just exists or not or is it built somehow?"; "What is trust based upon, or how is it built? What consequences are there if there is trust between [teachers / teachers and principals]? How does it affect your daily work?"; "What consequences are there if there is no trust between [teachers / teachers and principals]? How does it affect your daily work?"; "What creates (or might create) distrust between [teachers / teachers and principals]?"; "Can trust be lost between [teachers / teachers and principals]? If not, why not? If yes, how?"; "If it is lost, can it be recovered? If yes, how? If not, why not?"; "Can there be too much trust between [teachers / teachers and

principals]?”; “Do [teachers / principals] ever try to fake they are trustworthy? Do they try to show they can be trusted when they actually can't be? Do they try to look more trustworthy than they really are?”; What kind of things make you feel that you are trusted or not trusted by your [colleagues / teachers / principals]?”; “Are there differences between primary and secondary schools (in your country or city) considering the level of trust between [teachers / teachers and principals]?”

The interviewees were then presented with two fictitious cases that they were asked to discuss. The teachers' first case was presented in the following way: “The teachers hear that there will be a new principal in their school. They start to ponder and discuss whether they can trust him/her. What kind of things do they probably discuss about? Why? What kinds of clues tell them whether the new principal can be trusted or not? Why?” The teachers' second case was presented as follows: “think about a situation, where the principal has previously been well trusted, but now the teachers do not anymore trust him/her. What do the participants think, what has happened, why don't the teachers trust the principal anymore?”

The principals' first case was as follows: “You are hiring a new teacher and you have almost made up your mind, but then you start to think if you can trust him/her. What kind of things do you probably think about? Why? What kinds of clues tell you whether the new teachers can be trusted or not? Why?” The principals' second case was as follows: “You have previously trusted a teacher in your school but now you do not anymore trust him/her. What do you think, what has happened, why don't you trust this teacher anymore?”