

Leadership and Religious Schools

Contemporary Perspectives
and Challenges

Edited by
Michael T. Buchanan

B L O O M S B U R Y

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International Perspectives and Challenges

Michael T. Buchanan

B L O O M S B U R Y
NEW YORK • LONDON • NEW DELHI • SYDNEY

Bloomsbury Academic

An imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

175 Fifth Avenue
New York
NY 10010
USA

50 Bedford Square
London
WC1B 3DP
UK

www.bloomsbury.com

First published 2013

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All chapters were subject to a double blind peer review process.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Leadership and religious schools : international perspectives and challenges / edited by Michael T. Buchanan.

p. cm.

Includes index.

ISBN 978-1-4411-7297-6 (hardback)

1. Church schools—Administration—Cross-cultural studies. 2. School management and organization—Cross-cultural studies. 3. Educational leadership—Cross-cultural studies.

I. Buchanan, Michael T.

LC331.L43 2012

268'.1—dc23

2012028911

EISBN: 978-1-4411-6150-5

Typeset by Newgen Imaging Systems Pvt Ltd, Chennai, India

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Preface

Much discussion and research has been attributed to the significant role school leaders play in creating effective learning environments (Christie & Limerick, 2004; Dubrin & Dalgish, 2003; Golanda, 1991). Much of the leadership literature as it applies to educational leadership in general has sought to classify effective leaders as those who are able to fulfill a critical role in rallying teachers towards enhancing progressive learning opportunities for students (Barth, 2001; Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2004). Though these insights arising from the general body of literature are relevant to effective leadership in religious schools, they are not entirely adequate for the development of leaders in these schools. Religious schools have special characteristics of their own, which means that the formation of effective leadership in religious schools requires the consideration of issues in addition to those that are common to all schools (Chapman & Buchanan, 2012).

This collection of edited works has been put together to encourage leaders and potential leaders in religious schools to think more broadly and critically about their roles as leaders. There are various dimensions to leadership in religious schools (Buchanan, Chapter 8), and the contributors to this volume explore many of these dimensions from a range of perspectives. Leadership involves leading with some end, or ultimate values, in mind. Gellert (Chapter 2) and D'Souza (Chapter 3) explore the ultimate values of education in a religious school.

Three chapters deal with case studies of how leaders in religious schools can work within the particular cultural and political environment in which they are located. Du Preez (Chapter 4) explores how leadership in human rights can promote social change. Kollontai (Chapter 5) and Yablon (Chapter 6) each explore (based on their own very different experiences) how leaders in religious schools can promote a culture of peaceful coexistence in a multifaith community.

The final collection of chapters considers the ways in which generic problems of leadership assume particular hues in schools that have a religious foundation. Stern (Chapter 7) explores some of the problems leaders encounter with inclusion and exclusion among their students—and with the

exclusion that the role of leader necessarily entails. Lavery (Chapter 9) shows how pre-service teachers can be trained for servant leadership. Engebretson (Chapter 10) suggests ways in which leaders in religious schools may best deal with secularization of the community in which the school operates. Mushin Canbolat, Ismail Albayrak and Kath Engebretson (Chapter 11) discuss the key characteristics of good leadership in Hizmet schools and suggest that they may be offered to leaders in other educational settings, including religious schools, around the world.

I thank my friends and colleagues who have so expertly contributed to this volume and express my appreciation to the scholars who dedicated their time and expertise to the task of peer reviewing the chapters in this collection in accordance with current academic practice. I have been delighted and immensely stimulated by reading the chapters as they have arrived on my computer. I trust that my delight and stimulation will be shared by leaders apprising leaders in many religious schools.

Michael T. Buchanan

Australian Catholic University

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Foreword

In many countries, religiously affiliated schools retain a prominent place in educational offerings. The strength of enrolments in these schools, in a range of cultural contexts, also speaks powerfully of their ongoing role. It is somewhat surprising, however, that there remains a dearth of quality literature on the particular challenges that are faced by those in leadership positions in religious schools. Leadership of a religious school can easily, and mistakenly, be seen as a conventional position with an added dimension. This idea was captured well in a conversation I had some years ago with a principal of a prominent religious school, who remarked that his job involved all the challenges of leading what he called a “normal” school, but with the added difficulty of giving the school a religious flavor. This notion of leadership in religious schools is bound to be inadequate as it is, in essence, a deficit model. The religious school is seen in this approach as being like the secular school except for a tangential interest in an additional element that complicates rather than substantiates the school’s mission. A far sounder approach, represented in this volume, is that leading in the religious schools involves an intrinsic understanding of the importance of the religious character of the school, and that this is not something that can be seen as an added extra.

There is a well-established literature on the critical role that leadership plays in shaping and directing school culture. To be effective, educational leaders must be immersed in the social context that their schools operate in. This reality can often be quite complex. There is a tendency, however, to see the phenomenon of religious schools, even in the secular West, as a relatively unnuanced category. The reality, as reflected in this book, is quite different, and this impinges directly on the capacity of school leadership to provide vision, oversight and management. To lead a religious school in a country with deep and abiding religious roots brings with it a range of challenges that may not be evident in different contexts such as in more secular cultures or in places where even nominal religious allegiance gives rise to political and

social tensions. There is the added dimension of the importance of religiously affiliated schools in the globalized education debate as many schools retain a religious connection and see this as a critical part of adapting to rapid social change.

This edited volume is a most valuable addition to the scholarly discourse on leadership of religious schools. It strikes a very attractive balance between theoretical and practical concerns with a clear bias towards providing a framework for effective leadership. Its focus on the centrality of religion and its international perspective are most welcome.

Professor Richard Rymarz PhD, EdD.
University of Alberta

Contributors

ISMAIL ALBAYRAK is a professor at Australian Catholic University and holds the Fethullah Gulen Chair in the Study of Islam and Muslim-Catholic Relations at Australian Catholic University. He completed his Ph.D. at Leeds University in the United Kingdom. Prior to his current appointment, he was an assistant and associate professor at Sakarya University/Turkey, where he taught and published in the areas of Qur'anic Studies, Contemporary Approaches to the Qur'an and Orientalism. He is also interested in the formal and informal education of Muslims, their place and activities in a globalized world together with the study of interfaith dialogue and tolerance education.

MICHAEL T. BUCHANAN is a senior lecturer at Australian Catholic University. He is a member of the National School of Religious Education and lectures in the postgraduate courses in religious education curriculum and leadership in religious education. He is the author of *Managing curriculum change in religious education: An inside perspective from school leaders in religious education*, and coauthor of *An introduction to Catholic education: Current perspectives*, and *Cornerstones of Catholic secondary religious education*. Michael is also the editor of *Religious Education Journal of Australia* and publishes regularly in national and international scholarly journals.

MUHSIN CANBOLAT is the regional coordinator of the Selimiye Foundation. His doctoral research at the Australian Catholic University focuses on the educational vision of Fethullah Gulen. He studied theology at the Divinity Faculty of Marmara University.

MARIO O. D'SOUZA is an associate professor and dean of the Faculty of Theology at University of St. Michael's College, Toronto. His research and teaching areas include: the philosophy of education; religion and education; and pluralism, personhood and democracy.

PETRO DU PREEZ is an associate professor at North-West University (Potchefstroom) in South Africa. She obtained her Ph.D. from the University of Stellenbosch in 2008. Her research foci includes: curriculum studies and human rights for diverse education environments. Petro's research involvement includes national and international projects and publications. She has presented several papers and published widely on topics of human rights in education for multicultural and multireligious environments.

KATH ENGEBRTSON is an associate professor, lecturer, researcher, writer and doctoral supervisor in the School of Religious Education at Australian Catholic University. Her current research interests are interfaith education, the role of the Catholic school in relation to the local church community, professional standards for teachers of religious education and freedom of religion in relation to religiously affiliated schools. She is widely published both nationally and internationally, and along with colleagues from Australian Catholic University and overseas she is one of the editors of the *International handbook on the religious spiritual and moral dimensions of education* as well as the *International handbook of inter-religious education*. Her three most recent books are: *In your shoes: Inter-faith education for Australian religious educators* (2009); *Cornerstones of Catholic secondary religious education: Principles and practice of the new evangelization* (2008, with Marian de Souza, Michael T. Buchanan and Richard Rymarz), and *Connecting: Teenage boys, spirituality and religious education* (2007).

ADRIAN-MARIO GELLEL is a senior lecturer in Catechetics and Religious Education and a member of both Faculties of Theology and of Education, University of Malta. He has defended his PhD dissertation on meeting individual differences in the religious education classroom through adaptive teaching at the Università Pontificia Salesiana in Rome. During these past years he has published and researched in the fields of children's spirituality and religious education. Adrian is also actively involved in the ministry within the Maltese Archdiocese. Currently, he is the diocesan responsible for Catholic religious education in state and private schools.

PAULINE KOLLONTAI is a professor and deputy dean in the Faculty of Education and Theology at York St John University, UK. Her research is focused on religion in society, particularly looking at religion, peace and reconciliation. Pauline teaches in the area of religious studies.

SHANE LAVERY is an associate professor in the School of Education at the University of Notre Dame, Australia Fremantle Campus, where he coordinates the postgraduate program. He has taught service learning and social justice to pre-service secondary teachers since 2004. His teaching and research in this area has led him to believe strongly in the life-changing influence a well-structured Christian service-learning program can have on the leadership formation of pre-service teachers.

JULIAN STERN is a professor of Education and Religion, and dean of the Faculty of Education and Theology, at York St John University, UK. He was a schoolteacher in the South of England for 14 years, and has also worked for 18 years in teacher training, research and consultancy in five universities (the Institute of Education, London, the Open University, Brunel University, the University of Hull and now York St John University), in partnership with numerous schools, local education authorities, government agencies and other organizations across this country and internationally. He has published 11 books and several dozen articles for trainee teachers, experienced teachers, teacher trainers and academics, most recently on involving parents in schools, on homework, on RE teaching, on schools and religions and on the spirit of the school.

YAACOV YABLON is the head of the Educational Counseling Program in the School of Education at Bar-Ilan University, Israel. He deals with affective aspects of behaviour and learning, and his research focuses on peace education, high-risk behaviours of children and prevention programs.

Leadership and Religious Schools: Introducing Some Contemporary Perspectives and Challenges

Michael T. Buchanan

There is a growing realization of the significant impact that an educational leader may have on leading schools and educational change (Shahid, 2011). This awareness relates to virtually all schooling systems and diverse education contexts, including public schools and/or state schools, as well as independent schools and religious schools (Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2005; Robinson, 2007). The main responsibilities of a school leader should be oriented towards improving teaching and student learning (Spillane, 2004). Successful leadership, regardless of the educational environment in which it is expressed, has been attributed to principals or school leaders who are perceived as playing a crucial role in mobilizing teachers towards enhancing progressive learning opportunities for students (Barth, 2001; Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2004).

A considerable degree of interest and research has explored the imperative role school leaders across the range of diverse schooling systems play in continuously transforming schools into effective learning environments (Christie & Limerick, 2004; Dubrin & Dalgish, 2003; Golanda, 1991). The international body of research pertaining to effective leadership in educational contexts is vital in informing leaders in all types of schools. Though these insights are relevant to effective leadership in religious schools, they are not entirely sufficient for the development of leaders in these schools. Religious schools have special characteristics of their own. These characteristics mean that the formation of effective leadership in religious schools requires the

consideration of issues in addition to those that are common to all schools (Chapman & Buchanan, 2012).

Leadership in religious schools according to McNamara, 'requires a particular mindset and a very deep conviction that the spiritual is more real than the tangible realities that we take in through our senses' (2002, p. 5). Leaders in religious schools require a highly tuned-in sense of how their roles as leaders are guided by a responsibility to act morally in accordance with the religious tradition to which the school belongs and in the best interests of all members of the school community (Klenke, 2007). Effective leadership in religious schools needs leadership that will direct the infusion of moral order in the school community, embracing values and beliefs that drive the purpose and meaning of the school (Sergiovanni, 2000). Leadership in religious schools requires *religious leadership*, and such leadership is not separate from school leadership but rather is an integral part of the entire educational enterprise of a religious school (McNamara, 2002, p. 5). Religious schools need leaders who enable such schools to achieve their aims by preparing people to take their place in society and deepen the spirituality of each member of the school community by 'creating the conditions of work that nurture the human spirit' (Klenke, 2007, p. 90). Effective leadership in religious schools requires those exercising leadership to constantly be open to exploring issues and challenges in contemporary society. Leaders need the skills and vision to critique and examine such issues within the context of the religious tradition to which the schools belong and to equip students with values and principles that form them for useful service.

A prominent issue impacting on all societies throughout the world is globalization. It has far-reaching (and broad) positive and negative impacts on various aspects of the many nation-states, cultures, economies and peoples of the world. Its impact on education and educational leadership is evolutionary (Litz, 2011, p. 47). A theoretical perspective on globalization views it as 'a systematic process of worldwide social change' (Held & McGrew, 2007). Globalization has been defined as

a multifaceted ideological and politically charged process . . . an overarching umbrella term to describe the complex series of economic, social, technological, military and political changes that generally move

investment funds, ideas, goods and services, people, and businesses beyond domestic and national boundaries into a larger international realm which, in turn, has the effect of increasing the interdependence and interconnectedness between various people, cultures, ethnic groups, government entities, and organizations from different locations into a wider global arena. (Litz, 2011, p. 47)

Globalization has been perceived as a standardization of culture which 'operates through the imposition of a one-windowed view of the world' (Bottery, 2006, p. 11). The growing influence of sociocultural globalization enables people to consume any type of food, be present at any religious ceremony and pay attention to any kind of news report, music or sporting event in virtually any location throughout the world. The influences of globalization are interpreted as the advent of new and distinct transnational forms of global culture, governance and society (Bruff, 2005; Held & McGrew, 2007). One of the concerns regarding the impact of globalization is that it may result in giving people a superficial understanding of ideas, thoughts, meaning and values, and make them perceive these as negative or manipulative influences on their profound convictions (Bottery, 2006; Tikly, 2001).

The effects of globalization (including economic globalization) can lead to drastic changes in societies, and Litz (2011) has argued that it is crucial that global forces and pressures are accurately identified by school leaders. Leaders need to lead schools effectively so that they can respond to large-scale changes arising from the complex and multifaceted process and/or dimensions of globalization:

In addition, educational leaders need to be aware of the fact that globalization can take on many forms and it is becoming increasingly evident that they will need to use several dimensions with which to frame their work in the coming years. (Litz, 2011, p. 49)

A lack of attention by educational leaders on the impact of global forces may result in schools, including religious schools, losing their way and relevance. Adrian Gellert has responded to the challenges of globalization in Chapter 2 of this book. He considers how leaders of religious schools might effectively address the challenges and remain authentic to the educational mission of the

religious tradition to which the school belongs. While his insights are drawn from the Christian tradition, he acknowledged that all instruments built by humans, including educational institutions, are oriented towards change according to the tools or technologies humans create.

Gellel argues that the challenges arising from globalization have the potential to endanger or make vulnerable the very existence of religious schools depending on which part of the globe they are situated. He notes that, with the arrival of globalization, economic considerations and policies have become more influential in shaping almost every aspect of human life and institution. These include both local and international governance as well as educational policies and school curricula which are particularly being conditioned by economic considerations. Leadership in religious schools must constantly bear in mind the values and worldview which centre on a passion for humanity, a solid anthropological vision, so that the quality of these schools goes beyond the achievement of raw academic scores and truly contributes to the holistic development of individuals and societies.

Globalization has also contributed to the increasing formation of multicultural societies in virtually every Western democracy as well as other nation-states. Mario O D'Souza observes that the growth of multicultural societies has contributed to the promotion of principles of secularism, and that Western democracies seem unable to accommodate or respond to the many and diverse forms of religious and cultural identities present within such communities. In Chapter 3 of this collection, D'Souza argues that growth in multiculturalism can lead to miniaturization of the human identity. It can distort the positive role that religion and culture play, and it can sour aspirations for positive orientation towards the common good and democratic well-being of all members of society. He claims that, in the midst of multicultural diversity, limiting human identity to religion and culture on the one hand and secularism on the other leads to the miniaturization of the citizen and eventually the fragmentation of society. In Chapter 3, D'Souza maintains that educational leaders in religious schools must perform the dual task of encouraging religious identities and relating them to citizenship, but ultimately to the common good. Educational leaders need to make religious

identity relevant to the whole school community, but they also need to expand on how human identity is conceived and how it is manifested in the democratic square. Given these challenges, learning and leadership take on a special importance in religious schools.

Uncertainty as a consequence of globalization has caused unrest in many countries and frequent changes in the nature of schooling throughout the world. In Chapter 4 of this book, Petro du Preez identifies one of the new responsibilities expected of a school leader: he/she is required to assist in the recognition of human rights through education. She argues that the process of addressing human rights education is even more complex in religious schools where human rights values are sometimes seen as contradicting the value system of the religious beliefs that these schools uphold. The overarching issue in Chapter 4 that du Preez is concerned with is the responsibility of school leaders in religious schools for a curriculum based on human rights. This responsibility entails not only being accountable for human rights education, but also ensuring that human rights education is explored via diverse approaches to human rights education. This leads to several questions relating to the practice leaders of religious schools should adopt in terms of their responsibility to foster a human rights culture in their schools. She suggests that, in the midst of multicultural diversity, leaders in religious schools need to teach and lead for diversity, and this imposes a responsibility on a school leader to be accountable for a human rights based curriculum. According to du Preez (2009), a human rights based curriculum does not limit itself to narrow interpretations of human rights and its supposed value system. In fact, a truly human rights based curriculum is one that welcomes a diverse range of beliefs and values, that allows human beings to be committed to their beliefs and values and that requires human beings to be open to the commitments of others as well. The principle which should be adopted is one of dialogue that enables extensive use of the richness and wisdom embedded in the faith community.

In multicultural societies or nations with mixed ethnicity, race and religions, the existence of religious schools is sometimes controversial. Pauline Kollontai reveals in Chapter 5 that religious schools have the

potential to divide, isolate, segregate and ghettoize children on religious grounds. If this occurs, there is the danger of adding to, or creating, fragility in terms of a lack of social trust and a breakdown of social cohesion. Kollontai argues that if these traits of intolerance, prejudice and hatred that are found across the globe are to be overcome, then it is vital that leadership in religious schools plays its part. The type of leadership required is one that promotes inclusive learning environments and respect for all. She claims that the starting point for such learning environments rests with the leaders themselves. Consideration needs to be given to the actual purpose of religious schools within diverse social contexts, and a key challenge is to build inclusive learning communities while fostering the particular religious foundation to which the school belongs. A way forward, Kollontai argues, is to encourage school leaders and teachers to face the challenge by identifying what is actually meant by an inclusive learning community and to envision how it might be brought about. Effective leadership in religious schools requires that leaders be willing and able to consider ways to develop and nurture a collegial atmosphere and work dialogically to establish a collective vision and purpose which reflects the reality of the students and their communities.

Adopting a peace-education approach across the school curriculum in religious schools provides a significant way of fostering inclusive learning communities oriented towards the advancement of social cohesion and social trust. Kollontai draws on perspectives from Christian and Muslim schools in Bosnia–Herzegovina contexts. Yaacov Yablon is also concerned with the interplay between peace and education and draws on insights from Jewish and Muslim school students in Israel. He argues that religion and religious schools have the potential to play a positive role in fostering peace among diverse religious and cultural groups. In Chapter 6, Yablon proposes that this potential is frequently overlooked: religion and religious schools are time and again perceived as divisive and polarizing, and to some extent a source of intergroup conflict.

Yablon proposes that contact between members of conflicting groups is a way to enhance positive relationships and schools, including religious schools, have an important role to play in facilitating purposeful contact. In Chapter 6,

he explores various approaches that leaders in religious schools could consider in order to promote peace education based on religious ideals. He contends that a religious framework can be drawn upon to motivate divisive groups towards peace and inclusion. Drawing on Johnston and Sampson (1994), Yablon argues that school leaders are better able to influence peace relations through religion than through other political or social means. The attitude of school leaders according to both Kollontai in Chapter 5 and Yablon in Chapter 6 is crucial to the advancement of peace education in divisive religious and cultural contexts.

School leaders need opportunities to critically review their existing attitudes and beliefs and have a healthy understanding of self as a person and professional (Shahid, 2011). Such understandings are vital for school leaders who are responsible for every member of the school community and are also accountable to others such as the school's governing body, public bodies and politicians responsible for education. In the light of these responsibilities and accountabilities, Julian Stern in Chapter 7 considers their potential to generate loneliness in leadership. He argues that leaders need to understand their loneliness and be able to distinguish between healthy and unhealthy "aloneness". Stern suggests that a leader's understanding of his/her loneliness will help him/her to realize the potential for loneliness in schooling in general. Healthy loneliness can be perceived as solitude, and he argues that school leaders need to retain a place for solitude as it is a time for reflection which may lead to enlightened self-knowledge (even if the self-knowledge is uncomfortable). Times for solitude are strongly rooted in religious traditions, and, according to Stern, leaders in religious schools should embrace solitude and be able to host some loneliness in a congenial way, rather than treat loneliness and loners as being *wrong*. In Chapter 7 he suggests that school leaders will be able to tackle loneliness effectively only by putting loneliness in the context of inclusion and exclusion.

Leadership in religious schools is a complex and often misunderstood role. Leaders in such schools are required to exercise various dimensions of leadership distinct from those generally required of a public or state school leader. In Chapter 8 my own contribution to this collection of works explores several dimensions of leadership. These dimensions which are the focus of

this chapter arise from a recent study focusing on school leaders' management of a major curriculum change in Catholic religious schools in Melbourne, Australia. The study reveals that there are various dimensions of leadership associated with the role of leadership in these religious schools (Buchanan, 2010). The participants involved in the study identified six dimensions of effective leadership being constantly exercised by leaders including principals, deputy principals, faculty leaders and teachers as leaders. The dimensions of leadership exercised by leaders in religious schools include, but are not exclusive to, religious leadership, faith leadership, spiritual leadership, ministerial leadership, educational leadership and curriculum leadership. The various dimensions of leadership are generally exercised in a simultaneous manner. Effective leadership in religious schools may be enhanced by a leader's understanding of and willingness to exercise these dimensions of leadership. Leaders who know, understand and exercise the various leadership dimensions are more likely to offer effective leadership that is oriented towards achieving educational goals that accord with the religious identity of the school.

Opportunities for teachers to exercise leadership capabilities and take up leadership roles are imperative to leadership succession planning and fostering leadership density in all schools including religious schools (Catholic Education Commission Victoria, 2005; Elmore, 2000). This requires a leadership approach that enables teacher leaders to encourage colleagues to work towards instigating improved learning opportunities for students (Catholic Education Commission Victoria, 2005). Opportunities to exercise leadership action in an educational context should commence during the formation of pre-service teachers as they advance through their teacher training course. Shane Lavery proposes that pre-service teachers desiring to teach in religious schools can develop leadership potential through service-learning programs. In Chapter 9, he explores a Christian service program designed specifically for pre-service teachers but contends that the approach can also be designed to be accessible to practicing teachers in a school context. He suggests that service learning requires opportunities for deep reflection, and without such opportunities this type of learning only amounts to volunteerism (Lavery & Richards, 2006). Teaching practice

requires the exercise of leadership on a daily basis. The form and/or shape that leadership takes is an important consideration for those who prepare pre-service teachers and for those who lead schools. The servant leadership model proposed by Lavery in Chapter 9 blends organizational competence, collegiality and a vision of teaching and learning that is relational. Early career teachers including pre-service teachers need to be involved in experiences that will enable them to self-reflect on their own potential for leadership. The challenge is for teacher training institutions, schools and centralized educational bodies to offer consistent servant leadership approaches such as the one proposed by Lavery to enable this.

In Chapter 10 of this collection Kath Engebretson suggests that secularization poses a particular challenge to religiously affiliated schools. She adopts Taylor's (1991, 1999, 2007) theoretical position on secularization which holds that secularization is ultimately a spiritual, moral and religious phenomenon. Engebretson argues that a challenge for leadership in religious schools is to consider ways of accommodating secularization while at the same time being attentive to offering a religion-specific education as well as opportunities for religious socialization. Drawing on the journals of Matteo Ricci (Rule, 1968) and James Davison Hunter (2010), she proposes that socialization takes place within the family and the community, and religious socialization is the key function of religious schools as a community in faith. One of the challenges faced by leaders in religious schools is the responsibility of ensuring that religious socialization takes place within a conversation where the religious context is both assumed and treasured. This type of conversation needs to be one that is formative and potentially transformative of the individual and ultimately the tradition itself.

Mushin Canbolat, Ismail Albayrak and Kath Engebretson contend that religious schools aim to espouse the values of honesty, sincerity, service, love of humanity, acceptance of difference, enculturation and interreligious dialogue. In Chapter 11 they explore the Hizmet movement in education. This movement is based on the educational vision of Muslim scholar Fethullah Gulen. His vision underpins a growing number of schools in numerous cultural settings throughout the world. Canbolat, Albayrak and Engebretson discuss the key characteristics of good leadership in Hizmet schools and suggest that they may

be offered to leaders in other educational settings, including religious schools, around the world.

This chapter has introduced some current perspectives and challenges pertaining to leadership in religious schools. Each of the issues raised is explored further throughout the various chapters in this collection. They provide opportunities for critical reflection that fosters careful consideration of ways to transform leadership that is oriented towards improvements for teachers and, ultimately, students for the betterment and advancement of all societies.

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