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Defining and Identifying Distrust in Educational Settings

In the fall of 2015, a coalition of community activists initiated a thirty-four-day hunger strike to protest the closing of Walter H. Dyett High School in Chicago. This action shone a spotlight on the issue of school closures and their impact on local communities. The extreme response of calling for a hunger strike in response to a school closure illustrates the power and poignancy of unaddressed distrust in impeding educational change.

A HUNGER STRIKE AS A RESPONSE TO THE CLOSURE OF DYETT HIGH SCHOOL

Dyett High School is located in the Bronzeville community on Chicago's South Side, an area that has been the cultural hub for African Americans since their arrival as a part of the Great Migration from the South nearly a century ago. Dyett was the last open-enrollment neighborhood school in an area that has seen rapid demographic shifts due to new housing policies and a dramatic decrease in school-age youth.¹ Sometimes called comprehensive schools, open-enrollment schools admit all students in a neighborhood, rather than selecting students according to certain criteria. After a four-year phaseout that diminished its resources, prevented new students from enrolling, and led teachers to leave, Dyett High School had closed its

doors the previous spring with a graduating class of just thirteen students. Some students who had attended Dyett left for other schools, often traveling miles to reach them. To fulfill the requirements needed for graduation, the remaining students were required to take online courses—including an online gym course—to supplement the few courses still offered. Teachers departed in the middle of the year, afraid that they would not find a job if they stayed any longer.

Parents and community members protested that without this open-enrollment school in their community, there would be few options for their children; the nearby schools included a selective high school, a contract school run by a private operator, and a school that was outside of the neighborhood attendance zone. To attract national attention and underscore their grievances against the district office, school board, and mayor, community activists called for a hunger strike. Twelve people refused to eat until their grievances were addressed; and the number of supporters went well beyond those individuals.

Chicago was no stranger to radical action in support of education. In the fall of 2012, an extended teacher strike had garnered unprecedented support by parents and community members. The following May, the district closed fifty schools—one of the largest number of school closings at a single time in the United States, affecting twelve thousand students—despite citywide protests and the occupation of buildings by parents. Some of the closed schools were replaced by charter schools, further fueling the anger and distrust of parents and activists who feared the loss of local control over their children's education. Adding to the outrage, the closed schools were disproportionately located in African American neighborhoods.² Although these events can be interpreted along multiple dimensions, I understand them as representative of the growing distrust between communities and district officials, two groups struggling to enact lasting educational change.

Although the distrust expressed by the community members toward the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) authorities was most visible, the mayor, the district's CEO, and the board in turn distrusted the vocal Chicago Teachers Union and the community activists. This reciprocal distrust should be understood in the context of a hierarchy and imbalance of power. The community was represented by several powerful grassroots organizations with

a history of challenging the authority of the mayor and his school board. For instance, earlier that same summer, the Rainbow/PUSH Coalition, which was affiliated with the strike, challenged the district's proposals for closing schools and, in particular, their selection of which schools to close and which to expand. The Coalition's history of grassroots actions fed the reciprocal distrust in the debate over Dyett High School. The mayor and CEO wielded greater decision-making power and their solutions appeared to intentionally favor the participation of some members of the community over others. Naming the distrust on both sides—including the history, surrounding politics, local context, power dynamics, and interpersonal missteps that indicated a lack of respect for the dignity of individuals—might have made it possible to address the distrust through honest dialogue. Instead, there was an impasse that lasted for days.

DEFINING DISTRUST

Distrust is often defined as the absence of trust and is frequently equated with suspicion and doubt. In relation to education reform, it can be parsed in several different ways: as a disposition and characteristic of individuals; a set of behaviors or actions that promulgate negative reactions and feelings, including disconnection; or an attribute of particular contexts and institutional arrangements.³ Typically, in conflict situations, parties distrust each other. The events that transpired in Chicago—which are emblematic of growing discord across the country in response to the privatization of schools and the rise of high-stakes testing as the primary form of student and teacher assessment—reflect the three types of distrust identified and elaborated on in this book: relational, structural, and contextual distrust.

Relational distrust is grounded in interpersonal relationships that are characterized by unpredictability and unreliability. It is the most frequently recognized form of distrust and often masks the other two forms of distrust: structural and contextual distrust. In other words, people often identify individuals and institutions as untrustworthy, when in fact, there are structural or contextual antecedents. The remedy for relational distrust in educational settings is often to simply replace the distrusted person or change the institution rather than to examine and address the political and historical causes of that distrust.

Structural distrust is connected to local politics and consequential decisions made by politicians and others in authority. Structural distrust is embedded in hierarchies and bureaucratic structures or policies and is characterized by an imbalance of power that undermines participation by local communities. This type of distrust often stems from top-down decisions.

Finally, *contextual distrust* arises from local interactions that have persisted over time, often between members of various ethnic and racial groups, and is also inflected by power. It is situated in the sociocultural, historical, and political contexts of schools and communities.

Although relational distrust often appears to be the most prevalent and the easiest to identify, the various forms of distrust are frequently interwoven. In fact, when relational distrust causes deep, enduring damage, it is almost always connected to one or both of the other forms of distrust. While simple relational distrust can sometimes be remediated by building trusting relationships, more enduring relational distrust demands that the political and historical roots of the distrust are addressed if there is to be lasting change. All of these dynamics were apparent in the conflict over Dyett High School.

RELATIONAL, STRUCTURAL, AND CONTEXTUAL DISTRUST IN THE DYETT HIGH SCHOOL CONFLICT

The distrust that fueled the conflict over the future of Dyett High School had deep roots in local structures, conflicts, and relationships, and was influenced by larger social dynamics, including national reform movements. It thus could not be remediated simply by substituting trust for distrust; that is, by reaching out, building coalitions, or supporting collaborative actions, important as those acts can be. The hierarchical sources of distrust were rooted in the imbalance of power between the authorities who made decisions and the community members who had to live with them. Policy makers may have had more success in resolving the issues behind the strike and associated discontent by examining the history of distrust between the community members and the mayor that was based on conflicts over housing policies and other issues in this neighborhood. And beyond acknowledging distrust, those in power might have drawn on the knowledge and resources

of the community itself to repair it. Lasting educational change only occurs when both parties grapple with the actions that engender distrust.

The Dyett strike was linked to past injustices experienced by Chicago's African American community and similar communities across the country whose schools have been consistently underfunded and neglected for decades. It was also connected to the vital importance of education in Bronzeville. As one of the leaders of the strike, Jitu Brown, explained, "Even when we were in slavery, black people fought for schools . . . Our ancestors evacuated the South to come here, to find a better life for their children . . . The institution that our ancestors fought for and won—we've got to reclaim it."⁴ Such statements emphasized the the strikers' connections to larger social justice movements in which African Americans fought for control over their own schools, as well as other poverty-related issues such as adequate health care, jobs, and housing. In choosing to wage a hunger strike, protesters drew on practices African Americans have historically used to preserve their dignity while mobilizing in support of their deeply held beliefs.

Brown and his colleagues distrusted the CPS Board of Education's decision-making process, declaring that it was rigged against the community's interests. They sought to bring national attention to the decisions about their school as well as the plight of many schools that once served Chicago's African American and Latinx communities. The CEO and the board countered that the growing budget deficit, coupled with changing demographics, necessitated school closings. Both groups claimed that their solutions were in the children's best interests. Each group raised questions about the other side's ethics, values, and understanding of the situation.

The hunger strike ended after thirty-four days, with the strikers declaring victory in having drawn national and international attention to the inequities of an education system that neglected its working-class black and brown communities. Throughout the strike, the activists had repeatedly claimed that they did not trust the board members—who were not residents of their community and operated from a position of authority rather than local knowledge—to make decisions about their children.

The underlying distrust stemmed from the way that the board developed a compromise solution without the input of the hunger strikers, reflecting their allegiance to the mayor; the coalition supporting the strike claimed

that the board's solution was put together too hastily and did not reflect the vision that the community had developed based on six years of deliberation. The community felt shut out of the decision-making process and silenced by it. Distrust was located in the structures that vested the power to make decisions in outsiders rather than in people with local knowledge.

Relational Distrust in the Closing of Dyett

Relational distrust is often personal and arises when an individual or group does not believe that the decisions or actions of other individuals and groups of people are based on a shared set of values or principles. Relational distrust was evident in nearly all of the interactions between administrators, teachers, parents, students, board members, and school district officials in relation to the closing of Dyett High School. The decision to initiate a hunger strike rather than to continue to engage in conversation illustrated the relational distrust the protesters felt toward the authorities and their decision-making processes. In trying to reach a compromise, the mayor, CEO, and selected board members attempted to address the distrust by claiming that their plan represented "the opportunity for a unique, world-class high school on the south side." The CEO of Chicago Public Schools, Forrest Claypool, explained, "Working with community partners, we arrived at a solution that meets multiple needs: creating an open-enrollment neighborhood high school, producing an enrollment stream that can weather population changes, filling the critical demand for an arts high school on the south side and working with education leaders to create a technology hub."⁵ This compromise, however, was initially not acceptable to the activists. Importantly, it did not name and address the district's distrust of the community groups. In addition, it did not take into account the depth of that distrust and its structural and contextual roots, including the race and class positions of the protestors. Rather than explicitly naming the source of the discord, the district leaders proposed a solution that silenced the group that had brought the problem to the fore. While the compromise may have addressed some of the community's surface concerns, it intentionally excluded the protestors from contributing to the solution and did not recognize the dignity the hunger strikers sought to assert in their decision to embark on a hunger strike.

Dyett's closing affected many individuals, while also reflecting a larger social pattern of school closures. Community activists across the country have claimed that school closures and charter school expansions disproportionately affect African American and Latinx students. When a school closes, a set of community relationships is lost and community members's lives are significantly affected. Schools contain histories of individuals and families, orienting people to their geographic locale in deeply personal ways and serving as an anchor for the community. The relational distrust that stemmed from the closure of Dyett High School came from both a decision-making process that ignored this history, including the individuals who lost their school.

Structural Distrust in the Closing of Dyett

The relational distrust among the stakeholders involved in the set of decisions concerning Dyett High School was tightly connected to both structural and contextual distrust. The decision-making powers and processes of the mayor-appointed school board were a critical component of the structural distrust. The board members and school district officials responsible for this school closing—along with a large number of closings in 2013—made the decisions *for* rather than *with* the community. Structural distrust reflects hierarchical decision-making in which those in power make decisions for those in less powerful positions, often ignoring their dreams or demands. If authorities, such as the school board, simply address the relational distrust without articulating the structural causes, distrust will persist. In Chicago, the hunger strikers' demands went beyond a distrust of the relationships between the community and the authorities and the anger over Dyett's closure; they were also connected to a fight for local control of the school board. When the strike ended, the organizers turned their attention to this new battleground.

Unlike 98 percent of the school districts in the United States and all the other districts in Illinois, Chicago has never had an elected school board; its members have been appointed by a variety of methods since 1872 and, since 1995, solely by the mayor, after the state legislature gave the mayor full authority over the Chicago Public Schools. Among several important findings in their examination of the history and record of the Chicago Board of

Education, Pauline Lipman and her colleagues concluded that “[m]ayoral control and Board structures and processes limit public input and democratic accountability. The Board has been markedly unresponsive to outpourings of public opposition to its policies and essentially indifferent to advice and proposals of parents, teachers, and others with expert knowledge and who have a primary stake in students’ education.”⁶

Mayoral control of school boards is often associated with top-down decisions and heightened one-way accountability measures, such as the use of test scores to evaluate teachers, school closures in response to low student test scores, and the application of business models to education. In the United States, participatory democracy is thought to be a hallmark of local governments and institutions.⁷ Thus, in contrast to appointed boards, elected school boards are associated with greater democracy and the public role in the governance of public schools. When public institutions limit local participation or govern without seeking input from local stakeholders, there is often distrust in the decision-making processes and in the people who make the decisions.

Appointed school boards, first introduced in the 1980s and 1990s, are generally imposed on struggling districts by governors as a solution to persistent poor financial management or concerns about academic achievement, generally measured by scores on tests given by the state. Several other reform measures that have been developed at the federal, state, and local levels seek to achieve the same goals. As I discuss in chapter 3, these reform measures are often undercut by the distrust that they engender. For instance, the reforms that are typically supported by appointed boards and designed to promote school change often create distrust among teachers, parents, and community members who are unhappy with decisions made by people who are considered outsiders and unaware of the needs of the children and youth served by the schools.

Contextual Distrust in the Closing of Dyett

In addition to the structural distrust that shaped the interactions between the community and the board, the history and politics of the district were integral to the contextual distrust experienced by the community activists. The hunger strike arose from distrust tied to the local context of Chicago

Public Schools and specifically to neighborhood surrounding Dyett High School. A report prepared by Public Agenda in 2012 identified a legacy of distrust as the first of five tensions that characterize the response to reform by the Chicago community of parents, teachers, and educators: “Although CPS has recently taken steps to incorporate community concerns and improve communication, many parents, teachers and community leaders bring a long history of skepticism and distrust to the table. They wonder whether recent attempts to reach out are genuine and whether the District has any long-term commitment to them.”⁸

Adding to their distrust of the board, the community felt a strong desire for a high school in their neighborhood that reflected their own historical legacy of artists and activists. In the 1920s, Bronzeville was well known because of its many prominent African American artists, entertainers, and activists, including dancer Katherine Dunham, journalist and social activist Ida B. Wells, musician Louis Armstrong, author Richard Wright, and poet Gwendolyn Brooks.⁹ The high school itself was named after Walter H. Dyett, a music teacher and violinist in the Chicago Public Schools, who taught such well-known musicians as Nat King Cole and Dinah Washington. The community did not feel that the compromise proposed by the board took account of this history and legacy.

The board’s decision to close Dyett because of the area’s changing demographics increased the distrust of the community, who felt that their neighborhoods had been consistently undermined for years. They also felt disenfranchised from the political process that failed to rebuild affordable housing, as promised, leading to the closure of their high school. Their distrust in the political process was tied to a history of political exclusion in several arenas, a diminishing of public services, and the quality of their lives.

The responses to the Chicago school closings might have led to a more enduring solution valued by all constituents, if the contextual distrust was clearly articulated by both the strikers and the school authorities, if the dignity of each group was recognized, and if the response was more explicitly tied to local and historical contexts. The coalition that supported the strike included community organizations such as Kenwood Oakland Community Organization (KOCO) and the Journey for Justice Alliance (J4J), two groups

with long histories of activism in Chicago. Both groups have historically positioned themselves against Chicago's recent mayors, including Mayor Rahm Emanuel and his administration, which may have led the mayor and board to construct a solution that did not include them in the compromise. Naming and acknowledging the distrust as an issue and exploring the local contours of the distrust, including its historical and political antecedents, would have made an amicable and lasting resolution to the perceived educational injustice more likely.

In selecting their form of protest, the hunger strikers looked to history. Hunger strikes have long been used by African Americans and other disenfranchised groups to call attention to injustices in the United States and around the world. Africans starved themselves during the Middle Passage to America to protest their enslavement. Imprisoned Freedom Riders staged hunger strikes to protest their wrongful imprisonment. In Chicago, on Mother's Day in 2001, fourteen mothers and grandmothers in Little Village, a Latinx section of Chicago, staged a hunger strike that led to the opening of a new social justice-focused high school in their Mexican community, Little Village Lawndale High School. The strikers demanded that the district fulfill its promise to build a new high school to serve their growing neighborhood, whose only high school was overcrowded and crossed two gang territories. This action was launched for similar reasons to the Dyett hunger strike: in response to a situation where families felt betrayed by the CPS officials. The distrust expressed by the strikers was not simply anger at the mayor and other officials, it reflected a history of disappointment and harm by authorities.

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To create positive and lasting change grounded in trusting relationships, one strategy for those in charge is to uncover, acknowledge, honestly name, and directly address the genesis and sources of the distrust. If this is not done, the solutions will be fleeting, because the persistence of distrust can impede positive change and reform. The Chicago school board had a plan to address its fiscal difficulties by closing schools that they identified as underenrolled and underperforming. The Bronzeville community, for social and historical

reasons, wanted to hold on to a neighborhood school. They felt that it was the last vestige of connection to and identity with their once-flourishing section of Chicago. They valued an open-enrollment school that allowed all youth in the neighborhood to have access to education.

Each side distrusted the other's motives and actions for a variety of reasons. The board tried to indicate their own trustworthiness by suggesting a compromise: a school with a slightly different focus. The community, represented by the hunger strikers, read the offer as a dismissal of their demands and their stated interests. An analysis of the distrust of the hunger strikers would have encompassed an examination of the local history and context and also the national debate about school closings and privatization that grounded this conversation, a recognition of the structural distrust of an appointed board whose interests extended beyond the community, and an observation of the political, historical, and social contexts of the protest. Instead, there was a failed attempt to build relational trust with the hunger strikers.

DISTRUST, TRUST, AND EDUCATIONAL CHANGE

The three kinds of distrust I elaborate in this book, which are reflected in the narrative of the fight for Dyett High School, are prevalent in schools and across education systems in the United States. They are key to understanding why educational reform is so difficult. Teachers were once almost universally trusted by their students' parents. Today, all too often, teachers feel distrusted by both parents and administrators. They are often worried that they will be negatively judged and evaluated by their students' test scores, rather than trusted to teach children using their own experience and assessments. Likewise, principals are often concerned that their schools will be judged negatively by falling test scores—to the extent that several have cheated by changing students' test answers in attempts to hold onto school funding.¹⁰ These actions undermine the perceived value of teachers as professionals and principals as instructional leaders who observe, guide, and provide opportunities for teachers to continuously learn and grow to improve teaching and learning. An atmosphere of distrust makes this kind of learning nearly impossible.

Students and parents, as illustrated in the Dyett example, frequently feel unheard, their perspectives unsolicited or devalued in the race to privatize schools, balance budgets, and standardize teaching, curriculum, and assessment. The push to reform educational systems has ignored the ways these “reforms” create disequilibrium for the stakeholders who are necessary to enact the change, which in turn leads to distrust and prevents the change necessary for educational institutions that serve all students well.

Trust is an essential component in every teaching and learning interaction. Learning—on the part of students, teachers, and administrators—takes place only in an atmosphere of trust. Although trust is often linked to the smooth functioning of schools and classrooms, the role and prevalence of distrust in larger educational settings is rarely examined.¹¹ If trust is necessary for people to learn and change, the presence of distrust, or actions that lead to greater distrust, prevents change.

Trust can be understood as the glue in human relationships. To learn and to change, and to enact the reforms that are necessary to improve educational opportunities for students, it is essential to risk not knowing and make oneself vulnerable in order to truly learn as an individual, an institution, or a system. At the same time that learning something new is always built on what a person or institution already knows, it also always involves holding knowledge loosely and being open to the transformation of familiar ideas or the absorption of new ones; the process of opening oneself up to change requires a measure of trust. When teachers, students, and schools are tightly monitored—in other words, distrusted—it is impossible to imagine a successful process of change and the likely result is that the educational reform will fail.

Given the essential importance of trust in nearly all aspects of teaching and learning, the ubiquitous presence of relational, structural, and contextual distrust in educational institutions and among administrators, teachers, students, and parents is alarming. A climate of distrust makes change difficult, if not impossible, and works against the publicly stated desire for school reform and change. There is a fundamental tension between the trust required for teachers, principals, or other educators to

experiment with new ideas and the current policies and practices, which engender distrust.

THE PLAN OF THE BOOK

There is a general consensus that current US education reforms are failing. There is little evidence that educational opportunities for *all* students are getting better; many would say they are getting worse, especially for youth in the highest-poverty urban and rural areas. In this book, I describe the ways that many current education reforms engender distrust and how all too often reforms fail because unaddressed distrust prevents their successful implementation. I propose that the strategies we as a country have chosen to enact change undermine precisely those characteristics that would enable successful reform. While much has been written about trust, little has been written about distrust in educational contexts.¹² To explore how distrust is both created by and is an obstacle to reform, this book is organized around three detailed narratives, illustrating relational, contextual, and structural forms of distrust. Each of these narratives is based on detailed field notes I collected while working in each context. In addition, I relied on field notes collected by graduate students working with me in two of the contexts (Chester and Lebanon), interviews with a wide range of participants, and published documents from a wide range of sources.

I bring to this book my understanding as a teacher, scholar, and activist committed to providing opportunities for all children and youth to learn in contexts and through interactions that recognize their human dignity, as well as the historical injustices that have shaped educational opportunities in the past. I have worked for almost forty years as a classroom teacher, professor, researcher, and dean in P-12 and university settings. During the time that I taught and worked in leadership positions in these varied settings, I always worked to improve educational opportunities for all children and youth.

In the next three chapters, I explore the relationship between one particular form of distrust and educational change. In each narrative, I played various roles as both observer and participant. The stories include distrust of me as an outside researcher and of the institutions I represent, including

their historical and political relationship in the community. In each of these contexts, I also experienced moments of trust and possibility.

Relational distrust is foundational to all forms of distrust. In chapter 2, I illustrate how relational distrust works at the district level through an historical account of the churn of superintendents in Oakland, California, over the past eighteen years. Despite the initial trust accorded to superintendents who came from Oakland and those who were outsiders, I describe how, in each case, the local community came to distrust them. The public's distrust was directed toward the superintendents as individuals in the form of relational distrust; the analysis of the political, racial, and historical roots of the distrust was missing from the dialogue. In other words, in each case, structural and contextual distrust that lay underneath the relational distrust of an individual were ignored, and the superintendents were blamed for the failure of the reforms. Because the superintendents unsuccessfully addressed the structural and contextual components of the community's distrust when they entered their positions, they were unable to enact the lasting change they desired.

The narrative of chapter 3 is located in Chester, Pennsylvania, and illustrates structural distrust. Chester is home to one of the poorest and lowest-performing districts in the state. It has repeatedly drawn the attention of the national media for its inability to pay its teachers and the teachers' decision to work without compensation. In each instance, at the last minute, the local court has ordered the state to give the district money to prevent this from happening. The financial distress and academic decline of the Chester Upland School District led to a state takeover in 1994. I was a member of an Education Empowerment Board or school board, appointed by the governor, which oversaw the district between 2007 and 2010. Despite our efforts to build trust with individual community members, we discovered that the distrust in the district was structural, located in the existence of an oversight board that did not trust the community to run its schools. Our efforts as an appointed board to enact lasting change ultimately failed, in part because we focused primarily on building trust rather than directly addressing the distrust embedded in the structural and political nature of our appointment.

In chapter 4, drawing on professional development work I conducted in Lebanon with Palestinian principals, I explore the historical and contextual nature of distrust. Palestinians live in Lebanon in a climate of insecurity and distrust, and the principals' distrust came from the particular local, historical, economic, and political contexts of living and working within the refugee camps of Lebanon. They brought their political and factionalized relationships to the workshops and were unable to break out of the patterns of deep distrust to engage in the collective problem-solving processes that we introduced. In addition to building trust, it became clear that we needed to directly acknowledge the contextual distrust that shaped their actions. Professional development is a key lever to educational change. All too often, professional development is conceptualized as a one-time training session that does not take into account the local context and the complexity of enacting new ideas. This chapter explores these ideas in a particular context in Lebanon, drawing parallels to the United States.

In chapter 5, I use the lens of distrust developed in the initial chapters to critically examine how distrust has shaped several key educational policies, as well as their fates. In this chapter, I briefly review the recent history of educational reform in the United States to explore the consequences of the three types of distrust for efforts to shift educational practice. Through an analysis of key moments of educational reform over the past few decades, I argue that the failure of each reform movement to address structural inequalities is connected to its basis in blame and a deficit perspective that ultimately lead to distrust. I begin by describing two sets of reforms: policies that focus on the achievement of equal opportunity and access to schooling for all students and strategies that emphasize global competitiveness through greater accountability and curricular reform. I argue that the failure of these reforms led to a third set of policies: the current market-based reforms. As in the other chapters, I argue that the inattention to the role of distrust in educational change has contributed to cycles of failure that are evident in the history of educational reform.

In chapter 6, I describe approaches to education change that have addressed distrust. Here, I argue for education reformers to resist quick fixes and pay attention to the elements of time and collaboration in the reform

process. In addition, I discuss how essential it is to recognize the dignity of children, teachers, and communities in order to address distrust. Through contrasting stories of reform in New Jersey—in Union City and Newark—I examine what happens when distrust is addressed through slow, thoughtful work with local teachers and in classrooms as occurred in Union City, as compared with Newark’s approach of bringing in outside consultants and attempting to make changes quickly without community input. In addition, I provide examples that illustrate several ways to address distrust including: honoring the knowledge teachers bring to teaching and policy making; building on children’s capacity for learning; creating solutions with the community defined broadly rather than imposing solutions from the outside; and creating educational spaces that honor people’s dignity.

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Across the United States and throughout much of the world, there is a general feeling of dissatisfaction with the educational opportunities available to children and youth, particularly those living in high-poverty urban and rural areas. The public often casts the blame for the failure of P–12 schools on teachers, families, public schools themselves, and, most recently, schools of education. Social scientists widen the list of causes of the failing educational system to include poverty and social inequality. Responding to the belief that schools are not serving all children well, policy makers have offered numerous strategies or educational reforms, which the general public often views with great skepticism. These strategies come from policy makers who may or may not have expertise or experience in schools and, increasingly, come from wealthy foundations and individuals. Beneath the discussion of possible solutions lies persistent and somewhat intractable feelings of distrust. The distrust is directed at various people and institutions and expressed in the blame voters ascribe to US public schools for failing to provide a high-quality education for all children and youth, particularly those living in high-poverty communities. Education policies are often based on blame and distrust and, in turn, all too frequently perpetuate more distrust.

Social science surveys in the United States have documented a steady decline of trust in the past several decades. Recent polls show that the

United States is becoming a less trusting society, with youth more distrustful of government, educational institutions, and religious institutions today than in our recent past.¹³ This is hardly surprising, as there has been much written and discussed about the pervasive distrust in the United States and around the world, especially of politicians and governmental leaders. In the United States, people have ascribed Donald Trump's successful bid for the White House to his ability to connect to the public's distrust of government and public institutions. Positioning himself as an outsider, he captured this sentiment and translated it into several of his proposed policies, including building a wall between the United States and Mexico to keep out immigrants, as well as his assertion of the unreliability of many public institutions, including the media and the justice system. At the same time, during the campaign, the media regularly reported that both Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump were among the most distrusted political candidates to run for president of the United States.

Whether the prevailing distrust has arisen from the economic crisis of 2008 or other factors, there is little doubt that it is a destabilizing force that extends to schools and educational contexts. And while distrust is a much-discussed issue in political circles at this moment in the United States, it is a product of decades of decisions and relationships between those with political power and those without resources in this country. Likewise, the various instances of distrust in education are more visible today, yet they have deep historical roots that require sustained and collective work. This book posits that the desire to quickly build trust through activities or a focus on relationships is simply not enough. It is strategies that foster human dignity, while acknowledging and working toward reparation of each of the three types of distrust, that can help school leaders, parents, policy makers, and students to reenvision a path forward for educational change.