

## CHAPTER 1

# DIVERSITY, EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND INCLUSION

MONDAY MORNING, 6:10 A.M.

Kathaleen awoke with a start. Glancing over at the clock, she realized that she had overslept, again. Either Kathaleen had not heard the alarm or it was no longer working. She had no time to consider this problem right now, however. It was 6:10 and she was running late. Kathaleen jumped out of bed, grabbed some clothes and ran to the bathroom. After a two-minute shower, she dressed, brushed her hair, slapped on some make-up and stepped over the ever-present and quickly growing laundry pile into the hall. She tiptoed past her sons' bedrooms, smiling to herself as she did so. She knew that her two teenagers could sleep through a bomb blast at this time of the morning, so her stealth was really not needed. But old habits and motherly instincts die hard, and she could not help but try to be as quiet as possible. Kathaleen only hoped that the boys would rise in time to make it to school before the morning bell. She was becoming increasingly concerned with their tardiness of late. One or the other failed to make it to school on time on three occasions last week. She felt a twinge of guilt, and wished she could see them off to school every morning. But alas, this would never be. Her job precluded such things.

Kathaleen was principal of Althaven Secondary School and well into her second year in this position. She was no stranger to administration. Before this appointment she had been principal of another high school in the more northerly reaches of the board. In the years prior to this Kathaleen held a series of vice-principalships, all of them in secondary schools in this district. She had come into administration from teaching, as had all of her principal colleagues. Many lifetimes ago, or so it seemed to Kathaleen, she had been a Math teacher, one of a handful of women in this area in the entire board. She had never seriously considered a career in administration when she was teaching. Yet her second principal had seen promise in her, and he had gone out of his way to encourage Kathaleen to pursue an administrative path. He had pleaded with her to apply for the Math headship when it became available, and later to the vice-principal pool. Kathaleen was convinced that her mentor played a decisive role in her getting the headship and her first vice-principal position. After that, Kathaleen hadn't needed a champion to help her acquire subsequent positions. She worked hard and she was good at what she did. These days, however, there were times when she seriously questioned whether she was suited to this job.

She had no time for a sit-down breakfast – not that there ever was in the morning. Kathaleen threw on a coat, slipped into some shoes and opened the door to the

garage. She navigated her way around the heaps of bikes, skis, hoses, lawnmowers, shovels and just plain junk and hopped into her five-year old Toyota Corolla. It roared to life as it always did when she turned the key. At least there was one thing in her life she could be sure about these days, she thought. Her satisfaction was short-lived, however, as she glanced at the gas gauge and noticed that the indicator was pointing to empty. She howled in frustration as she remembered that Bob, her eldest, had borrowed the car last night for what he referred to as a late date. As usual, he had drained the gas tank. This was not all that was amiss, however. Out of the corner of her eye, Kathaleen spotted paraphernalia in the back seat that didn't belong. She didn't dare turn around, afraid of what she might find. She didn't need this extra complication right now. Her immediate concern was to get to a gas station before the car ran out of gas. This would cost her even more time, time that Kathaleen did not have right now.

Kathaleen pulled out of the garage and driveway, turned on her car lights, and pointed the car in the direction of the nearest gas station. She calculated that she would barely make it for her 7:00 a.m. meeting, that is if she could get gas at this station and the roads were driveable on this dark and foggy January morning. No time for Tim Horton's coffee and donuts today. As she approached the gas station and began thinking about the day that lay ahead of her, she came to the conclusion that her heightened anxiety was not due exclusively to being short on time and gas. She also realized that she was not looking forward to her first meeting, or for that matter, to some of the other issues that she knew she would have to deal with today. The 7:00 meeting, though, was her biggest concern right now. The private meeting was being held so early because the parents of the two Asians girls – Kathaleen wasn't sure whether they were from Pakistan or India – did not want anyone to know that they were meeting with the principal. She couldn't understand their desire for secrecy, but nevertheless went along with their request for an early meeting. Apparently, they were blaming the school for the anonymous calls they were receiving. Much to the parents' consternation, the callers were telling them that their teenage daughters were behaving in ways that were considered by the parents to be taboo. The situation itself aside, Kathaleen did not like the man to whom she initially spoke. She felt that he was arrogant and sensed that he treated her with disrespect because of her gender. She also disapproved of the way he was threatening her. This gentleman had told her that he would go to the Director of Education if Kathaleen couldn't solve his problem in short order. Right now she didn't have a strategy for resolving the situation, other than to listen, or at least try to listen, to what they had to say.

Kathaleen's blood pressure went up another notch when she pulled into the gas station. No one seemed to be around. Then it dawned on her that none of the gas stations in the area were likely to be open before 7:00. Kathaleen quickly sized up the situation. She had to make a decision and she had to do it quickly. If she waited for the station to open she would be at least forty minutes late for the meeting, and she anticipated that the parents would respond unsympathetically to her tardiness. On the other hand, Kathaleen had never run out of gas in her trusty Corolla, and her school was only twenty-five miles away. Besides, part of her route took her along uncongested country roads where she could make good time. She decided to go for

it. She pulled out of the gas station, and put her foot to the floor. She had heard somewhere that drivers get the best gas mileage if they drive at moderate speeds. Kathaleen, however, didn't buy this theory. She was convinced that while the car might use more gas at higher speeds, it also covered more ground. Anyway, she was in a hurry and couldn't be bothered at staying within the posted speed limit – not that she ever did at the best of times. She smiled with satisfaction knowing that she had so far this year eluded the police speed traps in the area.

Kathaleen began to feel a little better as she watched the countryside fly by and the first rays of sunlight penetrate the fog and the retreating darkness. At this rate, she was actually going to be a little early. Once again her thoughts turned to her meeting and her school. The situation that gave rise to the parents' wish for a meeting was just one among an infinite number of new and different kinds of situations that Kathaleen grappled with since coming to Althaven last year. The source of many of the challenges that accompanied these situations, she believed, was the incredible diversity in the school and surrounding community. She had never seen so much diversity in one place. At last count, students identified sixty different countries as their places of birth. And this was even not counting those students born in this country whose parents had emigrated from distant lands. Before coming to Althaven, Kathaleen would never have thought that she would have encountered so many religions, languages, modes of dress, interactional styles, temperaments, dietary preferences, and values on countless issues in a single school community. Needless to say, all of this presented her with many new yet demanding challenges – challenges that she sometimes wondered whether or not she welcomed.

The problem for Kathaleen was not the diversity in and of itself. In fact, she found herself fascinated with the many differences that she encountered in her students and in the community. The problem, or at least part of it, revolved around her unfamiliarity with these differences, that is, with many of the student groups that populated her school. Not only did Kathaleen know little about these groups, she discovered that she was not able to understand many of the practices and values that students and parents did display. Like most administrators in the board, Kathaleen was of Anglo heritage. Her four grandparents were of Western or Northern European background, and three of them were born in Canada. She had grown up in a rural Ontario that was very White and European. In contrast, most of the students at Althaven were not of Western European heritage. Rather, they or their parents had emigrated from countries in Asia, the West Indies, Eastern Europe, and Africa. The problem for Kathaleen was that her life experiences and her seasoning as a teacher and administrator had not prepared her to understand and solve many of the diversity-related challenges that arose in her school. At the best of times, she found herself scrambling to learn more about the various groups and situations that she regularly encountered so she would be in a position to make appropriate decisions. But she did not always have the time to dedicate to this kind of research, and she was constantly plagued with doubts about the decisions that she did make. In some ways, Kathaleen longed for the kinds of problems she had been used to facing in her previous schools, problems where her expertise and background would be of use.

The countryside now flew by, and Kathaleen's confidence soared as she neared her destination. Her good spirits quickly vanished, however, as she glanced in the



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