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An Exploration of Ethical Dilemmas for Principals and School Guidance Counsellors

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Abstract

Acting in the best interests of students is central to the moral and ethical work of schools. Yet tensions can arise between principals and counsellors as they work from at times opposing professional paradigms. In this article we report on principals' and counsellors' responses to scenarios covering confidentiality and the law, student/teacher relationships, student welfare, and psychological testing of students. This discussion takes place against an examination of ethics, ethical dilemmas, and professional codes of ethics. While there were a number of commonalities among principals and counsellors that arose from their common belief in education as a moral venture, there were also some key differences among them. These differences centred on the principals' focus on the school as whole and counsellors' focus on the welfare of the individual student. A series of recommendations is offered to assist principals to navigate ethical dilemmas such as those considered in this article.

Introduction

There are many challenging ethical situations in schools today. The potential for conflict in these situations can be exacerbated by differences in the roles, responsibilities, and values of

personnel within the school. One such potential area of conflict is that between the school principal and the school counsellor. Researchers over the past twenty years in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia have found differences among school counsellors, teachers, and principals surrounding the role of the school counsellor. These are particularly fraught in respect to questions of confidentiality, informed consent to undertake counselling, and counselling as a disciplinary measure. These tensions arise in part from a lack of understanding of the ethical principles that guide a counsellor's actions. They also arise from the different roles and focus of principals, teachers, and counsellors. Principals and counsellors, therefore, are often placed in ethical dilemmas generated by the tension between their different foci—principals on the common good of the school as a whole and counsellors on the wellbeing of the individual student.

In this article we explore principals' and counsellors' responses to scenarios covering confidentiality and the law, student/teacher conflict, student welfare, and the psychological testing of students. It is evident that there are commonalities and differences between and among principals and counsellors. There are also tensions between principals and counsellors that derive from principals' focus on the common good and counsellors' focus on the good of the individual student. Recommendations are proposed as a way to lessen these tensions. We begin by considering the methods used to conduct this study, and how ethics and ethical dilemmas are understood.

Methods

Participants

The schools that were approached to participate in the study were chosen from a random list of Independent and Catholic Education schools in Brisbane, Queensland. Ethical clearance to

conduct this study was gained from the Queensland University of Technology. After 50 schools were contacted, eight principals and seven guidance counsellors from nine separate schools (four Independent and five Catholic) agreed to participate in the study. Interviews took place in participants' offices, and consent was gained at the time of interview.

Materials and Design

Seven scenarios were described to participants in an interview situation. These scenarios were created after a detailed literature search, looking at typical situations of disagreement and decision-making ambiguity for principals and counsellors in schools. The scenarios, which will be discussed in the results section, included ethically-provoking situations of student drug-taking, the psychological testing of students, and conflict between students and their teacher.

Data Analysis

A thematic analysis was used to determine common and conflicting attitudes and ideas among and between principals and guidance counsellors.

Literature

Ethics

Ethics and ethical dilemmas facing educators, school leaders in particular, are part of the fabric of everyday life in a school and have become important topics in the academic and professional literature (E. Campbell, 2003; Cranston et al., 2006; Day et al., 1999; Dempster and Berry, 2003; Duignan et al., 2003; Duginan and Collins, 2003; Eyal, et al., 2010; Langlois and Lapointe, 2007; Norburg and Johansson, 2007; Starratt, 1996, 2003; Stefkovich and Poliner Shapiro, 2003; Strike, 2003). Ethics can be thought of as being 'about how we

ought to live and behave' (Cranston et al., 2006: 106) in our lives and our relationships with others. It concerns both thought and action, as moral reasoning, although a precondition to ethical behaviour, is not sufficient to acting ethically. A person might reason that an action is unethical but still choose to engage in that action. Thus by cultivating good character a person is likely to choose to do what is right (Kimber et al., 2011).

Ethical dilemmas arise 'when people find themselves in perplexing situations that necessitate their choosing among competing sets of principles, values, beliefs or ideals' (Cranston, et al., 2006: 106). As many ethical dilemmas that confront school leaders involve right versus right or wrong versus wrong (Kidder, 2005; Cranston et al., 2006), they need to be able to not only deal with these tensions but also make 'the tough decisions' that accompany them (Day et al., 1999: 15). Studies have shown principals, counsellors, and teachers report that they have difficulty in resolving ethical dilemmas (Cranston et al., 2006; Lyons, 1990; E. Campbell, 2003, 1997, 2001; Day et al., 1999; Duginan and Collins, 2003; Eyal et al., 2010; Langlois and Lapointe, 2007; Norburg and Johansson, 2007).

Ethical principles have been posited by philosophers to guide how we ought to live. These principles include faith, hope, love, prudence, temperance, courage, justice, dignity, equitability, honesty, openness, goodwill, and avoidance of suffering (Christenbury, 2008; Francis and Armstrong, 2003). Justice, care, and critique have been identified as important for school leadership (Starratt, 1996, 2003). Prudence is a significant virtue for professionals (Duignan et al., 2003; Kane and Patapan, 2006). It is 'the practical judgement for deliberating and knowing what principles to apply in a given set of circumstances' (Ehrich et al., 2011). These circumstances are 'the right things we accept as part of our role or office or job' (Uhr, 2010: 88). Thus professional ethics can be thought of as being 'about the "right conduct"

expected of a member of a particular profession' (Uhr, 2005: 37). This right conduct derives from the nature of the particular office such that 'ethical responsibilities vary with role' (Uhr, 2005: 78). It could be expected, therefore, that the ethical responsibilities of school principals and counsellors would differ in that principals are responsible for their schools as a whole while counsellors are responsible for the wellbeing of each student at their schools.

These principles can be incorporated into codes of ethics. Many professional organisations have enunciated such codes to assist their members to act ethically. Teachers, psychologists, academics, doctors, lawyers, public servants, and journalists are all subject to a code of ethics for their respective professions. For instance, the New Zealand Teachers Council (http://www.teacherscouncil.govt.nz/required/ethics/codeofethics.stm) has a code of ethics for registered teachers and the Association for American Educators has a code of ethics (http://aaeteachers.org/images/pdfs/aaecodeofethicsforeducators.pdf).   The   British Psychological Society has a code of ethics and conduct (2009).

In Queensland, Australia principals work under the Code of Ethics for Teachers in Queensland (Queensland College of Teachers, 2008). Key ethical principles enunciated by the College of Teachers are:

- integrity
- dignity
- responsibility
- respect
- justice
- care.

School counsellors in Queensland practice under either the Queensland Guidance and Counselling Association's (QGCA) (2000) Code of Ethics or the Australian Psychological Society's (2007) Code of Ethics. Under the QGCA's (2000) Code of Ethics, confidentiality is promoted. Counsellors need to safeguard confidential client information, only releasing information with parent or student consent, except when clients are in immediate danger to themselves or others. However, counsellors are able to discuss this confidential information with people who are concerned with the case for professional purposes. Importantly, however, the issue of confidentiality with minors, which often makes decisions difficult, is not really addressed specifically. This lack of specificity might contribute to ethical tensions for school counsellors.

In its Code of Ethics, the Australian Psychological Society (2007) promotes:

- respect for the rights and dignity of people and peoples, such as in the promotion of justice, respect, informed consent, privacy, and confidentiality
- propriety, such as ensuring competence, collaboration with others, and dealing with competing demands
- integrity in respect of behaviour, communication, conflict of interest, non-exploitation, authorship, etc.

Justice, respect, dignity, and integrity are enunciated by both the Queensland College of Teachers and the Australian Psychological Society. Confidentiality is common to the QGCA and the Australian Psychological Society. Thus it can be suggested that ethical dilemmas

might arise in schools around confidentiality. As will be seen in the scenarios presented in this article, confidentiality was a key concern for counsellors.

Increasing the complexity, in Queensland, many schools are also subject to the code of conduct in the *Public Sector Ethics Act 1994 (QLD)*. The ethical principles contained in the act are: respect for all people; integrity; diligence; economy and efficiency; and respect for the law and system of government. Principals must resolve tensions that emerge from situations in which their professional ethics might conflict with their duties as a public sector employee such as caring for a student who is engaging in an illegal activity.

Thus codes of ethics can provide 'broad guidance about appropriate behaviour'. Yet they are limited in that they do not necessarily allow recognition of 'constraints and competing priorities' (Sumison, 2000: 173). There might be a need to choose between right and right, such as between the good of a whole class and the good of an individual student within that class; or between wrong and wrong, such as complying with a supervisor's directive that would be detrimental for students or going to the media. Conflicts between the good of the individual and the common good can pervade ethical decision making for school leaders (Cranston et al., 2006; Eyal et al., 2010). Similarly, different groups of professionals might agree in principle about an issue, but tensions could emerge in implementing these principles. For instance, principals and counsellors might agree that certain actions are wrong but they might disagree over whether or when student confidentiality should be breached.

Such complex situations can arise in the grey zones of an organisation (Bruhn, 2009; Kakabadse et al., 2003). Grey zones are those areas in organisations 'where the border between right and wrong behavior is blurred' (Bruhn, 2009: 205). It is in these zones that a person's ethics can be tested. Such tests require individuals to exercise prudence in dealing

with ethical dilemmas (T. Campbell, 2010; Duignan, et al., 2003; Kane and Patapan, 2006). In such situations 'individual discretion and judgement about the appropriate[ness]' of certain actions or decisions (Uhr, 2005: 45) is required. Ethical issues need to be considered systematically and the person or team making the decision needs to take personal ownership for the responsibility to act ethically (Bond, 2000).

Most dilemmas principals experience relate to students or to staff. They can concern tension between the welfare of the individual student or staff member and the good of the school community as a whole. Principals' dilemmas can entail competition between ethical principles (such as between justice and care), between professional ethics and personal values (such as between respecting another person's religion and one's own spiritual beliefs) or legal and administrative decisions conflicting with personal or professional ethics (Cranston, et al, 2006; Ehrich, et al., 2011; Eyal et al., 2010).

Dilemmas might be heightened for principals when they need to work with a staff member, such as the counsellor, who operates from a different professional paradigm. Nonetheless, common ground can be found as 'educators, leaders included, have a responsibility and duty of care to act in the best interests of both students and staff' (Cranston et al., 2006: 106). Acting in the best interests of students, although notoriously difficult to define, requires school leaders to promote their students' rights, as enshrined in the United Nations Universal Declaration on Human Rights and Convention on the Rights of the Child, stress their responsibilities (e.g., the social contract, equity, teachable moments, community growth, attention, etc), and respect them (e.g., promote equality, equity, self-respect, tolerance, acceptance, celebrate diversity, and find common ground) (Stefkovich and Begley, 2007).

The role of the school counsellor

Studies from the United States (Bodenhorn, 2006; Gilman and Gabriel, 2004; Kaplan, 1995; Kirchner and Setchfield, 2005), Canada (Lehr et al., 2007), the United Kingdom (Voskuijl and Evers, 2007), and Australia (Thielking and Jimerson, 2006) have explored the role of the school counsellor and the varied perspectives of counsellors, principals, and teachers regarding the role of the school counsellor. In general, there seems to be a lack of understanding of what the counsellor could do and how the counsellor is expected to act, particularly in relation to situations that were ethically wrought. The most common issues counsellors have experienced relate to confidentiality; whereas the most challenging issues counsellors have encountered relate to information about self-harm, parental rights, knowledge of a colleague's confidentiality breach, and spirituality (Bodenhorn, 2006; Lehr et al., 2007; Thielking and Jimerson, 2006). These issues have varied according to the context within which the counsellor was working (i.e., primary school or secondary school) and the student's age (Bodenhorn, 2006; Lehr, et al., 2007; Thielking and Jimerson, 2006).

Some studies connect these issues to either a lack of awareness of the code of ethics for school counsellors, lack of understanding of the role of the student counsellor, or the different paradigms from which principals and counsellors worked (Kaplan, 1995; Kirchner and Setchfield, 2005; Stolle, 2001). Lack of awareness has been considered most apparent in relation to psychological testing of students, interventions, confidentiality, and discipline. In terms of professional paradigms, principals often need to take a whole school approach, while counsellors generally need to take an individual student approach (Kaplan, 1995; Queensland Guidance and Counselling Association, 2000; Stolle, 2001). While school-wide and individual student needs are often aligned, when conflict between these needs arises it can result in difficult ethical situations, such as the difficulty arising from the counsellor having

dual roles of employee and student advocate (Bodenhorn, 2006; Mayer, 1986; Moleski and Kselica, 2005; Theiking and Jimerson, 2006).

As noted earlier, the most common ethical dilemmas experienced by school counsellors are those relating to confidentiality. Such dilemmas can lead to tension between principals and counsellors because open communication is often encouraged in schools. Generally, open communication is beneficial for students but counsellors can feel that information students share with them in confidence cannot be shared with others. Counsellors' concern with confidentiality is supported by research suggesting that students are reluctant to access counselling at school due to real or potential confidentiality breaches (M. Campbell, 2004; Collins and Knowles, 1995; Isaacs and Stone, 1999; Jacob-Timm, 1999; Lindsey and Kalafat, 1998; Mitchell et al., 2002; Reid, 1996; Taylor and Adelman, 1998).

Tensions between principals and counsellors can be heightened when they hold different personal values. These tensions can be shaped, exacerbated, or mitigated by the organisational culture of the school (e.g., is it ethical or unethical). These differences are due in part to schools being microcosms of society (E. Campbell, 2001; Cranston et al., 2006; Ehrich et al., 2011). Indeed, in a survey of school counsellors in the mid-1990s conducted by Davis and Mickelson (1994), 'there was less than 50% agreement among school counsellors regarding preferred ethical choices' (M. Campbell, 2004). These issues are explored further in the remainder of this article.

Results

Principals' and school counsellors' perspectives were sought on a range of ethically challenging scenarios. Scenarios related to confidentiality, the law, relationships among

students, between students and teachers, psychological testing of students, and staff concerns. Principals were asked what they would expect or want the counsellor to do. Counsellors were asked what they would do and what the principal would expect or want them to do. Responses from principals and counsellors confirm many of the points raised in the discussion above. It was found that principals' and counsellors' views connected on some issues but not others. Some of these differences could be attributed to the organisational culture of each school and to the personal values of those interviewed. To preserve the anonymity of interviewees and their schools, in reporting the interview results 'P' will be used to denote principal and 'C' will be used to denote counsellor. Table one provides a summary of the scenarios and principals' and counsellors' responses to them. Table two summarises each of the scenarios and highlights the ethical principles and conflicts that arise among and between school principals and school counsellors.

Insert table one about here

Insert table two about here

Three of the scenarios — student drug use, conflict between students and teachers, and the psychological testing of students — discussed here highlight tension among and between principals and counsellors. The remaining two scenarios — dealing with a teacher seeking assistance for a drinking problem and suspected child abuse — show the alignment between principals and counsellors. The first scenario concerned principals' and counsellors' views related to a student revealing in a counselling session that they had bought drugs from another student, but refusing to reveal that student's name.

All the principals interviewed considered this matter to be a serious one that needed to be reported directly to the principal 'straight away' (P8). This response might be due to societal concern with drug use and drug dealing having led governments to pass laws and schools to develop policies in these areas. Principals are likely to be mindful of both school policy and legal requirements in these areas. Counsellors too would be mindful of legal requirements. However, they would also be concerned with confidentiality and the welfare of the individual student. Yet P8 argued that confidentiality could not work for illegal activities. The principal would report the matter to the police and to parents. P8 wanted to identify the person selling the drugs and to then contact the parents and the police 'immediately'. However, if the drugs were bought outside the school most principals felt that the matter was outside their jurisdiction and the counsellor would need to decide whether or not they needed to notify the parents (P8). Yet one principal felt that they would contact the police if the drug use became obvious to other students.

Counsellors made a clear distinction between drugs purchased inside and outside of school grounds. Drugs bought or used outside of school would be kept confidential. Some counsellors felt the tension between the professional requirements of confidentiality and the employment obligations of reporting intensely, with one counsellor stating that they would prefer a student not tell them everything so they would not be required to breach their trust. However, counsellors were clear that all drug activities within the school would be reported to either the deputy principal or the principal. As C4 stated:

> I would tell the principal...if they purchased it from a student at this school...I'd have to. That would be part of my, I think, employment. ... if they just generally talk about using drugs and that sort of thing, that's confidential. ... I say to students when I first start seeing them that certain things it's just better not to tell me, 'cause that puts me in a difficult position. And they know what they can and can't say.

One counsellor felt that they would report drug use within the school but explained that their principal (who was not a participant of this study) would prefer not to report these matters should they be damaging to the student's family (C7). Thus C7 highlighted a conflict between the values of the organisation—a dangerous and illegal activity needed to be reported—and the personal values of the principal, leaving the counsellor to have 'to float somewhere in the middle'. C7, therefore, could be placed in an ethical dilemma when such a situation arose.

Therefore, while it is likely that both principals and counsellors respected the law and institutional policies derived from it, principals need to recognise that other professionals within their school might hold differing professional ethics and personal values that need to be reconciled in the best interests of the student. Thus it is important for principals to be mindful that they and the counsellor might each be placed in an ethical dilemma by the actions of the other.

Principals experience ethical tensions from staff issues as well student issues (Cranston et al., 2006). The second scenario centred on a teacher seeking assistance from the counsellor for a drinking problem. There was alignment between the views of principals and counsellors. Most felt that counsellors needed to refer the teacher to an external counsellor and it should remain confidential. Principals thought confidentiality should be breached or knowledge acted on if the problem was affecting the teacher's work and affecting students. For principals this was because 'A teacher needs to set a good example all the time' (P6). Some counsellors felt that they would not breach confidentiality but would encourage the teacher to speak with the principal if they needed support such as time off. Although the principals in the study all felt the need to support the teacher, it was agreed that the issues need be reported

and the teacher possibly given time off, if their drinking was impairing their ability to work. Although P7 wanted the issue raised with them, they 'wouldn't necessarily act on the teacher's drinking issue unless it was impacting on their job...I would be expecting the counsellor to be getting them in to a particular program and I would be expecting us as a school to be supporting the teacher.' One principal considered that it would be a breach of confidentiality to fire a teacher based on knowledge that had been conveyed to them from a private counselling session. Hence, there was little conflict between principals and counsellors in relation to this situation.

A key point of contention between counsellors and other school staff is testing. The third scenario concerned a principal wishing to move a disruptive student, who was significantly behind the rest of their class, into another class, where there are students of a similar academic ability. The student did not wish to change classes and was upset about the thought of going to what they considered to be the 'dumbie's' class. The student's mother also felt that her child was being treated unfairly.

The majority of schools in the sample did not use streaming, or only used it for particular classes (generally Mathematics). This trend could be viewed in terms of the Queensland government's inclusive education policy. In addition, it was common for these schools to test all students before or at enrolment to ensure they were assigned proper supervision and learning schedules. Consequently, over half (five) of the principals said that in-class help and counselling or programs to work on the student's behaviour would be used instead of moving the student into another class. As most classes were comprised of students of mixed ability, principals argued that exporting a misbehaving student would only export the same problem. P6 put it, 'If all the classes were mixed ability classes then I would be loath to change a

student unless it was having a detrimental impact on other students...I would prefer to work with that student to change their behaviours or to attempt to change their behaviours and we would do that by means of teacher aid or some sort of counselling'. P7 stated 'that the common good comes before the individual good. You know if I'm moving the boy and he's going to disrupt another class well then that's not very helpful. We actually have to address his behaviour and why he's being disruptive and what's best for his behaviour'. Yet, for another two principals the common good of the class necessitated moving the student as 'there's other kids in the class, we've got to think of the whole picture' (P8).

Similar to most principals, counsellors believed that the student remaining in their current class was the preferred option. Unlike principals, they asserted that the student should be helped to stay in the class they wanted to be in. Thus there might be alignment between what is in the best interests of the students as a whole and the best interests of the individual student. Counsellors suggested strategies to help the student and the teacher deal with the situation they were experiencing. For C5, 'The child has got to want to be in that class'.

Only one counsellor stated that they would agree with the student being moved to another class, but this agreement was conditional on it being in the best interests of the student. C4 observed that, 'Well I'd probably disagree [with the principal]...I always feel that the student knows what they need. Well that might not be the best decision but that's what the student wants and so I'd probably support the student's decision'. Thus a situation such as changing the class a student was in could provoke tension between and be ethically fraught for principals and counsellors. This complexity is clearly a result of principals being more likely to look at the situation from the perspective of the class as a whole and counsellors being more likely to look at the situation from the perspective of the student.

As part of this scenario, principals' and counsellors' views on testing for an intellectual impairment were gauged. They saw testing as important and useful in such an instance. Funding was a significant factor in principals' responses. They did, however, recognise that parents must consent to the testing, particularly if labelling was a concern for parents. For example, 'I've experienced some parents who say look we've been to this psychologist and they've diagnosed ASD, this one wasn't sure, we don't want him or her labelled. Now my response to that is generally labelling is something that provides extra support because there's funding for it' (P3). Labelling was seen as means of accessing 'additional help' for a student (P8). Similarly, P6 commented '... when a student comes to us with apparent special needs, there has to be accompanying paperwork to back up that because there are funding issues and all sorts of things...'. Counsellors' reasons for supporting testing were less monetary. They raised health and safety concerns, and adjustments to classes because 'it's actually to make sure that we have the hours that we have for the teacher's aide just that you have room for her in a small class, that you're looking at, say, hospitality, instead of science for the child' (C5).

Extending this scenario, principals' and counsellors' views were sought on whether a student would be removed from mainstream classes if tests showed that they had an intellectual impairment. Most principals (6) stated that they would provide the student with additional assistance but within the same class. Here, several principals expressed their distaste for streaming. For P6, 'we have an inclusive education policy which means that all students are involved in standard classes, we don't withdraw students for any reason. ... But we ensure that teacher aides come into the classrooms and work with students within a standard classroom'. P3 had 'an ethical problem with streaming'. P4 asserted that streaming led to winners and losers, with the losers being 'lumped into a class and are made to feel that they're not as good as another class or another level in that subject'.

As most counsellors felt that they did not have a decision in this process, they refused to answer this question. Those who did respond, echoed principals in stating that they felt that in class support would be introduced rather than any removal from mainstream classes. Thus, in general, most principals and counsellors promoted inclusive practices as a result of government policy, personal values, and professional beliefs. However, principals tended to take financial implications into account more than counsellors tended to. Counsellors tended to focus on the resources that needed to be made available for the individual student.

Principals and counsellors were asked whether teachers or principals should by privy to students' test results. They asserted that information should be shared where it would help the student concerned. Counsellors felt that the information should only be shared with the teacher teaching the student. Principals' responses suggest that different schools had different ideas on how information would be shared. It was generally agreed that the teachers teaching the child would be the only ones to receive any information on test results. For instance:

> Teachers don't need to know all the details; they'll be able to see the behaviour of the student anyway. The important for the teaching learning support co-ordinator is to ensure the teacher themselves has all the necessary strategies to work with the student in the classroom. And if they know something of the diagnosis of the student, that might be helpful and that might not and that's up to ourselves to make that call and the parents of the student (P6).

Yet it was recognised that, 'If it's something like a medical condition or something that doesn't affect them in school then not at all' (P8).

It could be argued that the differences between principals and counsellors derived from the principals' focus on funding and counsellors focus on student wellbeing. But principals also stressed their animosity to exclusion. This animosity could be seen as deriving from both government policy for inclusive education as well as from personal and professional values

about inclusion. Counsellors seemed more likely to stress students' rights as well as personal values and professional ethics.

The responses to the next scenario foregrounded the tension between the principal's focus on the school as a whole and the counsellor's focus on the individual student. Principals and counsellors were asked about handling a situation where a student wanted to change classes as they disagreed with the disciplinary style of their teacher. It was noted that a number of other students have also disagreed with the teacher's disciplinary style. While principals agreed that they would be unlikely to allow students to change class based on conflict with their teacher, their reasons for this response differed. Nonetheless, all the principals interviewed advocated for a mediation or similar process to allow students and teachers to overcome difficulties in class.

Many principals reasoned that students needed to learn how to deal with situations and people they did not like. It was resilience training for the student because 'part of growing up is learning to deal with things that are difficult sometimes' (P4). However, two principals indicated that complaints from students highlighted an issue with the teacher that would need to be resolved thus they would not move the student. For P3, 'What I would say is that we need to have that math teacher get some assistance and some help and we need to make sure ... So if you don't deal with that maths teacher's style of teaching the problem will crop up again and again'. Thus some principals viewed the situation in terms of teacher underperformance which required the principal to act. Cranston, Ehrich and Kimber (2006) noted that dealing with staff underperformance was an area of concern of principals, particularly whether to provide further professional development or to remove the staff member, especially when the staff member was a friend or was a longstanding member of staff.

Most principals considered the counsellor's role in this situation to be that of assisting students to deal with the situation and to explore strategies that would enable the students to remain in the class. P5 provides a clear example:

> I'd be expecting the counsellor to listen to the student, to explore with the student what strategies the student had taken, what were the actual issues, was there something the student could do to make the situation better. To explore with the student the reality that in life you will always have to work with people whose style you may not like, what are strategies in terms of being able to respond to that.

Counsellors, like principals, suggested mediation as the first option. However, counsellors were more likely than principals to suggest the student be removed from the class if discussions with both student and teacher could not resolve the situation. Counsellors were also more likely than principals to suggest removal if the situation was impacting on the student's emotional wellbeing. C1 stated that, 'if it was not in her best interest to stay in the class, if she was feeling anxious, depressed whatever then we would do that'. None of the counsellors agreed with principals that building resilience entailed 'dealing with people we don't like or agree with' in a class situation. Counsellors also did not raise the issue of staff underperformance that concerned principals. Yet counsellors expressed that they had little voice in these types of decisions and their only option would be to help the student to deal with the situation.

Thus, while both principals and counsellors promoted student wellbeing, their views and practices to obtain it in such a situation differed. Principals focused on student responsibility to learn and on principals' responsibility to deal with an underperforming teacher. Counsellors stressed care and respect, but also expressed tension between these ethical principles and organisational policies relating to the ability of a student to change classes.

The final scenario related to a teacher's concern that a student in their class was being abused, a situation that could be difficult if abuse or self-harm was found as principals could be placed in a right versus right dilemma where they are required to choose between taking the teacher's word and reporting suspected abuse (respecting the law and care) immediately and conducting a thorough investigation (critique and care) prior to deciding whether or not to report the matter. There was alignment between principals and counsellors in their response to this situation. Both groups of professions argued that counsellors should conduct a thorough investigation of the situation prior to notifying parents or authorities. As part of this investigation most principals felt that the counsellor should discuss the matter with teachers, especially the student's physical education teacher, to see if there were any other signs of abuse or self harm. They also felt interviews with the student would be necessary. Almost half of the principals interviewed mentioned that it should be reported to the principal or deputy principal if any doubt remained. Two principals did not wish it to be reported if the counsellor could find no evidence of harm or if they felt the teacher was overreacting. All of the principals interviewed felt that this was a serious issue; however, none seemed willing to argue that the counsellor ought to report the matter until evidence was obtained.

Only one counsellor felt that, if some doubt remained after this investigation, then the matter should be reported. All other counsellors said they would continue monitoring the student even if no evidence of abuse was discovered and only notify authorities only if evidence was found. While there was no apparent conflict between principals and counsellors, they did place emphasis on different principles. Principals stressed the law and policies, as well as care and critique. Counsellors stressed care and critique. Such stresses are consistent with

principals needing to be concerned for the school as whole and counsellors concern for individual student wellbeing.

What should principals do?

Although this study was limited to eight principals and seven counsellors, it is clear from their responses that there is both commonality and dissent between and among principals and counsellors. These similarities and differences reflected professional ethics, institutional roles, personal values, and organisational culture. A key message is that, at times, principals and counsellors might differ in their approach to an issue. This difference is due to their working from different professional paradigms—principals from an administrative paradigm that entails their being responsible of the school community as whole and counsellors from a professional paradigm that necessitates a stress on the wellbeing of the individual.

Thus it is important that principals:

- recognise the complexity of ethical decision making in schools, especially in situations that involve conflicting personal, professional, or organisational values
- 'promote reflection, judgement and a sense responsibility among their' staff (Langlois and Lapointe, 2007, p. 258) to assist them in making ethical decisions that are in the best interests of the students. Models of identifying and resolving ethical dilemmas such as that proposed by Cranston, Ehrich, and Kimber (2006) might be useful
- ensure that they and their teaching staff are aware of and respect the professional code of ethics under which school counsellors work
- work with other leaders within their school to sustain an ethical organisational culture

- work with counsellors to determine a common approach to particular issues, wherever practical

- use ethical tensions among staff as a means of identifying and eliminating grey areas where possible.

Conclusion

The results from this research mirror those from previous studies in North America, the United Kingdom, and Australia. While principals and counsellors share a common moral understanding of schooling, ethical tensions can emerge due to the different paradigms from which they work; namely, from principals' concern for the school as a whole and counsellors' concern for the welfare of the individual student. Ethical dilemmas can also emerge from differences between personal values or professional ethics and organisational values. To lessen these possible tensions principals can ensure that they are aware of and respect the professional code of ethics under which school counsellors work; work with counsellors to determine a common approach to particular issues, wherever practical; and promote ethical reflection and decision making within their schools.

Table 1: Principal and counsellor responses to scenarios

Scenario	Title	Decision	%
In a session with the SGC a student mentions having purchased drugs from another student but will not reveal the name of this student.	Principal	Try to find out which student was selling drugs	37.5
		Go to deputy/Principal	87.5
		Tell parents	50
		Notify police	37.5
		Police would investigate, not us	12.5
		If counsellor feels there is danger then notify Principal	12.5
		If outside school – their responsibility	12.5
		If outside school – still report to police if obvious child taking drugs	12.5
	SGC	Investigate details of situation	43
		Discuss with deputy/Principal	71.5
		If used outside school – confidentiality kept	43
		Bring in parents	14.3
		Would notify but principal would probably advise against it	14.3
A 14 year old student disagrees with the disciplinary style of her Maths teacher as do a number of other students, and wishes to switch classes.	Principal	Would not switch classes.	37.5
		Help teacher modify teaching or get assistance, or restorative process. Not move child	25
		Would not switch classes. Child resilience involves dealing with things they don't like. Counsellor should help child deal with problem.	25
		Investigate what is happening in class (doesn't necessarily mean they would be moved).	25
	SGC	Would talk with teacher and student	28.6
		If was in the best interest of the child (anxiety or depression) or can't resolve with mediation then would suggest moving.	28.6
		Suggest child speak with teacher, mediated discussion. Try to figure out a solution instead of moving.	43
		If one moves they all want to.	28.6
		Would talk to APA about it.	14.3
		Talk/report it to deputy	43

A teacher visits the SGC because of a drinking problem which is seriously affecting his work, and would like help.	Principal	Refer them out	37.5
		Assist/encourage teacher to come to Principal	37.5
		Keep confidential unless students are in danger (drunk at work etc)	37.5
		irresponsible to keep confidentiality	12.5
	SGC	Refer them out	85.7
		Would discuss with supervisor/Principal if they refused to seek help	28.6
		Help them speak with Principal	28.6
		Not sure if would have to tell Principal	28.6
A teacher is concerned with one of his students and sends her to see you. He says she has altered her behaviour over the past months, becoming more aggressive, and showing less interest in school work. The teacher also mentions that she has previously worn long sleeved clothing on warm days and is concerned that she may be hiding signs of abuse. After speaking with her you cannot make a judgement as to whether the abuse exists or not, although you feel the teacher may be over-reacting.	Principal	Investigate whole range of things (speak with parents, other staff, grades, etc)	25
		Counsellor and deputy should monitor child. If any fear of harm to child then would hand it over to authorities	12.5
		Can call child protection and diarise this contact	12.5
		Observe without directly confronting (don't ask to see arms, etc). Discuss with child	12.5
		Inform deputy/Principal	25
		If any doubt, contact authorities	12.5
		If counsellor thinks it doesn't exist then don't report it.	25
	SGC	If doesn't seem she's being abused, keep an eye on her anyway. Keep her in counselling, keep monitoring	43
		Investigate. Talk to teachers, year level coordinator.	14.3
		If abuse found call child protection, parents, medical team	14.3
		Talk to student. Believe student	14.3
		If any hint of abuse then I'd report it to child safety	14.3
Jason, a year 6 student, is particularly distracting to the other students and far behind the rest of the class in his academic abilities. It's suggested that he be moved to another class where he will be	Principal	Don't stream classes	50
		Peer coaching and counselling within class	12.5
		Only move class if it helped behaviour, not because of disruptions	12.5

		Might suggest to parents that they move	12.5
around children of a similar academic level, and not distract other children who may advance more rapidly without his influence. Jason says that he does not want to change schools and feels very dejected at the thought of going to what he considers the 'dumbie's' class. His mother also feels that he is being treated unfairly.		Would work on behaviour, not export problem to another class. Work on behaviours	37.5
		Some ability grouping in classes	12.5
		If it's better for him and others	25
	SGC	If child doesn't want to move then work on their behaviour, extra support etc.	57
		Would have to be a serious reason to move child.	14.3
		If it's a good idea to move then discuss advantages with parent and child	28.6
		Wouldn't take a position but feel that additional support in current environment would be better	14.3
It has been suggested that the reason for Jason's behaviour in class is the result of an intellectual impairment. Would you agree to testing?	Principal	With parent permission, yes.	75
		Already a condition of enrolment	12.5
		Yes, is done all the time	12.5
	SGC	Talk to parents about the option of testing. Would be remiss of me not to put this forward	14.3
		Testing already done often/to all students	28.6
		Yes, testing can be very helpful	14.3
		With more evidence	14.3
		Worth doing with parental consent	14.3
Tests show that Jason is indeed intellectually impaired. Would you suggest he be moved from mainstream classes?	Principal	No. Would be managed within class	37.5
		Not fully. Some support in class and some withdrawal	12.5
		Whether tested or not, if child was struggling they should already have been placed in appropriate class	12.5
		Only if it's best for the child	25
	SGC	No separation in class here. In class support	43
		Not my decision	43
Should principals/teachers be privy to the results of tests?	Principals	Teachers would be given verbal reports unless parents don't wish this to happen. No further than teachers	12.5
		Yes. Labelling doesn't happen here, they are all taught in same	12.5

		class	
		Only if there's a reason. Info goes to people in ability support enrichment dept to make decisions about curriculum modification	12.5
		Head of learning support will be given full report. Teachers told main areas of support required. Told what might be helpful.	12.5
		Teachers can access. Labelling is more in the minds of parents than anything else.	12.5
		Yes, if it's going to impact the school, students and their education	12.5
	SGC	Individual learning plans includes details on problems and strategies. Parent and child must agree to what teachers can see.	14.3
		Would need to know to give assistance. Would be helpful	28.6
		Would have given a different answer in a different environment, but can understand why they might benefit from knowing.	14.3
		Only a small summary is available to teachers	14.3
Do you see anything wrong with streaming?	Principal	Philosophically no. Only in the way it's done. Can be beneficial but not if it creates labelling	12.5
		I have an ethical problem with streaming if it's done for the good of the school and not the student	12.5
		Yes. There are winners and losers	12.5
		We do some streaming – called setting	12.5
		Make decisions based on individual groups of students. Only used in some maths classes	12.5
	SGC	Need to know the reason for it	14.3
		It's fine, as long as it's done carefully.	14.3
		I can see where it might be valuable and where it might be detrimental	14.3

Table 2: Ethical principles and conflicts between principals and counsellors

Scenario	Principals	Counsellors	Principal/counsellor conflict
Under-age sexual relationship	Legal responsibilities prevail	Law versus professional ethics	While all concerned by situation, principals deferred to the law and counsellors to promoting the student's welfare.
Student drug use	Critique (principals differentiated between internal and external drug use)	Professional ethics versus organisational values (dual relationship)	Principals focus on law and policies while counsellors have a conflict between supporting the student and enacting their duty as an employee.
Student/teacher conflict	Responsibility (if seen as resilience training) versus respect (if seen as underperforming teacher)	Care and respect versus organisational policies	Principals focus on the common good in dealing with the teacher and counsellors focus on individual students need to deal with the situation they are in.
Student discipline	Policies	Policies versus care	Conflict only for counsellor.
Teacher with a drinking problem	Counsellors should keep confidentiality and refer out, out alert principal when affects work.	Keep confidentiality and refer out, only alert principal if mot comply with referral &/or affect work.	No conflict.
Teacher's concern student is being abused	Law & policy, & care	care	No real conflict as all believed a thorough investigation was needed.
Psychological testing and inclusive education	Funding implications for school, personal and professional animosity to exclusion	Student's rights	Difference between focus on funding and focus on supporting student wellbeing. In most schools testing occurred prior to entry to the school. The reasons for principals were inclusive education policy, funding, & personal values. The reasons for counsellors were personal values and professional values.

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