

RESPONDING TO DIVERSE STUDENTS' NEEDS IN NEW ZEALAND SCHOOLS: ETHICAL PROBLEM-SOLVING APPROACHES USED BY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

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Article History: Submitted 11 May 2022 | Accepted 17 Mar 2024 | Published 18 Sept 2026

ABSTRACT. Inclusive schools have brought ethical challenges to school teams, in part due to the fact that there are now more stakeholders, each with their own set of values and principles, interacting in response to diverse students' needs. When conflicts involving ethical problems arise, school principals act as mediators in the problem-solving process, and must consider the issues in their full complexity. In this article, we present examples of ethical problems encountered by New Zealand school principals when responding to diverse students' needs, and the approaches taken to resolve those problems. We also highlight some singularities of New Zealand's education system that impact ethical problem-solving in relation to addressing diverse students' needs.

RÉPONDRE AUX BESOINS D'UNE DIVERSITÉ D'ÉLÈVES DANS LES ÉCOLES DE LA NOUVELLE-ZÉLANDE : APPROCHES DE RÉSOLUTION DE PROBLÈMES ÉTHIQUES MOBILISÉES PAR DES DIRECTIONS D'ÉTABLISSEMENTS SCOLAIRES

RÉSUMÉ. L'inclusion scolaire a engendré certains problèmes éthiques pour les personnels scolaires, en partie en raison du nombre croissant d'acteurs qui, chacun avec leurs propres valeurs et principes, interagissent pour répondre aux besoins des élèves. Lorsque surviennent des problèmes éthiques, les directions d'établissement scolaire agissent à titre de personnes médiatrices dans le processus de résolution de problème et doivent prendre en considération toute la complexité de la situation. Dans cet article, nous présentons des exemples de problèmes éthiques liés à l'inclusion scolaire rencontrés par des directions d'établissement de la Nouvelle-Zélande, et les approches adoptées dans le processus de résolution. Nous exposons également certaines particularités du système éducatif néo-zélandais qui influent sur le processus de résolution des problèmes éthiques rencontrés.

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The recognition of human diversity and the ideology of inclusion are now taking hold on a global scale. Larochelle-Audet et al. (2021) define “human diversity” as an incontrovertible fact in society, existing in many forms and in all individuals as “numerous characteristics, preferences and needs combined and uniquely interwoven in each person’s life” (p. 4), such as learning profile, gender identity, or cultural customs. In our framework, the concept of diversity is associated with the denormalization paradigm, in which the idea of being different is part of a sociologically inspired model (AuCoin & Vienneau, 2015). That is, human diversity might be perceived negatively or positively depending on a given social context, aspects of which include the era, place, social and political issues, authority relationships, and so forth (Larochelle-Audet et al., 2021).

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2015) has clearly reaffirmed the vision of diversity and inclusion not only for society at large but also in education. An inclusive school recognizes the social phenomenon of diversity and adopts a holistic approach toward the educational success and well-being of all (Borri-Anadon et al., 2021). The move toward inclusive schools brings complex challenges to school teams, in part due to the fact that there are now more stakeholders (new professionals, parents, etc.) interacting in response to diverse students’ needs. Because each individual has their own set of values (Desaulniers & Jutras, 2012) and principles, conflicts involving complex issues are more likely to occur (St-Vincent, 2011). Some of these challenges include ethical problems (St-Vincent, 2017). Research shows that school principals play a central role in ethical problem-solving (Cherkowski et al., 2015; Shapiro & Gross, 2013; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2010; St-Vincent, 2015). Indeed, principals must act as mediators in the problem-solving process, taking into consideration the complexity of the issues and their roles as administrators, pedagogical leaders, and decision makers. Ethical problems may involve multiple complex factors related to the people involved in the situation. For example, what should a principal do when a teacher refuses to help a student who needs specific accommodations in class on the grounds that the teacher does not have time to deal with that situation? How should a principal resolve a situation in which parents insist that their child should remain in a regular class, but school staff argue that they do not have sufficient resources to support the student?

Our previous studies focused on ethical problems encountered by school principals in different countries (*viz.*, Canada, Spain, and Switzerland) where inclusive education policies prevail (St-Vincent, 2015). The study conducted in New Zealand that is the subject of the present article was intended to extend this corpus of international research, thus allowing us

to compare and contrast our results. Our research objectives were to identify ethical problems encountered by school principals when responding to diverse students' needs, and to explore the actions taken and approaches used to resolve them. Furthermore, we wished to highlight some singularities of New Zealand's education system that impact ethical problem-solving in relation to diverse students' needs.

Several authors have highlighted the importance of investigating ethical issues faced by school principals, this across geographical contexts (Murphy, 2013; Norberg & Johansson, 2007). In a study conducted with school principals in New Zealand and Australia, Cranston et al. (2003) highlighted the urgent need expressed by school leaders for professional development to help them better integrate ethics into their role and to improve their ability to develop lasting and meaningful relationships with members of the school community. To our knowledge, no previous studies have specifically addressed the ethical problems faced by New Zealand school principals in respect to inclusion and meeting diverse students' needs.

THE NEW ZEALAND EDUCATION CONTEXT

New Zealand is a country of approximately 5 million people, made up of two main islands in the southwestern Pacific Ocean. The compulsory New Zealand education system is free and secular, although there are some separate religious schools. The education system consists of primary education (Years 1–8) and secondary education (Years 9–13), comprising both English and kura kaupapa Māori^{1,2} (Māori-language immersion schools). Students begin school at the age of 5 and progress each year regardless of ability or achievement. There is a compulsory national curriculum (made up of 10 learning areas) which outlines a vision of education and the principles, values, and key competencies that are to underpin the curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2025). Schools, though, are free to design a local curriculum to meet the specific needs of their students and communities.

In recent history, New Zealand has demonstrated a strong commitment to promoting inclusive education through its legislation and education policies. This began in the late 1980s with the introduction of the New Zealand Education Act, which confirmed the equal rights of all people to enrol and receive education at state schools. This policy has since been replaced by the Education and Training Act (2020), which further reinforced the notion that education in New Zealand should be inclusive of all children and youth. Education policies have also played an essential

part in signalling the importance of inclusive education, initially focusing on meeting the individual needs of children and youth, then on the importance of the school context, and more recently highlighting the importance of cultural and political aspects of education as a key driver for inclusive education (Kearney, 2011). The New Zealand Ministry of Education describes the education system as reflecting “our unique and diverse society. We welcome different abilities, religious beliefs, ethnic groups, income levels and ideas about teaching and learning” (2026, Education in New Zealand section, para. 2). This is in line with policies and legislation that reflect a commitment to inclusive education, ensuring that, regardless of personal and/or social circumstances, all children and youth have the opportunity to succeed and flourish at school.

Every state school in New Zealand is governed by a school board. This board is comprised of members of the school community who are elected by that community, as well as a representative of the school staff, the school principal, and, for schools in Year 9 and above, a student representative. The school board is the employer of all staff including the principal, who is the chairperson of the board and manages the day-to-day operations of the school. Members of the board are responsible for the selection of all school staff. The board is also responsible for setting the strategic direction of the school, managing curriculum, finances and property, health and safety, and the development of school policies and procedures (New Zealand School Trustees Association, 2025).

Schools are reviewed by an agency external to the Ministry of Education called The Education Review Office (ERO). The ERO typically monitors and evaluates schools once every 3 years and publishes their findings on their website. The ERO also conducts research on the performance of the education system.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: ETHICAL PROBLEMS AND PROBLEM-SOLVING APPROACHES

An ethical problem requires decision-making and a choice of action while taking multiple elements into consideration. The risks, benefits, and impacts of these elements on the people involved must be considered (Legault, 2003). Essentially, an ethical problem (even within the context of existing regulations and laws) presents no clear answer (Clarkeburn, 2002), and is often characterized by conflicting values or principles (Legault, 2003). Therefore, when resolving an ethical problem, a person may feel an internal struggle (St-Vincent, 2011). Being able to solve an ethical problem presupposes that the individual is able to recognize the

ethical dimensions of the problem (Clarkeburn, 2002). Four such dimensions have been identified: the values, professional principles, normative framework, as well as the people affected (St-Vincent, 2011). A value represents a preference, an inclination, a motivation to act (Legault, 2003). Values can be acquired through experience or education (Desaulniers & Jutras, 2012). The professional principles are guidelines proposed by the professional community to which the individual adheres in their practice (Jeffrey, 2005). The normative framework consists of official regulatory guidelines to be considered before making a decision or taking action. In an educational context, this includes the various charters, laws, ministerial policies, regulations, and jurisprudence governing educational systems, as well as the codes of ethics and professional conduct of certain professional orders, along with collective agreements (Cranston et al., 2014; St-Vincent, 2017). School principals must act as a mediator when an ethical problem is encountered that involves sensitive issues (Poirel & Yvon, 2011), and in doing so they must ensure that laws and regulations are respected and consider the values and professional principles at stake (St-Vincent, 2015; Tuana, 2014). With respect to inclusion, it is particularly important that principals show their adherence (Bélanger, 2015; Larochelle-Audet et al., 2021; Ryan, 2010; Thibodeau et al., 2016). For instance, a situation may arise in which a teacher does not authorize use of a support measure for a student with a learning disability, arguing that it does not seem fair to the other students; and yet, government policies authorize this measure for these students. Questions for the principal to consider would include:

- Who exactly on the school team should intervene?
- What are the rights and obligations of the teacher and the student?
- What are the school principal's responsibilities?
- How can a principal adequately solve the problem?

Research has revealed the kinds of ethical issues related to inclusive education encountered by school principals in Canada, Switzerland, and Spain (St-Vincent, 2015; St-Vincent et al., 2017). Remarkably similar ethical issues occurred in all three settings, ranging from complex demands from parents to lack of collaboration from some school team members. The research highlighted six different approaches commonly used to resolve ethical issues: conciliatory, active, preventive, adaptative, accompanying, and proactive. Most approaches were found in all three

settings, which allowed us to design a typology (see Table 1; St-Vincent, 2015, 2017).

TABLE 1. *Typology of approaches used to solve ethical problems (St-Vincent, 2017)*

Dominant approach	Characteristic	Main goal in terms of school dynamics
Conciliatory	Helps individuals to come to an understanding that a solution is beneficial, even if it is not satisfactory for all	Agreement
Active	Acts quickly and directly with people before another situation arises	Equity
Preventive	Averts problematic situations by taking precautions and establishing rules and regulations	Stability
Adaptative	Focuses on adjustments and harmony between individuals and the means to obtain them	Openness
Accompanying	Puts emphasis on finding a suitable rhythm and progression and tries to follow steps, one at a time	Progression
Proactive	Directs actions toward the future and education of the stakeholders	Evolution

As in Canada, Switzerland, and Spain, responding to diverse students' needs is also a central concern in New Zealand (Kearney & Kane, 2006). The focus of the present article is on how New Zealand principals respond to those issues, in the same or different ways from principals in the other countries.

METHODOLOGY: USING AN INTERPRETATIVE / QUALITATIVE APPROACH WITH FIVE SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

Our interpretative / qualitative research study aimed to understand the points of view of school principals who had been working for more than 5 years in a school actively implementing inclusive practices. Our sampling was thus intentional in seeking representativeness and consequently a certain contrast in contexts (Savoie-Zacj, 2018). We conducted semi-structured interviews (Savoie-Zacj, 2016) with New Zealand primary and intermediate school principals whose situations allowed us to highlight ethical problems associated with diverse students' needs and to analyze the approaches used to resolve these problems.

The principals were identified and contacted by a New Zealand university professor (the second author), who introduced them to the study and asked if they would be interested in participating. Selection of participants was based on the second author's prior awareness of principals of schools with highly diverse student populations. After their initial agreement to participate, an email was sent to each of the school principals seeking their informed consent to participate in the study.

The five participating school principals had different profiles in terms of their experience and the number of pupils in their schools (see Table 2). It is relevant to mention that, like the other countries where we conducted previous studies, there is no official training in New Zealand to become a school principal. First of all, only certified teachers can become principals. However, there is no formal leadership training dedicated to ethical problem-solving for principals. Rather, they acquire experiential knowledge as they progress in their practice, often through discussions with their mentors. Typically, prior to being appointed as a school principal, a candidate will have served as a team leader of other teachers and often will have held a deputy or assistant principal role. Prospective school principals apply for an advertised principal role and, if successful, are appointed by the school board. For the most part, school principals learn on the job. In smaller schools (of less than 150 students) in New Zealand, assistant principals, deputy principals, and principals themselves may have classroom teaching responsibilities.

TABLE 2. *Characteristics of the participants*

Participant (pseudonym)	Experience as a school principal / deputy principal (years)	Experience as a qualified teacher (years)	School enrollment (number of pupils)	Type of school / student age range (years old)
Andrew	6.5	14	+/- 300	Primary / (5 to 13)
Craig	3	8	+/- 400	Intermediate / 10 to 13
Karen	11	20	+/- 450	Intermediate / 10 to 13
Deborah	20	20	+/- 200	Primary / (5 to 13)
Jason	28	5	+/- 300	Primary / (5 to 13)

The interviews took place in five schools on New Zealand's North Island during March 2018. Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes and was intended to gather information on the ethical problems encountered by the school principals related to responding to diverse students' needs in an inclusive context. Before asking each participant to tell us about ethical problems they had encountered on the job, we briefly presented the four dimensions of an ethical problem, as described above: the different people involved in the situation, elements of law or regulations, conflicting values, and professional principles. The central questions asked were:

Have you ever experienced a situation that appeared to you as an ethical problem related to responding to diverse students' needs in an inclusive context, whether in relation with colleagues, management, parents or the students themselves? Could you tell us what happened? Describe the facts, the people, certain words and the approach used to solve the situation.

We analyzed the corpus of data in two different ways: First, we created an inventory of the ethical problems described, and second, we identified the approaches (from the existing typology) most used by school principals to resolve such problems. To inventory the ethical problems described by the participants, we first extracted passages from the verbatim interview transcript, identified as "significant units" (Sabourin, 2009) related to ethical issues, and coded them using Microsoft Excel. This allowed us to analyze the selected units by emerging themes (Leray & Bourgeois, 2016; Paillé & Muchielli, 2012).

Secondly, we coded and classified units into categories determined a priori (Bardin, 1996) using the typology followed in our previous studies carried out in Canada, Switzerland, and Spain (St-Vincent, 2015). For example: "The teacher was overwhelmed. So we asked her what was her biggest problem. We tried to design the teaching model without adding more and more adults in the class for her to manage." This passage is associated with the characteristics that define the adaptive approach in the typology: harmony between individuals, answering expressed needs, discussion, openness, and the search for new means.

Lastly, we validated the results and discussion by inter-judge agreement between researchers (Van der Maren, 1996).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION: ETHICAL ISSUES AND PROBLEM-SOLVING APPROACHES

Results are presented for each participant to illustrate the singularity of each context. The elements related to each career path and school are first explained. Then, we describe one significant ethical problem that principal encountered. Finally, the approach that the principal used to resolve the problem is outlined. It is important to underline that, as in previous research carried out in Canada, Spain, and Switzerland (St-Vincent, 2015), regardless of the variety of ethical problems a given participant had encountered, that person constantly used the same approach.

ANDREW³: A CONCILIATORY APPROACH

Andrew started teaching 20 years ago in the primary school where he was currently principal. He had been in the principal position for 6 months. Previously, he had taught overseas for 4 years and then returned and worked as a deputy principal in this school. He then worked as a principal in other schools for a period of 6 years before becoming principal in his current school.

There were approximately 300 students aged 5 to 12 years old enrolled, all of whom lived in proximity to the school. Many of the students' parents worked at nearby public institutions, such as at the hospital. There were many rental homes in the area, and this brought a constant renewal of students. The rental status attracted transient, lower socioeconomic status families; some parents were unemployed or single parents. Diversity in the school was increasing along lines of ethnicity as well as students with learning needs, who studied alongside gifted children. Data held by the school showed declining indicators of "readiness to learn" (basic emotional, intellectual, and social skills) in children starting at the school.

Andrew expressed that his main role was to support the children. He aimed to develop collaboration among the school members, and he frequently consulted staff to better understand their intentions:

First, I wanted to be more in control. I wanted to make the rules and have the final say. Over time, that desire has disappeared. I want to lead alongside other people. Collaboration empowers people, that keeps the people happy, they feel like they are listened to and what they say matters. They know how valued they are and they lift their barriers.

Ethical problem: Should we allow Barry, who was excluded for unacceptable behaviour, to return to our school?

If a student adopts unacceptable behaviours, the principal can “stand them down”⁴ to bar them from school for a couple of days. If they repeat the behaviour, it is possible to suspend the student. That means that the student cannot come back to school before authorization from the school board. Starkly put, a choice needs to be made between educating them or excluding them. If the student is excluded, the Ministry of Education must find a new school for the student. The new school has no choice but to welcome the student, as occurred at Andrew’s school:

We were contacted and asked to take in Barry last year. This student had behaviour such as fighting, kicking the teacher, running out of class or out of school. Also, the parents were incredibly aggressive and abusive. The [school board] discussed the impact taking in this student would have on the school and on the class. First, I thought “No, I don’t want this kind of behaviour in our school! Too much impact.” So did the [school board]. (Andrew)

Andrew reported that different elements had to be taken into consideration: the school and class climate; what was best for the child; his need to be in school where he would be educated, cared for, and have good behaviours modelled to him; and the well-being of the staff. A team sought to gather as much information as possible in order to make the best decision. Many letters were sent to the Ministry of Education refusing to enrol Barry at their school. In the end, the school did not have a choice and was forced to enrol Barry. The school decided to pay a full-time teaching assistant to accompany and monitor Barry, even at morning tea and lunch time. The school board agreed to the solution, but struggled with the fact that this was a lot of resources and money to devote to one student.

In general, Andrew tended to prefer a conciliatory approach when encountering an ethical problem. The conciliatory approach leads the people involved to agree on possible compromises that each feels able to live with in the short or medium term. The principal aims for an agreement, prioritizing compliance with directives, but not necessarily to the satisfaction of all parties. A context in which many administrative, regulatory, or legal constraints are present is propitious to the use of this type of approach. A principal that uses the conciliatory approach often maneuvers between numerous constraints imposed by administrative directives.

CRAIG: AN ACTIVE APPROACH

Craig served as a deputy principal in an intermediate school. Part of his role was to be a SENCo (Special Educational Needs Coordinator), which is an agent of inclusive education who must ensure that all students, regardless of their background, are able to access the curriculum, whatever their particular needs may be. Before serving as a deputy principal, he was a teacher working with students with special needs.

There were about 400 students at his school, all from middle-class families. The school had some classes with students with ASD (autism spectrum disorder) and ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder). The students included 20 different ethnicities and a small population of Māori students, plus one refugee student from Syria.

Craig aimed to make decisions collectively: "It's always about the kids. What is the best for the student's learning and well-being. We discuss as a group (two deputies and a principal) and consult colleagues with teachers, parents and experts."

Ethical problem: Should we suspend Amish for actions we did not witness?

Two students were alone in a classroom, finishing classwork assigned by a teacher. At one point, the boy asked the girl if she wanted a massage. She refused but nonetheless he massaged her shoulders and neck. The girl said that he had slid his hand down and grabbed her breast. Afterwards, when asked, the boy, Amish, denied that this had happened. The principal called the police and the Oranga Tamariki (Ministry for Children), <https://www.orangatamariki.govt.nz>, who provided a social worker for vulnerable children to look into the situation. Craig believed that because the boy's family was Muslim, this situation was heightened by certain religious principles, and he sensed that the parents might react in a very emotional way. Indeed, the father was angry and in denial. The mother was more understanding, although she was not fluent in English. The boy told his version of the story and insisted that the girl had invited him to a more private area of the room. The school principal told the father that the main concern was that there was an allegation about the student touching the girl inappropriately. When the boy first told the story to the principal, he had completely left out the part about the massage, which brought suspicion on his version. In addition, Craig reported that they noticed the girl displayed an attitude of guilt and shame that had to be taken in consideration:

So, we made the decision to suspend him. We had our policies in place and it's stated that if there is anything about sexual abuse, then it is pretty cut and dry that there is suspension. The tough part was when it came to her words against his. Who do we believe? But through the elements, we decided she must be telling the truth. (Craig)

Amish was moved to another class after his suspension. He was not allowed to be a tutor or to be alone with any girl. The two students involved were not permitted to be alone together. That solution seemed satisfactory to the people involved, including Amish's parents. Two days later, there was an incident between two boys where one grabbed the other's testicles. The boy who had been grabbed was very upset. But some members of the staff said it was cultural: "Just boys being boys, it's not [that] big of a deal." Craig said, "For the second situation, we had a conversation with the boy, but nothing more serious, but I think we should address it with the same seriousness. We did not suspend him." In Amish's case, the school board ruled that the boy would be suspended and required to participate in a "Strengthen the Family" program with his family when he came back to school in order to help a better understanding of everyone's responsibilities.

Craig used an active approach. The active approach is characterized by a fast responsive attitude toward events in order to quickly restore situations. The principal aims for equity among school actors and often reframes their roles and responsibilities, trying to reach rapidly the most satisfactory solution for all concerned. The active approach focuses on a quick resolution.

KAREN: AN ACTIVE APPROACH

Karen was a principal in an intermediate school enrolling children from 10 to 13 years old. She held a literature degree and an education degree. She had taught for more than 20 years as a teacher and lead teacher, was a syndicate leader, and served as a deputy principal for 6 years before occupying her position as principal of her current school, which she had held for the last 5 years.

The school included more than 450 students. Karen depicted its population as a microcosm of the city: 50% New Zealand European, 20% Māori and Pacific Islander, 20% Asian, 5% South American, and 5% from the United Kingdom. A total of 27 different languages were spoken in the students' families. The number of students born outside of New Zealand was increasing, while the number of students from lower socioeconomic populations was decreasing as the community grew bigger and wealthier.

However, there was an increase in students with diverse learning needs. For example, the parents of a nonverbal autistic student applied for a place for their child. In response, the school decided to build a space with special equipment to welcome students sharing similar needs: flexible spaces, showers, furniture, and rockers. To promote inclusion, a value chart, represented by various symbolic icons, had been conceptualized within the school's community.

Equity for the students held a central space in Karen's decision-making process: "It's about the child and family's needs. It's all about the people."

Ethical problem: Should we keep doing Pōwhiri in our school or not?

Promoting values of the Indigenous People is important in the school. They valorized te reo Māori (the Māori language) and tikanga Māori (the Māori way). They also do pōwhiri to welcome new students, a Māori ceremony involving speeches and cultural performances.

When we talk about this in our country, it is new learning and it is shaky. Every school has a moral obligation, inserted in our curriculum, to make sure that there are opportunities to learn about the First People. One of my dilemmas as a principal, is how much I put those opportunities in my school. There are some schools that do none. (Karen)

Students learned in te reo Māori for 20 minutes every Monday. In classes, they studied te reo Māori for 10 minutes per day. The haka was taught to volunteers, a ceremonial war dance in Māori culture. In the school's haka group, most of the students were not Māori but Filipino, Chinese, or Pacific Islander. Some parents came to believe that the school was too Māori. Three years previously, all new students had been welcomed with a pōwhiri (20 minutes of speaking and singing) by protocol, and the school had carefully prepared and explained it to all parents prior to the event. After the event, Karen received nasty emails and phone calls saying, for example, "How dare you hijack my child's first day and not speak any English, not explaining and translating in English. We felt excluded." Even though Karen felt uneasy about trying to find a solution for the handful of people who felt insulted, she emailed them back saying that from now on the school would share with them in advance what was going to be said and explain its meaning, but that the ceremony would continue to be performed in the Māori language: "Since then, we explain to the parents before the pōwhiri and encourage them to look out for important words in Māori, like children, grandchildren, ancestors, learning, a place you can belong."

Like Craig, Karen tended to use an active approach, choosing tailored, short-term strategies. Karen aims for equity among school actors reframing their roles and responsibilities, trying to reach rapidly the most satisfactory solution for all concerned.

DEBORAH: AN ACCOMPANYING APPROACH

Deborah had been a principal for more than 20 years. Before becoming a principal, she taught in different schools for more than 2 decades. During that process, she had experienced being a resource teacher⁵ who helped and advised teachers in 25 schools about children with learning and behavioural difficulties. This primary school offered her a position, first as an assistant principal and then as a SENCo who coordinates special needs resources. Deborah became part of a professional learning community:

I meet regularly with three peers, and we have a facilitator. We share and question each other. It is informal. We did it for a year. I introduced it to the staff. The staff started a little professional learning community. We formed our own group because we are compatible.

The school served approximately 200 students from 5 to 13 years old, including a total of 27 different ethnic and cultural groups. There were a large number of Syrian children (many from refugee backgrounds). There were multi-level classes, with some children on the autism spectrum, some with dyslexia, and some with anxiety conditions. There were two deputy principals.

The school board chose the employees very carefully, looking for skills and values compatible with the school's mission, which emphasized inclusion and collaboration. The board also employed a Māori teacher who helped all of the teachers and students learn the Māori language, songs, and culture: "Our vision is that every student can achieve more than [they] think [is] possible: celebrating diversity, promoting excellence" (Deborah). Of the student body, 24 were Māori, some of whom were fluent Māori speakers. A pōwhiri occurred every term (four terms a year). The students performed the kaikaranga (ceremonial call to visitors). All students in the school would participate; they knew the songs and the actions and what they meant. And at the end, they would invite the new families to introduce themselves. In doing so, they aimed to acknowledge the journey that took place before they came to the school.

Ethical problem: Should we take more time to include the parents despite the staff work overload?

Some teachers did not share the value of including all parents at the same level. Deborah described hearing remarks teachers made about, for

example, parents from refugee backgrounds. Whenever a teacher made such a comment, Deborah responded. For example, when a teacher said: "Those parents are overprotective," Deborah tried to make the teachers reflect on their comments and learn from them: "Why do you think this? In a country in war conflict, if you cannot find your child, you can absolutely panic!" At one point, there was a violin teacher in school that spoke Arabic, Assyrian, and English. She volunteered as a translator in the school for teachers and parents to facilitate understanding between the various actors. Deborah even asked the Ministry of Education to fund her contribution. The violin teacher gave a presentation describing her history to the staff. She explained that her father had to leave Iraq three times and start his life all over again. An English teacher commented, "I don't understand why, with all the English language support we offer, some parents don't bother to learn English and continue to speak in their own language!" The violin teacher said, "You know, sometimes I [have to] try so hard not to think about home, and this is like it must be for those parents." Deborah encouraged spontaneous and informal group discussions when such comments arose.

Deborah sensed her practice had evolved over time:

Communication with the parents is important. Now, I meet the parents. My belief is that every child has a right to be helped. I have earned the board's trust over the years as a principal: they know that I really consider things before I make suggestions. The teacher's response as well. I evaluate my decisions and consult. It's an incredibly complex job and we need support. I try to make time for people.

The accompanying approach represents a slower pace of reaction to ethical problems. The principal aims to make progress, but wishes to reflect in order to evaluate the impact of what might be implemented and to make readjustments. The principal consults with all the people involved and all the information deemed essential is communicated.

JASON: AN ADAPTATIVE APPROACH

Jason had been a principal for 28 years. He hadn't completed his education degree before beginning work as a teacher. He became a principal in a small school after 5 years of teaching. He had always conducted informal studies on diverse subjects (for example, on learning disabilities), as well as organization and management, and shared his knowledge with various groups. He had developed an understanding of diversity, universal design, and design thinking. He believed he must meet the needs of the teachers so that they could in turn meet the students' needs.

The primary school at which he was principal taught 300 students from 20 different ethnic and cultural groups, including Somalia, the Philippines, and Syria. A large number of students were from non-English speaking backgrounds. Jason mentioned that some of the students were neurotypical and some had specific learning needs. The school had transformed itself from a Pakeha⁶ school to a school for all with special classes. Jason explained that 20 years ago there were school policies for employees (for example, protecting gay rights), but not for students. The school set a standard for an exemplary environment in New Zealand for students with special needs. The school board was supportive of inclusion. However, because of their inclusive vision, they often found themselves caught between Ministry of Education policies and their own objectives.

Ethical problem: Should we provide time as a resource for the teacher or not?

A few years ago, a very competent teacher had a multi-level group of 28 students, which posed a challenge in terms of the students' learning and adaptation needs. Some students needed one-on-one resources. One of the students had severe autism, another had extreme anger issues. The children had diverse interests and needs: Some were on the autism spectrum, others had developmental issues, others were learning English, one had Tourette syndrome, and one was a gifted student. The teacher felt overwhelmed. A team attempted to design a teaching model that would not require more and more adults in the class for her to also manage. They asked her to name her biggest problem. Being a perfectionist, she said she was terrified that someone would say that she was not doing the best she could and had let the children down, so she responded that her biggest problem was "I don't have time." In response, they provided her with another teacher. This was not a teacher's assistant, but rather a permanent experienced teacher who took over the class 1 day a week for 6 months so that she could take time outside of class to develop ideas and strategies to help her students. While the children with special needs were fine because they had good supports in place, it was the "in between" students that she was the most worried about. Using the allotted time, she successfully developed new programs to stimulate the students.

Jason tended to use an adaptative approach to resolve ethical problems. The adaptative approach fosters a space for dialogue for a medium-term adjustment. The principal aims for a climate of openness between the school actors. A set procedure is respected in the resolution process so that everyone can express themselves and be heard. It is hoped that each person will be satisfied with the chosen actions once the decisions are made.

Using this approach, the Ministry of Education is only contacted as a last resort.

DIFFERENT CONTEXTS: SIMILAR ISSUES AND APPROACHES

In this article and the research on which it is based, our intention was not to analyze the effectiveness or impact of the approaches used by the participants to solve the ethical problems they encountered, but rather to offer a nuanced picture of each of the six ethical approaches. Among the participants' stories and leadership styles, we were able to identify four of the six approaches from our typology. It is important to emphasize that there is no right or wrong approach among the six identified. Each has its advantages and limitations depending on the dynamics of a given school. To ignore an ethical problem is the most damaging approach, as this leads to further complications and the multiplying of problems (St-Vincent, 2015, 2017). Each principal develops their own moral literacy, including ethical sensitivity, that enables them to respond to ethical issues (Tuana, 2014); by moral literacy is meant a repertoire of values and knowledge that they are able to mobilize when faced with ethical problems. Ethical sensitivity allows the individual to interpret situations, imagine actions to be taken, and anticipate consequences in terms of their impact on the well-being of each person concerned (Bebeau et al., 1985). A principal's preferred approach seems to depend on the context of the school and the goals of their practice in light of the culture and dynamics of the school. A principal might opt to rapidly reach an agreement that aligns with the administrative policies (conciliatory), promote equity (active), encourage patience toward progress in the student's educational experience (accompanying), or show openness to different perspectives within the school's team (adaptive).

When complex ethical dilemmas are encountered, an ethical decision-making process helps establish a suitable consensual response (Legault, 2003). School principals need to be trained and have sufficient tools before engaging in a resolution process involving conflicting values or principles (Cranston et al., 2003; Murphy, 2013; Shapiro & Gross, 2013; St-Vincent, 2015). It is possible to resolve some ethical issues without training, but ethical problems can also be severe and complex, and cause a multiplication of other underlying ethical issues. Adequately resolving ethical problems implies further that the principal should have sufficiently developed their ethical leadership in a school setting, which may require appropriate training (Langlois, 2011; Shapiro & Gross, 2013; St-Vincent, 2017). Our goal was to investigate and listen carefully to school principals' needs regarding ethical issues, and how they are able to adjust their

informal or formal training and propose appropriate tools or means to use when they encounter complex issues in their practice. We are currently continuing our research with school principals to study the different approaches they choose when they encounter ethical problems and where sometimes they may use a combination of approaches. Considering the evolving nature of a typology (Larouche, 2011), it would also be relevant to extend the research, for instance, by studying more teacher leader practices from different contexts.

Certain limitations need to be considered in relation to our results. The New Zealand participants expressed an interest in inclusive practices and, because their schools had very diverse student populations, this may bias the data. Furthermore, although the findings align with the typology of approaches we have theorized, it is not yet possible to generalize these results. A broader sample could deepen our understanding of the ethical problem-solving approaches used by principals and their consequences on school dynamics.

CONCLUSION

Despite some cultural differences particular to New Zealand, principals described ethical issues comparable to those identified in other countries. In this study, we identified four approaches that were used by the principals: conciliatory, active, accompanying, and adaptative. School principals should become aware of and better understand which approach they tend to prefer over others when faced with a situation involving ethical issues. This would allow them to take a step back and try a different approach that might prove more effective.

NOTES

1. As te reo Māori is an official language of New Zealand, Māori words are not italicized in this article.
2. The Māori are the Indigenous People of New Zealand, and kura kaupapa Māori schools are Māori middle schools.
3. All names used are pseudonyms. Ethical approval for this research was given by the Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières.
4. Fortier (2014) reports that the formal removal of students is permitted in New Zealand, whether by means of stand-downs, suspensions, exclusions, or expulsions. Stand-downs, the shortest of these removal practices, last for a maximum of 5 days during a school term and 10 days or less during a school year, with students returning to their school afterwards. Suspensions involve a meeting

of the school board within 7 days of the initial removal to decide on the suspended student's return to school (suspension lifted with/without conditions, suspension extended for a certain period, or exclusion or expulsion, which are both permanent). Exclusions apply to students under the age of 16 and necessitate enrolment in another school, whereas expulsions apply to older students and do not necessitate re-enrolment.

5. As Fortier (2014) explains, Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour (RTLb) are experienced teachers mandated to work with individuals or small groups of students and to support teachers reflecting on and changing their practice, working on a case-by-case referral basis. The RTLb's case load can also comprise class or school-wide programmes they help introduce. Created in 1996, the RTLb service was meant to better align resources and was transformed at the beginning of 2012 to improve consistency, governance, support systems, and professional leadership nation-wide, and to better respond to Māori and Pacific Islander students.
6. Pakeha: White people, especially New Zealanders of European descent.

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