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Dealing With Religious Intolerance



In this case, a principal faced with issues of diversity looks to the school's traditions and its Mission Statement for inspiration. Commentators Judith Lessow-Hurley, Lyn Miller-Lachmann, Poonam C. Dev, and Harold Brathwaite examine issues of religious diversity, school policies, equity, and parental communication. Although a principal must be a strong leader, collaboration must be an essential element in creating meaningful educational partnerships.

❖ THINKING AHEAD

As you read this chapter, reflect on the following questions and issues:

- Consider the attitudes, skills, and experience of the principal in this case.
- What dilemmas occur at this school?

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- Consider the diverse cultures in the school, and explain what significant role they play in the formation of the dilemmas in the case.
- What are the pressure points in the case? Why do they occur?

“Jesus Christ is a wicked man,” announces one student to another. “Yeah, and Allah is evil; He kills people,” is the immediate response. Cindy Greenshaw overhears two fourth-grade elementary students arguing and preparing to fight—students who are usually best friends. Shocked, Cindy freezes in her shoes. She cannot believe what she has just witnessed. In an environment where inclusion of all cultures and faiths is honored, a school where students are taught to celebrate and respect one another, these exclamations surprise, alarm, and anger her. She reflects that these statements are certainly not about peace on earth and goodwill to all people. She stops and ponders for a moment—What season is this? It is, indeed, the end of Ramadan, marked by the celebration of Eid ul-Fitr, and the beginning of Christmas, the Festival of Lights season.

I put down the phone in my office, after having had a rather lengthy conversation with the chair of the Parent Advisory Council about the tenets of Islam, equity, and the curriculum. I feel confident about the conversation. I know my knowledge is grounded in school governance, and I feel reassured and satisfied with my response to her queries.

Interrupting my thoughts, a familiar knock on my office door breaks into my reverie. I hear, “Have you got a minute?” I look up to see the faces of two very concerned teachers. Having been an administrator for more than 8 years, I immediately know the underlying meaning of “Have you got a minute?” It translates into “I need you for an hour or three!”

The two teachers, Mrs. Greenshaw and Mrs. Bhadra, are visibly upset. Mrs. Greenshaw begins, “We need to talk to you about a problem. I overheard Roberta and Mohammed in Miss Wong’s class, and I was disturbed by their conversation. She relates the confrontation she observed. For a moment, the room is silent, but Mrs. Greenshaw’s trembling voice gives her away as she looks at me for support, “I don’t know what to do.”

Mrs. Bhadra adds, “I, too, had a rather disturbing conversation with one of our volunteer moms, Mrs. Ali, Rose’s mom. She came to see me today, and she was furious because I was teaching Rose Christmas carols. I tried to explain to her that for the Festival Of Lights assembly,

each grade presents a different festival to the rest of the school, and this year the second graders were doing Christmas. I stressed that the staff endeavor to teach from an antiracist perspective to ensure that all the students can experience a variety of cultural experiences. I showed her how we embed diversity into the curriculum, allotting time equally so that no one culture is left out or elevated more than another. Therefore, during the month of December, we are busy every day with preparations and presentations for Diwali, Christmas, Ramadan and Eid ul-Fitr, Posada, Hanukkah, and Kwanza celebrations, and each grade takes responsibility to teach and inform the rest of the school about one particular culture.

I outlined our integrated approach that links all the areas of the curriculum. I even elaborated how students and teachers invite prominent people from each culture to come in and speak in-depth to the students. For example, we had invited an Imam to visit during Ramadan. The Muslim parents in the community even worked with the school to organize a big Eid ul-Fitr luncheon. And we brought in Jewish storytellers to tell the story of Hanukkah. As a school, we go beyond the eating of ethnic foods, listening to ethnic music, and the wearing of ethnic clothing. We certainly go way beyond the "holidays and heroes" approach so our students can begin to comprehend diversity.

I even reminded her that last year, when the second grade's festival was Ramadan, she had come in and helped me with the preparations. Mrs. Bhadra, who speaks with such passion, is almost in tears, "My goodness, Mrs. Ali was so hostile." I could tell that Mrs. Bhadra felt her belief and value system was under attack.

Every year around Christmastime, as the school population increases and the demographics change, we fall into the routine of this sort of tension. Lately, religion takes center stage as the initiator of conflicts. I think about the list of complaints: Muslim parents refusing to send their children to school to celebrate Christmas; one critic returning his son's weekly spelling list because the sheet was decorated with a Santa Claus; others complaining about carol singing, especially if Jesus's name is mentioned. Yet, for many of the students, especially the Spanish-speaking students whose families celebrate Posada, the baby Jesus plays a big part in their tradition. So how could we even consider censoring His name?

I glance across my desk to see two good women, fine and admirable teachers, so angry, so frustrated, now depleted, and at a loss for words. As I listen to their concerns, I realize the potential of this problem.

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As a staff, we are all committed to having a strong sense of equity and social justice. It is embedded in our Mission Statement and in everything that we value as a staff, hence the teachers' frustration. As a Band-Aid solution to reassure them that our value system is not faulty, I engage the teachers in a dialogue about equity and commitment. Mrs. Greenshaw, a new teacher, looks puzzled and unsure as she makes this comment: "Are we really doing the right thing?" I quote from the school's Mission Statement to support the position we take at our school.

Commitment to equitable and respectful treatment is very important in a school like ours, as the ethnic, religious, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds are as diverse as the United Nations. We have students from Somalia, the English-speaking Caribbean, South and Southeast Asia, Latin America, Europe, Kuwait, Iraq, Afghanistan, the Ukraine, and Russia. There are over 25 different nationalities! Interestingly, 85 percent of our students are born to immigrant parents. Fifteen percent of our students are themselves immigrants or refugees, newly arrived and intending to become citizens when their residency period has been fulfilled. We celebrate diversity daily.

On most days, I know that our students get along fairly well. My mind moves from the students to the staff as I question how well prepared the staff members were to manage this kind of direct attack on diverse values, curriculum expectations, teaching practice, and students' learning? I exhale slowly and review our teaching strategies.

We believe in the teaching of inclusion from all aspects. The staff takes pride in ensuring that the students see themselves not only in the classroom, but also in the curriculum. We use materials and human resources that reinforce and validate our students' life experiences. We take great care to make certain that learning experiences are relevant and connected to the students' lives. With that philosophical approach, how can this conversation be taking place among my students at this particular school? I ruminate. Where is this coming from? What or who is fueling this kind of intolerance?

My mind races back to the potential "forest fire" that I might be facing. To calm myself, I reflect on the players who have perpetuated this dilemma. I could imagine Rose's parents, who are devoutly religious, asking, "Has Allah ever been insulted?" I could imagine the diatribe of Mrs. Cortez, the chair of the Parent Advisory Council, if she got wind that Jesus's name was being defamed. My mind's eye captures her, always handing out Christian pamphlets to the secretaries and the teachers. She prides herself on knowing her rights and taking every

opportunity to let the staff know that she has the ears of the school trustee and superintendent and intends to act when she thinks that she has a cause to complain, complain, complain.

This situation troubles me further. If it had occurred under my former superintendent, I would not have felt overly concerned. She understood the complexities of equity, poverty, and the ongoing tensions of managing a diverse school. She had expressed her support, and I had earned her respect and trust. She would say, "I have confidence in your abilities and skills as an educational leader. I wondered, however, about the present superintendent; brand new to the family of schools, what would her reaction be? I doubt that she will laugh it off, asserting her trust in my reputation and ability. Perhaps she will also be terrified of provoking a forest fire and micromanage, undermining my management skills. I feel the weight of the world on my shoulders. There is no way of knowing how she will react.

I slump down in my chair, refocusing not on the complaints, but on our guiding philosophy, one I truly believe in. We live in a multicultural society. We have to model respect for all human beings. Children, I believe, are capable of acknowledging other religions, without feeling they are being converted.

In spite of my lofty aspirations, I wondered, how then does a school cope with this kind of intolerance when it comes from the home? How can public schools adequately prepare children to live in a global society?

❖ EXPLORING THE CASE

A principal with 20 years of experience wrote this case.

Identification

Identify the key facts of this case. What factual events are central to understanding the situation? Identify the dilemmas and tensions in this case. Explore the main aspects of each dilemma and tension.

Analysis

Analyze the issue(s) from the viewpoints of the different people in the case. Identify and compare the clash between parental and school values. Why is it important for the principal to present strong leadership?

Evaluation

Examine critically the principal's strategies for handling the challenge(s). Does the principal depicted fulfill, fall short, or surpass your notion of the role of a community leader?

Alternative Solutions

Were there alternate solutions or strategies available to deal with the school's dilemmas? Generate alternative solutions to the ones presented in the narrative. Take into consideration risks, benefits, long- and short-term consequences of each proposed action.

Reflection

The principal is very philosophical at the end of the story, moving outwards to thoughts on diversity and its place in the larger scheme of life. Has anything been resolved or learned through the school's experience?

Changing Opinions

Consider your thoughts and assumptions at the beginning of the chapter. Who or what has caused you to consider a new way of thinking? How strongly do you still feel about your previous assumptions?

Synthesis

Synthesize your understanding of this case into a statement. What is this a case of?

❖ EXPLORING THE ISSUES**Religious Diversity**

Hurley says, "This case explores . . . value systems." She juxtaposes the notions of schools being responsive to *or* reflecting diverse religions. In this situation, which is the case: responsive or reflective, both, or neither? Why is either stance problematic for multicultural groups?

Collaboration

Hurley provides many suggestions for bringing together the school community; however, the students appear to be left out of the debate on religious diversity. How could they become educational partners and have their learning impacted at the same time? What model could be created that could benefit student learning?

Multiple Perspectives

Hurley provides several resources to remedy the conflict in her commentary. How could these resources contribute to conversations on a Parents' Night or even stimulate a resolution of school conflicts? How would resources such as these begin to explore "erroneous assumptions?"

Case Commentary by Judith Lessow-Hurley

Bullivant (1993) suggests that human beings construct culture to respond to physical, social, and metaphysical environments. Adaptations to the metaphysical environment, which include our religious assumptions and practices, are perhaps the deepest and most difficult to discern. This case explores the conflicts that can arise when public school assumptions and practices conflict with those deeply held value systems.

The case raises a key dilemma: If indeed, religion is an essential adaptation to a particular environment, in other words, if religion is an essential aspect of culture, is it possible to create a school environment that is reflective of and responsive to diverse communities without some acknowledgement of religion? For example, is a classroom for students with Mexican heritage truly responsive if it denies the Virgin of Guadalupe, patron saint of Mexico? On the other hand, can the curriculum acknowledge religion in the classroom without promoting one faith tradition over another, or without promoting religion in general?

The principal and school in this case have acknowledged that it is important to teach students about religious traditions. This is most appropriately addressed with sensitivity in the social studies, art, and music. Bringing in community members and clerics, however, to describe their faith traditions is problematic. There is always a risk that

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even well briefed speakers will promote or be perceived as promoting their particular faiths.

Religion in American Life (Oxford University Press) is an excellent series of books designed for middle school and secondary students that includes nine volumes about significant world religions. *Taking Religion Seriously Across the Curriculum* (Nord & Haynes, 1998) offers thoughtful guidelines and useful guidelines about how to incorporate religion into the curriculum in manners that are both content and age appropriate.

Despite a stated desire to avoid the “tacos and chitlins” approach to multiculturalism, this school overemphasizes holidays, and in doing so, has opened itself to justifiable criticism and controversy. In their approach, the principal and teachers are making assumptions about what constitutes normal assumptions and practice. For example, December is not everyone’s “holiday season.” To assume so is to engage in a subtle but important form of “Christo-centricity.” Jews, for example, celebrate the High Holy Days of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur in the fall. Because of the nature of the lunar calendar and the way Muslims keep time, Ramadan can occur in any season. The principal’s perspective is restated in a comment later in the discussion: “Every year around Christmastime . . . we fall into the routine of this sort of tension.” The principal appears unaware that it’s not Christmas-time for everyone.

Also, the nature of the holiday celebration in the school suggests erroneous assumptions about the comparable magnitude and nature of various celebrations. For example, whereas Hanukkah has taken on greater significance in recent years, it is still considered a minor festival. If the school were to oblige a Jewish holiday with significance comparable to that of Christmas, it would probably be Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year. Any attempt to honor holiday celebrations in the curriculum must be based in true understanding of the meaning and importance of those celebrations.

Responding to a parent’s concern about the use of an image of Santa Claus on a child’s paper, the principal expresses surprise that a parent might take offense. Although Santa Claus is certainly a secular figure, there can hardly be any doubt that the image is associated with Christmas. This approach is insensitive to the experience of a member of a minority faith community in December, when the world is awash in images of Christmas, which is, ultimately, a religious holiday.

This school’s administration and faculty might consider rethinking their approach to introducing religion into the curriculum. To that end, they might

- Reflect on the ways that they introduce religion covertly. Considering religious traditions only in December is one example, marking papers with Santa Claus images, another. It's easy to imagine that these are but two of many ways that this school communicates an exclusionary point of view.
- Consider how to carefully introduce religion overtly, in the social studies, music, and art curricula.
- Work on strategies for introducing religious traditions to young students. Although best practice suggests experiential learning, role-playing and acting out religious practices can be controversial, and hands-on activities have to be approached with caution.
- Move away from holiday celebrations and discussion of traditions in keeping with holiday calendars and encourage teaching about religion, as it is relevant to historical and social content.
- Develop a basic understanding of the world's major religious traditions, as well as any religious traditions represented in the school population. It is almost impossible to develop in-depth knowledge of faith traditions without years of study, but familiarity will assist teachers in avoiding pitfalls and engage students in learning about religion in positive and useful ways.

Finding Common Ground (Haynes & Thomas, 2001) is written from the perspective of the United States Constitution and in the context of schooling in the United States, but it provides a good overview of the issues. Given the protections for freedom of conscience and religion in Canada, it might be an excellent framework for professional development.

Case Commentary by Lyn Miller-Lachmann

At present, 10 percent of Americans and 18 percent of Canadians were born abroad; the percentage is far higher in urban areas. Schools have responded to this increasing diversity in different ways. Many have chosen what James Banks terms the "contributions" approach, emphasizing ethnic foods, heroes, and holidays without changing the content or structure of the curriculum or involving students and parents in the decision-making process (Banks, 2003). The principal in this case study has consciously gone beyond the "holidays and heroes" approach in creating a multicultural curriculum; ironically, it is the celebration of a holiday season that brings out suspicion, intolerance, and conflict.

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Those who seek to restrict multicultural education to “contributions” invite this kind of situation, for even holidays or heroes can tap into deeply held beliefs that come into conflict. In spite of the young children’s remarks, both Muslims and Jews consider Jesus Christ a great man if not the Messiah, and Allah is the Arabic word for God. Still, one cannot blame a newcomer parent, or a member of a cultural or religious minority, for feeling threatened when his or her child is being led to celebrate a holiday that may run counter to fundamental beliefs.

The principal has created a school climate that respects diversity and models that respect through the way the staff members treat each other, children, and parents as well as through a curriculum that is inclusive. But the principal’s shock and dismay points to the fact that the school cannot control everything about a student’s life. The school did not contribute to the circumstances that drove the family from its country of origin, and it did not force the family to adapt to life in a community very different from the one it left. However, schools and other community institutions have become the often-contested territory where people with widely divergent values meet.

The principal seeks to “model respect for all human beings” and believes that “children . . . are capable of acknowledging other religions, without feeling they are being converted.” But the malleability and natural acceptance that characterize young children are a source of concern for their parents. Immigrant parents like Mrs. Ali and Mrs. Cortez fear their children will be converted or otherwise estranged from the family and its values in a new country, and they do what they do to hold on to their children and their culture at a time in which they have already given up so much.

In creating a climate that accepts and promotes diversity, teachers and administrators must be sensitive to the concerns of immigrant parents and parents who may perceive themselves as members of a beleaguered minority. This does not imply giving space to expressions of intolerance. Rather, administrators, as educational leaders, must work with other community organizations—churches, synagogues, mosques, public libraries, social service agencies, and political leaders, among others—to help newcomers adjust to a society often far more diverse and very different from the ones they left. This means helping parents find a place within the school and coming to an understanding that regardless of our cultural and religious differences, “we are all in this together,” building lives and communities and raising children in a new land.

❖ EXPLORING THE ISSUES

School Policies

From the narrative, Miller-Lachmann points out that the principal has gently put into place policies that should promote diversity and respect. Although, as the principal writes, “the school climate . . . respects diversity and models respect,” what does the conversation between the two fourth graders reveal about the principal’s knowledge of the success of school policies? What does Miller-Lachmann suggest to apprise oneself of the success or failure of school policies and programs?

Collaboration

In her commentary, Miller-Lachmann addresses the principal’s lofty goals for the school. As a way to deal with societal conflict, however, school may become the battlefield. How might a school prepare for dealing with changing attitudes that might not be in sync with parental religious views before problems occur?

Leadership

Miller-Lachmann points out the need to be sensitive to diversity. How can a principal showcase respect for multiculturalism? Consider what leadership means for teachers and school administration in dealing with immigrant families. Why is it important to model leadership at multiple levels for students?

Multiple Perspectives

Miller-Lachmann comments on the multicultural populations that create schoolyards of diversity and refers to Banks’s criticism of the “contribution” approach. Why might a school population reject or accept policies or even Mission Statements? What role could a school community play in these areas?

Case Commentary by Poonam C. Dev

What do diversity and inclusion really mean? The context as well as one’s experiences and philosophies are sure to play a significant role in how these two terms are defined. These terms are sometimes

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overused and popular in documents across educational institutions today. Schools and other academic institutions usually have a “diversity statement” in student or parent handbooks, statements that have probably been crafted after much deliberation by a group of well-meaning individuals. Administrators are usually quick to show such statements—sometimes with pride—to employees and students as well as to parents anytime the issues of diversity and inclusion are raised, however informal the conversation might be.

In the case—written from the point of view of a school administrator—the principal reflects upon issues of diversity and inclusion as well as what they mean for the school. The principal is asked to assist with a situation faced by two teachers. The administrator clearly feels that the teachers have taken every step necessary to make all the children in the school feel that they belong by planning numerous activities related to a variety of cultures, for example, celebrating religious festivals. Although clearly with the best of intentions, this principal, like many administrators, seems to focus more on treating all cultures equally rather than on one of the main tenets of antiracist behavior, that of equity. Although the principal discusses equity and social justice with the teachers, she or he admits that the action taken is only a tactic to patch the situation and not a permanent solution. This would have been the ideal context in which to facilitate a discussion and encourage reflection upon what the school’s Mission Statement means to the teachers? What does it mean to a teacher when school personnel, parents, or students raise issues related to inclusion and diversity? How are cultures defined? Are religion and ethnicity the only cultural groups in schools? What about children who have special physical, intellectual, or emotional challenges? What about those who are considered radical thinkers or whose families are not considered typical in their school?

The principal says that “equitable and respectful treatment is very important,” but seems satisfied with the superficial level of cultural understanding prevalent at this school. The school’s focus seems to be more on tolerating rather than respecting differences in individuals, and the differences seem to be based primarily on ethnic and religious backgrounds, rather than any other characteristics. Teachers and administrators would be more effective in promoting an atmosphere of mutual respect and understanding by focusing on each individual student, parent, and school employee, rather than on just a few characteristics that make each individual whole. They could help facilitate a deeper

understanding of the impact of one's culture on behaviors, learning styles, and perspectives among all members of the school community.

The scenarios described by the principal would be ideal prompts for engaging teachers in discussions—among themselves as well as among their students—about how each person is different and yet similar to others in so many ways and what that means for everyone. Celebrating various religious festivals; meeting people from various ethnic, religious, linguistic, and other backgrounds; eating a variety of cuisines; and similar situations are only starting points for creating awareness and enhancing understanding about differences in all of us. It cannot be the only strategy used for preparing children or anyone else to communicate effectively and succeed in a global society. Words and tone of voice used by teachers as well as their interactions with visibly different students are noted by students themselves and can play a major role in influencing student behaviors.

As we all know, one learns best by doing, especially if the activity or topic is personally or professionally relevant. Hence, just writing or talking about diversity and inclusion is not enough to truly reflect on the terms and what they mean for individuals as well as for society. Instances described by this principal could have been and should be used as teaching moments by the teachers, parents, and the students involved to help them effectively examine and perhaps resolve their own philosophies and beliefs. Frequent introspection as well as ongoing reflection and discussion on diversity and inclusion by all individuals in the learning community would also help enhance understanding of and respect for one another. The principal seems to have the students' best interest at heart and to truly believe in the benefits of a multicultural society; but the whole school would benefit if these beliefs could be incorporated at a deeper level in the curriculum and communicated effectively to all students and parents as well as school employees.

❖ EXPLORING THE ISSUES

Communication

Dev alludes to the way in which slogans and words become meaningless. How can the words from a school's Mission Statement be made real and observable in the school?

Equity

Dev seems to draw our attention to the difference between *tolerating* and *respecting* differences in an education community. How might *teaching* and *reflection* add important dimensions to the aim of imparting equity and social justice in a school environment?

Case Commentary by Harold Brathwaite

I will adopt an unusual approach to this case study, one that more accurately reflects what I suspect many of us do as we read a case study. We have immediate reactions and then, later, we engage in a more broad-based, in-depth analysis.

The title, "Dealing With Religious Intolerance," immediately influences my mind-set, and yet the opening paragraph is paradoxical: Two fourth-grade students seemingly denounce the spiritual leader of the other's religion, a teacher appears not to know what to do, and there are references to a school environment where inclusion of all faiths and cultures are honored. The first questions that come to mind are

- What are the real issues between the students (friends) that led to name-calling, and is this really an issue of intolerance or one of students knowing which buttons to push?
- Why did teacher Cindy Greenshaw not intervene immediately?
- Did her failure to do so reflect a lack of skill or training in how to handle unacceptable, antisocial behavior?
- Was her incapacity due to fear of racist or cultural overtones?
- The second paragraph, in which the principal refers to her or his conversation with the chair of the School Advisory Council, is also troubling, and gives rise to the following questions:

Why is the principal having such a heavy-duty conversation on the telephone?

Why not face-to-face where a more intercultural exchange could occur, thus reducing the chance of a misunderstanding?

What is the context of her queries?

Is this the first time the chairperson of the council (in the context of this school) has engaged in a discussion about Islam, equity, and so on?

A further concern is the principal's assertion that, "I know my knowledge is grounded in school governance." This is more than a matter of governance; it involves human rights, it involves an understanding of what's needed for social cohesion in the school and community. It is more than feeling "satisfied with my response to her queries." More importantly, does the chairperson understand and is she satisfied with the responses to her queries? Recourse to governance and regulations rarely provide an adequate solution.

The entry of the two teachers, Mrs. Greenshaw and Mrs. Bhadra, adds a bit of context, but raises the level of concern even further. Since we now learn that the incident occurred in Miss Wong's class, was she aware of it, or did Mrs. Greenshaw bring it to her attention? Why are they discussing Mrs. Greenshaw's problem with the principal before or without involving Miss Wong?

Attention now shifts to Mrs. Bhadra's recent experience with Mrs. Ali. Mrs. Bhadra's description of her classroom practice appears to be exemplary, but what leaps to mind is the following:

- What prior communication has occurred with the parents of her students about the curriculum content and classroom activities involving cross-cultural practices?
- Were parents informed at the beginning of the year about the board and school philosophy?
- Were parents invited to help explain to newcomer parents what the school was trying to do?
- Were newsletters sent home to remind and alert parents to ensure that they were not surprised or did not get "stories" out of context?

The principal's conversations and reflections about the school environment and practice also raise the same questions at the macro level. She or he asks a question previously raised: How well prepared are staff members? One may well add—How well prepared are parents and students? Indeed, in some schools a student who has been trained in peer mediation, on overhearing the exchange Mrs. Greenshaw reported, would have intervened to help defuse the conflict.

Not surprisingly, the principal's angst leads her or him to worry about a worst-case scenario. In this instance, the anxiety is also at a personal level about how the district superintendent would react to the way in which the situation is being handled or not handled. This also suggests that the superintendent has not been brought into the loop

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about the processes and practices of the school. It is usually a better strategy to make the superintendent and trustee aware of a potential problem at the outset, and outline the plan of action.

These two incidents could be handled separately without distressing the entire school. At the very least, the two students and their parents should be involved in a discussion, with a minimum outcome of an apology to each other and to the other students in the vicinity at the time of the incident. Although suggested for secondary students, a model with relevance for elementary students is included in *Changing Perspectives: A Resource Guide for Antiracist and Ethnocultural-Equity Education*: "Students discuss the reasons for putdowns, whether based on race, culture, or some other characteristic. Students can use role playing, group discussion, creative writing, etc., to increase their awareness of the issues involved. They should come to realize that the initiator, the recipient of the putdown, and observers who passively accept it are all harmed" (Bidari & Ijaz, 1992).

In the case of Mrs. Ali, the principal needs to find a way to speak with her. The Imam who knows the school could also be invited to the meeting. This would ensure her comfort level and the Imam could help her better understand the approach of the school.

The questions raised above demonstrate the need for the following:

- In-depth, expert training (including simulations) of staff in schools about antiracist education and ethnocultural equity that would help them explore their own areas of discomfort. It should also assist in ensuring that all problems are not labeled as deriving from intolerance or discrimination.
- Parents, students, and volunteers must be brought into the dialogue, and communications and dialogue must frequently be renewed, especially for the benefit of those new to the school.
- All behaviors of intolerance or discrimination should be addressed immediately.
- Proactive planning is always preferable to reactive scrambling.

❖ EXPLORING THE ISSUES

Assumptions

Brathwaite finds the first exclamations in the case paradoxical. What do the opening words by the students suggest in terms of

student learning about intolerance and the principal's assumptions of acceptance of school diversity?

Leadership

Brathwaite asks very pointed questions about the principal's preparation and the communication with parents. How can a member of the administration fully prepare for meetings that concern parents' or guardians' strong opinions on religion?

School Policies

In discussing the school policies, Brathwaite presumes that the principal in this case follows protocol. Brathwaite, however, also poses questions about communication with parents. Why are these steps important in and out of the school itself?

❖ ENGAGING WITH THE COMMENTARIES

Religious Diversity

How would each commentator above comment on the school as a suitable context for applying lessons of tolerance? Compare their insights.

School Policies

Why is a *holidays and heroes* approach to creating truly collaborative communities a Band-Aid and temporary solution for resolving deeper issues? Examine Lessow-Hurley, Miller-Lachmann and Dev's concrete examples and reasons for failure of this approach in the case and in schools, generally.

Conflict Resolution

Compare and contrast Brathwaite's four points and Lessow-Hurley's five-point program for addressing the issues of acceptance of religious diversity in schools. Is one preferable to the other? Explain why. Could the reader add to the points?

Multiple Perspectives

Compare and contrast the commentators' views of the principal. Which commentator's view do you accept: enabling or responsible for the breakdown of communication? How might this school community continue to develop into accepting diversity and tolerance?

Connecting Questions

The Connecting Questions located in the introduction highlight themes that are threaded throughout the cases. You may continue your exploration of the issues raised in this case by addressing those connections. For questions pertinent to this case, please see questions 2, 9, and 11.

❖ ADDITIONAL READINGS

Begley, P. (1999). Guiding values for future school leaders. *Orbit*, 30(10), 19–23.

There are 13 articles that address the challenges principals face en route to school improvement. Working with staff, implementing new educational policy, involving parents and community groups, along with an overview of developing leadership on the national level are among the topics presented.

Cohen, E. G. (1986). *Designing group work: Strategies for the heterogeneous classroom*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Designed for many levels, this book examines the challenges of using group work. The authors focus on improving practice and engaging groups collaboratively. Helpful strategies are discussed.

Coles, R. (2000). *Lives of moral leadership*. New York: Random House.

This Pulitzer Prize-winning author Robert Coles creates portraits of moral leadership through narratives of Robert Kennedy, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Erik Erikson, a Boston bus driver, teachers in college, and in elementary school, among others. Coles explains how one single person can impact an individual's life and change its course. He explores how every person can be engaged in a continual process of personal leadership development.

Delpit, L. (1988). The silenced dialogue: Power and pedagogy in educating other people's children. *Harvard Educational Review*, 58(3), 280–298.

The author looks at meeting the needs of poor and Black students. Social justice is at the forefront.

Dow, I. I., & Oakley, W. F. (1992). School effectiveness and leadership. *The Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, XXXVIII(1), 33–47.

With a focus on both theory and practice, the book examines the relationship between a principal's style and educational context. Data from questionnaires explain and measure the principal's effectiveness as a leader.

Harper, H. (1997). Difference and diversity in Ontario schooling. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 22(2), 192–206.

The author discusses diversity in-depth. She begins with a historical perspective of the production and treatment of human difference in Canadian school policy and practices.

Haynes, F. (1998). *The ethical school*. New York: Routledge.

This very popular book used in most courses on ethics presents case studies that address conflicts that occur routinely in school communities such as issues of dress, censorship, and punishment.

Kouzes, J. M., & Posner, B. (2002). *Leadership the challenge*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

The book describes what successful leaders hold in common: challenging the process, sharing a vision, enabling others to act, modeling strategies, encouragement that is heartfelt and authentic. The book challenges the usual concepts of leadership.

Lee, C. (2003, June/July). Why we need to think race and ethnicity. *Educational Researcher*, 32(5).

Lee's editorial to the journal presents historical and contemporary ways in which cultures differ and are made political footballs for researchers. Her critical stance probes for reasons.

Sergiovanni, T. J. (2000). *The lifeworld of leadership: Creating culture, community and personal meaning in our schools*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

The author explores the link between the character of schools and school improvement. He discusses the levels of interaction that occur

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in schools: loyalties, compromises, stakeholder needs, upholding standards, and so on. With an aim to develop improved “thoughtfulness” in students, the book examines the virtues associated with good schools and good teaching.

Shapiro, J. P., & Stefkovich, J. A. (2001). *Ethical leadership and decision making in education: Applying theoretical perspectives to complex dilemmas*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

This book contains the authors’ draw on the ethical paradigms of justice, care, critique, and the teaching profession. It addresses practical, pedagogical, and curricular issues.

Shulman, J., & Mesa-Bains, M. (Eds.). (1993). *Diversity in the classroom: Casebook for teachers and teacher-educators*. San Francisco: FarWest Lab.

The framework of Exploring the Case was adapted from this book.

Trueba, H. T., Au Hu-Pei, K., & Guthrie Pung, G. (Eds.). (1981). *Culture and the bilingual classroom: Studies in classroom ethnography*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House.

This is a collection of 13 papers divided into 2 sections: “General Theoretical and Methodological Issues” and “Microethnic Culture Children in the Classroom.” Issues in the classroom concerning cultural diversity, bilingual education, culturally responsive education, validity, and the importance of ethnography for many diverse groups are explored.