



DOES ETHICAL DRIFT IN DECISION-MAKING INFLUENCE EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE?

ROSEANNA BOURKE, ROS PULLEN AND NICOLE MINCHER

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ETHICAL DRIFT



ISSUES RE ETHICAL DRIFT

- Gradual ebbing of standards, that occurs without conscious awareness is like a boat floating at sea (Sternberg, 2012)
- Practitioners get to the point "where they simply stop questioning their actions" (Bourke, 2017, p. 225).
- Knapp et al. (2013) referred to the 'dark side of professional ethics'

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- **Moral compass:** the inner voice that tells us what we should and should not do in various circumstances (Moore & Gino, 2013)
- **Moral stress:** one knows the right thing to do but institutional constraints make it nearly impossible to pursue the right course of action (Jameton, 1984)



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GAINING A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING

- exploratory study involving registered psychologists
- online 20-item survey
- based on three (authentic) practice-based scenarios
- 17-21 responses per question

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SCENARIOS

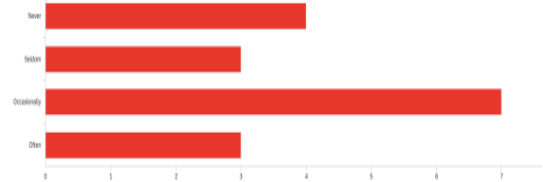
1. Reducing hours for school attendance
2. Recommendations for enrolment with Te Kura
3. Reporting assessment data

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You have been asked to complete an assessment to support a funding application for a 5-year old child who has complex needs, and has been at school for 2 months without support. Your assessment will be used to inform an ORS application. Although you would not typically use a cognitive assessment early on, after several observations you note the child has complex cognitive delay, and your assessment has implications for the type of resourcing the child will access to support her learning. You complete a cognitive assessment (psychometric test) and find that while the majority of the scores reflect your observations and other assessments of the child in the classroom, there are some areas the child scores higher on. In writing the report, you decide to leave out the higher scores, so that the child's application will be stronger.

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IS THIS TYPICAL PRACTICE?



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1. Incongruence between ways of practice (e.g. strength-based) versus the application of data to competing resources (deficit orientation)
2. Recognition of the need to present the situation as 'dire'
3. Concerns around the concept of 'deficit-based' practice, the use of labels and the need to 'fudge results'
4. Tension between knowing what is 'right' for the rules of the context, while also knowing the 'right' of every child who needs to access resources and support (organisational rules versus individual rights)

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Access to funding is very difficult, and I have had ORS applications declined...I want to help children to access services and support, and often that only happens if the applications for said support are as deficit-based as possible. However, I was trained and practice in a strengths-based way which creates tension.

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Tension between professional ethics and a system that seems to produce imbalanced acceptance. I remain mystified why some students are accepted when others, who appear to me to be more needy, miss out. It doesn't seem right to 'fudge' results in order to get the child the help I think s/he needs.

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I am hesitant doing cognitive assessments in the first place because of the labels that people can apply to children, and sometimes the consequences of teachers or support people believing that they have a cognitive disability and therefore lowering their standards/ expectations (or giving their education and oversight over to a Teacher's Aide) which reduces access to quality education for that child.

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Slide 10

BR1 Bourke, Roseanna, 30/1/2020

BR2 Bourke, Roseanna, 30/1/2020



What
does this
mean?

1. We need to be able to talk about this, without blame, guilt or judgement.
2. Is this a creep towards 'ethically defensible practice' [i.e. Ethical drift]? At what point, does the practitioner move towards another position of 'what is right?' and create a new normative understanding around decisions of practice?
3. This new normative understanding builds first with questioning, and then without question. The ethical gaps that appear slowly but subtly and ones that can easily be rationalised may not create moral stress for the practitioner, as they do not see the incremental steps that lead to the drifting of their espoused ethical stance.
4. Research shows that when ethical dilemmas arise by practitioners, moral stress is experienced, and there is a greater likelihood of 'burn-out'.
5. Is there a shift in practice from 'ethics to efficiency'?

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I see the tension being that the practitioner has a professional responsibility to accurately represent the data collected and to be honest and transparent in the knowledge that they have. However, in this case, it means that the practitioner has knowledge that may restrict the young person from accessing funding support that might provide them with opportunities that they would otherwise not have access to, and they may benefit from. In addition to this, the pressure from schools and families to create a successful application would also be quite significant. This creates an ethical dilemma.

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Roseanna Bourke
r.bourke@massey.ac.nz

Ros Pullen
r.pullen@massey.ac.nz

Nicole Mincher
n.mincher@massey.ac.nz



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The school made a recent decision to reduce a student's attendance to part time due to resourcing constraints. Your professional opinion is that the student should be able to continue with full time attendance, however you agree that additional resourcing would support the student to be present and participate full time. This view is shared by the student and their whānau. Despite this the school have informed the parents that the child must be picked up at lunchtime. You choose not to challenge this as you need to maintain collegial relationships with staff given that you support several other students at the school.

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A student has been referred to you for a psycho-social assessment for enrolment with Te Aho o Te Kura Pounamu (Te Kura, The Correspondence School). Through your assessment you identify that the home is safe with suitable supervision available. There is a long-term history of non-attendance and anxiety. After discussion with key stakeholders you realise that the option to attend mainstream education is not going to be viable. There is no other obvious way to support this young person and in view of this you recommend Te Kura. In your professional opinion you feel it is not the preferred option and the likelihood of any engagement in Te Kura and accessing support for anxiety and mental health is unlikely. Your rationale for this is that at least the student will no longer be considered truant and will be enrolled in an education facility.

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