

Connie's voice strengthened as she concluded, "Join with me *now* and stand up for your beliefs! We can't stand by and watch our culture being destroyed. You know and I know that language is absolutely essential to our survival as a people!"

A chorus of support cheered Connie on, but no one knew what would happen next as language, legalities, and the bottom line came crashing together.

## Questions

### The Case

With whom do you sympathize most, Connie or Armand, and for what reasons?

### History

The *Canadian Multiculturalism Act* (1988) is intended to ensure that all Canadians are able to participate equally in Canadian society. Based on what happens in this case, is that even possible? Explain.

### Philosophy

In this case, Connie makes a passionate plea for allowing non-certified elders to teach the Indigenous language course. Should all teachers be certified? What might be the consequences if we opened up teaching to non-certified persons? Justify your response.

### Sociology

Much of what happens between school districts and cultural groups involves issues of power and authority. Explain how these two concepts play out in this case.

### Implications for Practice

What would you do if your teaching load was "topped up" by having to teach a language you didn't know very well?

## Unmasking Hallowe'en

It was recess at Middleboro Elementary School, and the chilly prairie air which had crept across the school yard was causing the leaves to yellow and the school children's cheeks to redden. The teachers at Middleboro had been thoughtfully planning fall activities and celebrations, some in relation to seasonal changes and others in relation to ongoing classroom inquiries. In particular, they had been considering various field trips for the 31st of October in order to minimize the focus on—and distractions of—Hallowe'en. The teachers had worked diligently

over the past few years to make school celebrations more inclusive of different cultures, particularly since the community's immigrant population, especially families from the Philippines and India, was continuing to increase. They came to understand that Hallowe'en falls one day before the Filipino celebration of All Saints' Day, an extremely important holiday in which families honour their loved ones who have passed on. Knowing this, many teachers questioned whether the Canadian tradition of organizing garish Hallowe'en parties at school might be considered cultural insensitivity by these communities. In fact, some of the teachers argued that school-based Hallowe'en celebrations privileged and perpetuated a narrow North American perspective that simply disregarded the values and traditions of immigrant families and their children.

With this in mind, the teachers made alternative plans for October 31st. The Kindergarten classroom teachers planned pyjama parties highlighting the various stories they had been reading. The Grade 3 class planned a trip to the Art Gallery to see a photo exhibit of their city which complemented their current community study, and the combined Grade 1 and 2 class planned to go on a nature hike in an urban forest to support their study of animals and their habitats. By all accounts, the children were looking forward to their field trips and special events.

The new principal, Jennifer Bassaraba, supported the teachers' rationale for changing their approaches to Hallowe'en. As she was accustomed to doing, Jennifer engaged in a casual conversation with some parents of Kindergarten children who were outside the school, waiting for the bell. One of the parents, Kim Petrowski, who was excited about her child's first school experiences, asked Jennifer about the school's plans for Hallowe'en. Jennifer, proud of her teachers' thoughtfulness in honouring both the curriculum and multiculturalism, explained the school's alternative plans for Hallowe'en this year. Jennifer explained to Kim the stress that Hallowe'en usually creates for young children, the economic inequities that become more apparent, and the cultural privileging that Hallowe'en perpetuates.

Kim, who was also the vice-chair of the parent council, asked, "So, when did the school district pass a policy to ban Hallowe'en?"

"Oh, it's not a policy," said Jennifer quickly. "Teachers are simply using their professional judgment to accommodate our new children and their families. As you may or may not know, we have many new families in our community who don't celebrate Hallowe'en. It is not a part of our curriculum, so the teachers think that the classroom time is better spent on more relevant and inclusive activities. We aren't banning Hallowe'en, we are just trying to minimize the disruptions that it causes while doing a better job of including our families who do not celebrate it."

The conversation was interrupted by the school bell, and the children and parents entered the building to greet their teachers. Jennifer replayed the



conversation in her mind as she walked through the school and thought that it had gone well enough. She made a mental note to talk with her teachers at the staff meeting the following week about sending a letter home to families with more information about the school's plans.

Two days later, Jennifer received a phone call from Greg Leung, the school district superintendent. "Jennifer, Greg here. What's going on over there at Middleboro? I have a parent—Kim Petrowski—up in arms because you've banned Hallowe'en at the school. She's called one of the trustees and claims she's got a petition going."

"What? We haven't banned Hallowe'en," Jennifer retorted. "We're just not planning outrageous parties and costume celebrations."

"Yeah, yeah. That's what she said and that's exactly what she's upset about. She says that you're 'depriving her child' of Hallowe'en. She sees it as a fundamental part of the Canadian experience," Greg responded rather flatly.

"Greg, the staff here had many conversations about this before my arrival. The teachers are not only trying to minimize the disruptions that Hallowe'en brings, but they are also trying to respect our new Canadians by not forcing them to participate in an event that some might not understand and may even find inappropriate."

"I hear what you're saying," Greg replied, "but Mrs Petrowski feels that this is an opportunity to teach new Canadians about Canadian traditions and for children to learn about proper nutrition."

"Seriously? You've got to be kidding me!" Jennifer was shocked by the arguments she was hearing.

"Look," continued Greg, "Mrs Petrowski is not going to let this go. If you can believe it, she has even threatened to contact the media over this. You need to make this to go away and go away fast!"

Exasperated, Jennifer took a deep breath and asked, "What would you suggest, Greg?"

"Mrs Petrowski says that the parent council wants to organize a school-wide Hallowe'en celebration. They want a dance, costumes—the works! She said the parent council will organize it all. They just want the teachers to support it and for the kids to attend."

Jennifer felt her heart starting to race. "Look, the teachers here are adamant about this. When I started at Middleboro this year, they made it plain that the status quo simply won't fly. Furthermore, Mrs Petrowski's position is Eurocentric and condescending to our school's immigrant families. It bothers me that just because her voice is the loudest, she is being allowed to speak for everyone." Jennifer was getting angrier by the moment.

Suddenly, Greg interrupted, "Look, Jennifer, I've got to get to a meeting. Call me when you've got this resolved."

Jennifer hung up the phone and dropped her head into her hands. She wondered how this could have spun out of control so quickly. She believed, along with the teachers, that schools should do more than just *tolerate* the cultures and customs of new Canadians. Like them, she worried that the parent council's perspective was narrow-minded and did not represent the views of the larger Middleboro community. On the other hand, as a new principal at the school, she knew that she was expected to collaborate effectively with *all* of the parents. If she disregarded these concerns, it would likely be more difficult for her to establish herself in the community.

But what was she to do? She needed to find a compromise that would respect all the parties involved—whether they were part of the vocal minority or not. Unfortunately, she did not have the luxury of time.

## Questions

### The Case

Kim Petrowski disagrees with the decision that the staff has taken to downplay Hallowe'en. What are her arguments for keeping this tradition? What are the counter-arguments?

### History

Historically, the celebration of Christian holidays has been taken for granted in Canadian schools. What has happened in Canadian society to make us question the appropriateness of this long-standing tradition?

### Philosophy

Are Middleboro's attempts to be inclusive to cultural minorities fair to everyone? Why or why not?

### Sociology

Kim Petrowski threatens to take her concerns to the media. What role should the media play in decision making by school boards? Why do you think so?

### Implications for Practice

Imagine you teach in a school that has decided on alternative activities to traditional holiday celebrations. What kinds of activities might you plan that would be pedagogically defensible yet appealing to students?