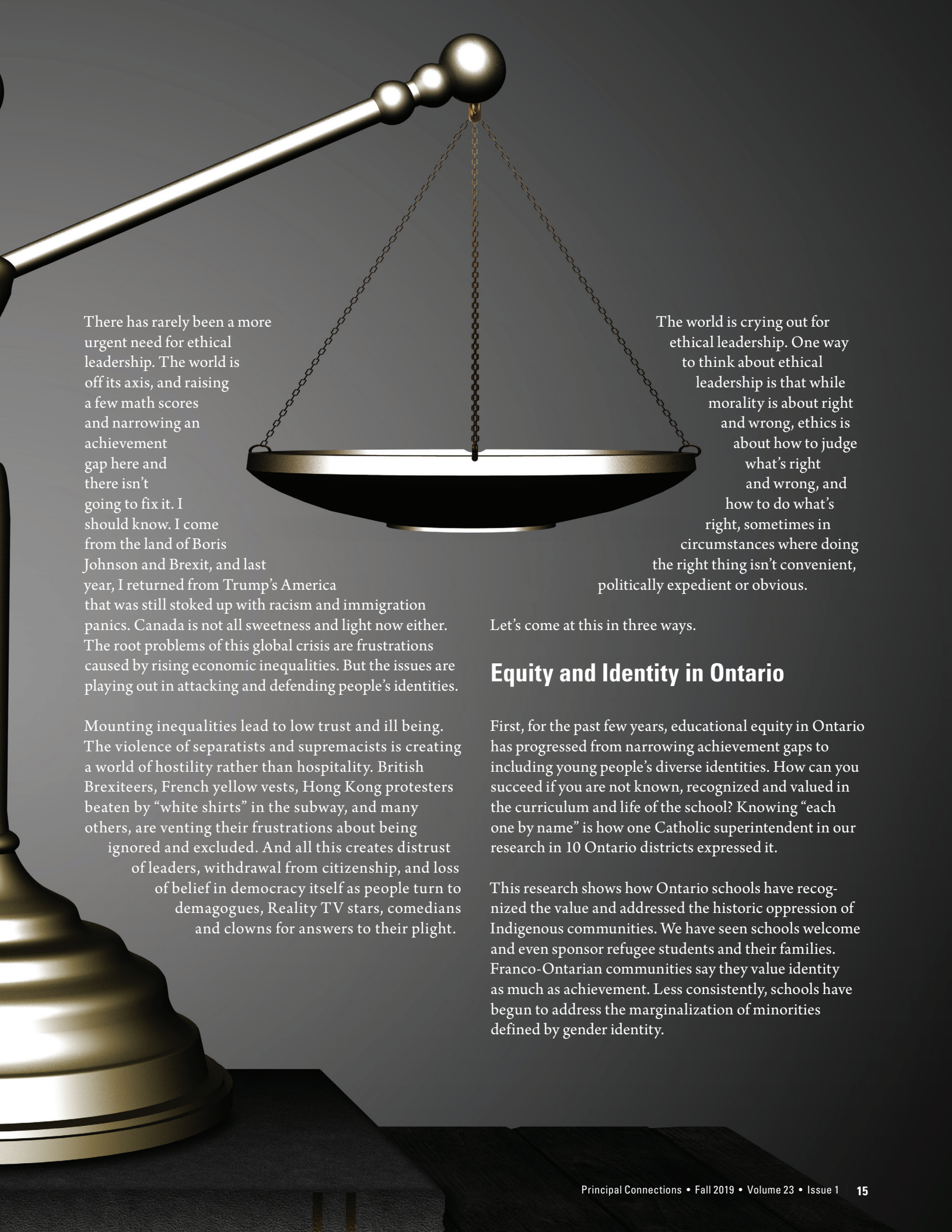


Leadership Ethics, Inequality & Identity

By Andy Hargreaves





There has rarely been a more urgent need for ethical leadership. The world is off its axis, and raising a few math scores and narrowing an achievement gap here and there isn't going to fix it. I should know. I come from the land of Boris Johnson and Brexit, and last year, I returned from Trump's America that was still stoked up with racism and immigration panics. Canada is not all sweetness and light now either. The root problems of this global crisis are frustrations caused by rising economic inequalities. But the issues are playing out in attacking and defending people's identities.

Mounting inequalities lead to low trust and ill being. The violence of separatists and supremacists is creating a world of hostility rather than hospitality. British Brexiteers, French yellow vests, Hong Kong protesters beaten by "white shirts" in the subway, and many others, are venting their frustrations about being ignored and excluded. And all this creates distrust of leaders, withdrawal from citizenship, and loss of belief in democracy itself as people turn to demagogues, Reality TV stars, comedians and clowns for answers to their plight.

The world is crying out for ethical leadership. One way to think about ethical leadership is that while morality is about right and wrong, ethics is about how to judge what's right and wrong, and how to do what's right, sometimes in circumstances where doing the right thing isn't convenient, politically expedient or obvious.

Let's come at this in three ways.

Equity and Identity in Ontario

First, for the past few years, educational equity in Ontario has progressed from narrowing achievement gaps to including young people's diverse identities. How can you succeed if you are not known, recognized and valued in the curriculum and life of the school? Knowing "each one by name" is how one Catholic superintendent in our research in 10 Ontario districts expressed it.

This research shows how Ontario schools have recognized the value and addressed the historic oppression of Indigenous communities. We have seen schools welcome and even sponsor refugee students and their families. Franco-Ontarian communities say they value identity as much as achievement. Less consistently, schools have begun to address the marginalization of minorities defined by gender identity.

Ethically, we need leaders to own up and face up to these issues, not as heroic individuals but as honest communities.

When Ontario redefined equity as more than achievement gaps, it took a big ethical turn. But it still has imperfections. No identity is flawless. Diversity is not always an unconditional positive to be celebrated in food and festivals. Members of poor white working-class communities can be xenophobic and racist (I speak as someone who comes from one of the most pro-Brexit towns in the UK): hence, some leaders' hesitancy to acknowledge their grievances. But fear of voicing an inconvenient truth about this group's economic margin-

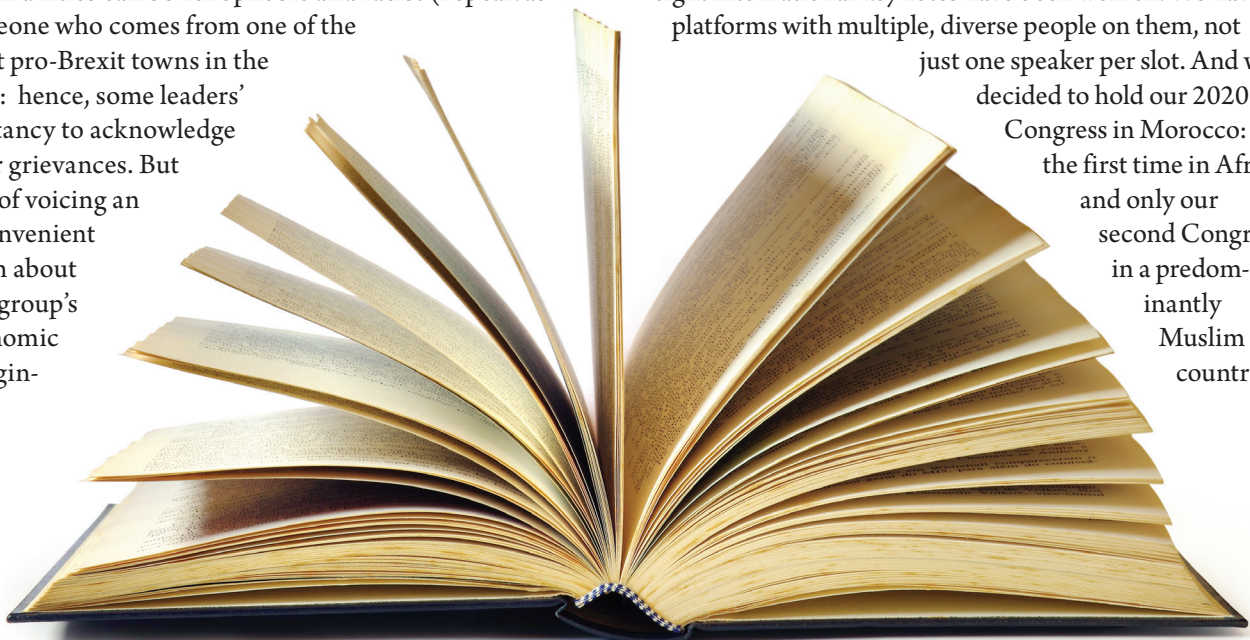
alization and its vulnerability to elite condescension is not a place from which we should lead. The highest rates of domestic violence against women do not occur in heterosexual relationships. Several faith-based communities marginalize gender-based minorities. Some Franco-Ontarian schools find it difficult to fully include French-speaking students from North Africa, Haiti or the Middle East without perceived risks to their own imperiled identity.

Ethically, we need leaders to own up and face up to these issues, not as heroic individuals but as honest communities. We need leaders who will help people recognize, inquire into, empathize with, constructively question, and then ultimately bring together multiple identities into one greater whole, without imposing a single white, colonial or Western identity on everyone.

Competing Human Rights

Second, what do we do when human rights conflict? I have just completed a two-year term as President of the International Congress for School Improvement and Effectiveness (ICSEI). When I became President Elect, with my predecessor, I called 10 per cent of the 500 plus membership to ask for feedback. Everyone liked ICSEI. But they felt it had grown older, was very "white," and tended to serve the interests of its existing older members (including me!) at the expense of the rest.

So, we set up a Generational Renewal, Inclusion and Diversity (GRID) standing committee to promote positive change. We encouraged younger members to run for office and build a more youthful and dynamic board. We rethought our keynote speaker slots: seven out of our last eight international keynotes have been women. We have platforms with multiple, diverse people on them, not just one speaker per slot. And we decided to hold our 2020 Congress in Morocco: the first time in Africa, and only our second Congress in a predominantly Muslim country.



Great progress, we thought – until, at the AGM, in a tone of outrage and hurt, one member asked, “Why is ICSEI holding Congresses in countries where homosexuality is illegal?” This was an uncomfortable leadership moment. I tried to listen actively to this challenging question and promised we would address it. Morocco, we realized, presented a not uncommon situation of competing human rights. In being inclusive of race, faith and the Global South, we were also risking exclusion and basic safety of gender-identity minorities. So we now have a published ethics policy on how we approach these issues. We secured assurances about intellectual freedom and safety for all members within the Congress. And our diverse speaker platform will include presentations on LGBTQ issues. Morality is about right and wrong. Ethics addresses what to do about this, in practice, when dilemmas like competing human rights have to be dealt with.

A Global Movement for Ethical Change

As CEO of England’s National College for School Leadership, Steve Munby was responsible for the training and developing of all leaders of England’s 22,000 state schools. In *Imperfect Leadership*, he argues that one of the greatest flaws of leadership is to believe you have to be the perfect leader: never weak, always right, free from self-doubt and impervious to failure. Ethical leadership, Munby says, means being clear about your values and hanging on to them rather than doing the expedient thing just to keep the government off your back, get performance numbers up or avoid unwanted pushback.

It’s a good argument. But ethical leadership shouldn’t rest completely on individual crises of conscience. We also have to make policy environments more ethical so educational leaders won’t encounter impossible dilemmas like having to implement policies they believe will harm children, or feeling pressured to lift results up quickly by concentrating undue attention on students closest to minimal proficiency targets.

So Steve works with me, and a Norwegian partner, to build a global movement for ethical educational change; to help get the world back on its axis. It’s called ARC (formerly known as *Atlantic Rim Collaboratory*). Its vision is to advance the interests of broad excellence, equity, inclusion, democracy and human rights in education, within professionally run systems (www.atrico.org). Invented in a restaurant in Toronto and based at the

University of Ottawa, ARC is a group of seven to ten systems, each comprising a Minister, Deputy Minister and head of a professional association, who convene in an annual summit to advance and realize ARC’s vision. The systems are self-funded. There is no corporate or foundation money to distract members from their core purpose. Nova Scotia and Saskatchewan are two of the systems. Ontario withdrew in June 2018. Leaders of the International Congress of Principals and of Education International (the union of teacher unions) also participate.

ARC’s work rests on three core practices:

1. School visits to get close to policy and practice in action, and debrief and give feedback afterwards.
2. Structured feedback from renowned thought leaders like Sir Ken Robinson, who work *pro bono*.
3. Facilitated peer feedback in triads on strategic and ethical problems of practice in an environment of confidentiality and trust.

System leaders say they have some of the most productive discussions with their own teams they’ve ever had, and that they sometimes go home and change their policies on accountability, creativity and other matters, as a result.

So ethical leadership is about being courageous and staying true to your values. It’s about letting right be done, even when it’s uncomfortable or poses personal risk. It’s about confronting complex dilemmas like competing human rights with others rather than trying to resolve everything alone. And it’s about creating and fighting for a positive educational and ethical environment together that removes ethical dilemmas between serving the child and complying with the system that are neither necessary nor desirable. [CP](#)

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His Ontario research can be accessed at:
ccsli.ca/downloads/2018LeadingFromTheMiddleFinal-EN.pdf

The references are available at: [@hargreavesbc](http://www.andyhargreaves.com)