How principals manage ethnocultural diversity: Learnings from three countries

Jennie Billot, J. Tim Goddard and Neil Cranston

Abstract: *Global movements of people are resulting in increasingly diverse societies and principals are encountering more complex and challenging school communities. This paper presents the results of a tri-national study that sought to identify how principals manage ethnocultural diversity in schools in New Zealand, Australia and Canada. The research context of the three cities is provided by describing their ethnocultural diversity, relevant literature is examined and the research methodology discussed. Two major themes of the study findings are identified. Firstly, there appear to be similarities in the ethnocultural diversity evident in contemporary high schools in all three locations and how principals identified the effect of such diversity on their school. The second identifies similarities in how principals perceived and managed the resultant challenges in the three ethnoculturally diverse locations. Implications and conclusions from the findings are discussed, with suggestions for further research in this domain.*

Introduction

In these early years of the 21st century, large scale human migrations are a global phenomenon. This massive relocation is both optional (e.g., people seeking economic advantage) and forced (e.g., as a result of conflict or environmental degradation). Many of these migrating populations seek to develop a new life in the robust economies of 'the west', a region broadly defined for the purposes of this article as the liberal democracies of countries within Europe, North America, and Oceania. Many of these countries have a colonial history emanating from the British Isles.

As a result of these migrations, contemporary societies are becoming more diverse and multi-ethnic in nature, especially in the urban environments of the larger cities. These changing demographics are especially apparent at the school level and are having a major impact on the work of educators, particularly those in formal leadership positions within the school. Dimmock and Walker (2005) have argued that 'leadership studies are needed that identify the particularity and diversity of cultural and contextual conditions within which leadership takes place' (p. 2). In this paper we make a contribution to this plea as well as to a better understanding of some of the knowledge and skills of principals 'attuned to ethnicity and multiculturalism' (p. 4).

Here we report the results of an exploratory study that sought to identify issues relating to the leadership challenges arising from this increasing ethnocultural diversity in schools. The

research explored the perceptions of high (or secondary) school principals from three different sub-national jurisdictions in Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, each of which is receiving new citizens from a variety of different countries.

The context of the research is provided by looking briefly at the ethnocultural diversity of the three nations and the cities in which the research was conducted. Some of the relevant literature is then examined, followed by a discussion of the research methodology. The findings from the study are then presented with two main themes identified as arising across the three research locations. The first of these concerns similarities in the ethnocultural diversity evident in contemporary high schools in all three of the locations studied and how principals identified the effect of such diversity on their school. The second identifies a number of similarities as to how principals from these three ethnoculturally diverse locations perceived and managed the resulting challenges. Finally, whilst acknowledging the preliminary nature of the findings, we present suggestions for further research in this domain.

Literature review and theoretical framework

While the study drew on the concepts of ethnocultural diversity and ethical decision-making to frame the research, the former is the primary focus of this paper. Au (1995) defined ethnicity as referring to 'groups with shared histories and cultural knowledge' (p. 85). It follows, then, that multi-ethnic schools may well be those containing varied and multiple groups of recognisably differing 'cultures'. Haidt, Rosenberg and Hom (2003) asserted that there are multiple domains of diversity. Goddard (1997) described these as language, socio-economic status, race, ethnicity, culture, heritage, gender, and sexual orientation, among others, which are collectively grouped under the term 'ethnocultural.'

In anthropological contexts, the term culture is 'often used to apply to the totality encompassing social and cultural life' of a people (Featherstone, 1997, pp. 136-137). While the term 'culture' is acknowledged to be highly contested (Billot, 2005; Dimmock & Walker, 1998, 2005; Featherstone, 1997), it is generally accepted that it refers to a collectively agreed upon set of meanings for various individual actions and patterns of behaviour systems. 'Culture' refers to the 'whole way of life of members of a society or group … [and] is the 'glue' that binds people together' in a way that makes a group distinguishable from other groups (Dimmock & Walker, 2005, pp. 7-8). When actions, behaviours and beliefs are collectively agreed upon, and when the language – whether verbal, written, or displayed – used to describe these holds the same meaning for all members of a community, then a culture can be identified. In this manner one group can be distinguished from another, resonating with Hofstede's (1991) interpretations of culture which infer that 'culture is learned rather than inherited' (Dimmock & Walker, 2000, p. 308).

In organizations (including schools), however, the notion of culture is much less robust. It is difficult to talk of *the* culture of a school, for example, because we may potentially be describing a myriad of shared actions, behaviours, beliefs, norms, and understandings held by the collective of students, parents and staff of that particular school community. Even so, shared understandings of 'the agreed upon' culture of the school may well be at variance from those of individual students (and their parents) whose ethnocultural profiles may be quite diverse. Further, the culture of the school may serve to distance the students and staff from parents, from community members, and from others. Dimmock and Walker (2005) talked about 'multi-ethnic' schools 'to describe a school whose student/staff profile has more than one race represented' (p. 9) – this is the case in all the schools involved in this study.

While the term 'diversity' is frequently celebrated as a modern social concept, there are multiple complexities associated with attempting to define and theorise it. Despite this, *ethnic* diversity is a phenomenon that is increasingly obvious in many countries as a result of global migrations and is now having an influence on many aspects of schools, including their leadership and management (Haidt, et al., 2003). Not surprisingly, the increase in ethnocultural diversity in schools is creating new challenges (Holloway, 2003). This raises an interest in seeking to better understand educational leadership as it is evident in ethnoculturally diverse contexts.

Purpose and context of the study

The purpose of the study was to investigate how principals lead and manage ethnoculturally diverse schools. The findings point to the complexity of how principals identify, respond to and resolve issues and demonstrate effective proactive agency.

The research was conducted in the three similarly-sized cities of Auckland (New Zealand) – 1.3 million people, Calgary (Canada) – 1 million people, and Brisbane (Australia) – 1.6 million. The cities are not deemed to be nationally representative but act as an urban context for the selected high schools. Although indigenous peoples (Aboriginal peoples in Australia, First Nations in Canada, Maori in New Zealand) and English speakers were the majority in all three cities, significant numbers of other languages were present (e.g., Arabic, Korean, Croatian, Iraqi, Cantonese, Italian, Vietnamese, Mandarin, Greek, Spanish, German, Tagalog (Filipino), Polish and Russian).

We now briefly describe the national contexts of diversity as experienced in the three countries.

New Zealand. The 2001 census indicates a changing ethnic and cultural demographic, with about one sixth of the population being born overseas. The total population stands at over 3.7 million (Statistics New Zealand, 2002) with 83% of the total being of European ethnicity. While this percentage is declining, those identifying as Maori and or Pacifika peoples is on the rise. Numbers of people of Asian ethnicity have more than doubled in the recent decade, to 1 in 15 according to the 2001 census. New Zealand society is transforming to become increasingly diverse. This is very noticeable in Auckland where 1 in 8 people are of Asian ethnicity, 1 in 8 are of Pacific people ethnicity and 1 in 10 are of Maori ethnicity (Statistics New Zealand, 2002).

Australia. The population of Australia at present is about 20.5 million people, with some 400,000 identified as being of Indigenous (Aboriginal or Torres Strait) origin (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2005). Multiculturalism is a declared strategy for all Australians. Brisbane is the capital city of Queensland, the third largest state in the country and a dynamic and diverse society with a great variety of cultures, languages and religions. The population of Brisbane is culturally diverse. Currently over twenty-six percent of Brisbane's population was born overseas. In addition to the rich cultural mix of society gained through immigration, Queensland recognises the unique status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the original owners and custodians of Australian lands and waters (Office of Economic and Statistical Research, 2005).

Canada. Canada has a long tradition of being an ethnoculturally diverse country. Founded on the three realities of the Aboriginal (First Nations), English, and French societies, nation building took place by attracting many migrants from foreign lands. This tradition has

continued for over a hundred years, with Winchester (2005) reporting that Canada 'has a higher ratio of immigrants to native born of any country on earth. ... Many schools in Canada have children from over 50 countries, some from over 100' (p. 3). According to the 2001 national census, 18 per cent of the total Canadian population were new immigrants and a further three per cent claimed Aboriginal identity (Canada Heritage, 2003). Canada receives, on average, 225,000 new immigrants of all ages each year, with the majority relocating to urban centres (Qadeer, 2003). Nearly twenty percent consider themselves to be members of a visible minority group, the majority of these Asian, the remainder identifying with a multitude of ethnocultural backgrounds. Almost twenty percent declare a language other than English or French as their mother tongue.

Summary

In reviewing the ethnocultural profile of the populations of the three cities in which the research was conducted, it is clear that they can appropriately be considered to comprise quite diverse mixes of people of ethnic backgrounds, a mix which has both increased in diversity and number across the last decade or so. Certainly, the student ethnocultural profile of most schools in the three cities would now be significantly different from that evident a decade or so ago.

Research methodology

Given the complexity of the issues to be investigated in this study, it was agreed that a qualitative approach was most appropriate. In so far as we were interested in the 'real world' experiences and stories of principals, the obvious settings for data collection were in schools themselves, with principals the appropriate data sources. In short, we were interested in research products that were 'richly descriptive' with 'words … rather than numbers' (Merriman, 1998, p. 8).

It is acknowledged that the research is limited by the fact that only the views of principals have been sought in this study. However, given the exploratory nature of the research, it is argued that the principal is certainly the first place to begin such research as it is the principal who holds the ultimate accountability for the school. Indeed, it is suggested later that expanding the research to seek data from other key school personnel - such as other school leaders, teachers, parent and community groups and perhaps students - would add valuable insights to our understandings of the issues focusing this research.

Using the three cities of Auckland, Brisbane and Calgary as the urban contexts, schools that cater for senior students were selected in each location. These schools are known as secondary schools in New Zealand (students in grades 9-13), Senior High Schools in Calgary (students in grades 10-12) and secondary schools (students in years 8-12) in Queensland. Each of the schools clearly presented as institutions with ethnoculturally diverse student populations. This was evidenced by statements on the schools' websites to that effect, review of school documents such as planning and reporting materials, and student populations profile data provided by the principals at the start of the interviews. Such evidence confirmed the views of the individual researchers who had a close working knowledge of the schools.

Semi-structured in-depth interviews of the principals were identified as the most appropriate data collection tool. At the outset, the research team did not define tight sample criteria for the whole study. Instead, each researcher selected their own sample of schools, drawing from their experience and knowledge within their own educational sector. Three

complementary processes were used. In the first instance, the researcher used his or her personal knowledge to draw up a list of possible schools for involvement. To ensure the schools identified were still of a significant ethnocultural mix of student population, the various school websites were reviewed. As a result the list was reduced and then a senior officer in each jurisdiction was asked to comment on the schools with respect to their ethnocultural diversity. The list was reduced again and principals invited to participate. In all three settings, principals only declined to participate due to either illness or, in one case, a new principal felt he was not sufficiently aware of the community to be able to comment.

In order to keep the data collection process comparable yet flexible across the three locations, the focus for interviews was identified and a convergent interviewing method utilised (Dick, 1990). Interviews were conducted with fourteen (NZ 5, Australia 5, Canada 4) principals, with the project design focusing on collecting qualitative information about principals' attitudes and perceptions on dealing with issues of diversity among the student population. The semi-structured interviews contained a predetermined set of questions in the form of an *aide memoir* (Freebody, 2003), but allowed some latitude to accommodate responses from principals – that is, to the 'situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent and to new ideas on the topic' (Merriman, 1998, p. 74). This allowed the researchers to capture through discussion in the interviews, the complexities of the challenges that principals encountered in their schools

The convergent interview process allowed a refinement of our understanding of concepts. In this process, convergence occurs both within each interview and over the series of interviews (Dick, 1990). It was through early tentative interpretation from each successive interview, that the questions asked became more specific and the issues under investigation gained clearer meaning. Essentially, the researchers refined the questions after each interview to *converge* on the issues in a topic area (Carson, Gilmore, Perry & Gronhaug, 2001). This process of convergence is flexible and allows refinement of a 'project's focus in its early stages, by talking with knowledgeable people' (Carson et al., 2001, p. 86).

Interviews were taped with the permission of participants with transcripts or summaries available to them for their approval. Participants were assured that no names of individuals or their schools would appear in any reporting of the study's findings. The school terms in the three locations are not synchronized, so data collection did not occur simultaneously. This was not problematic as the data collection continued across six months, accommodating the various school term differences. In addition, it allowed the researchers to share emerging findings across the three countries.

Identification and brief profile of schools

All three researchers are experienced in studying educational leadership in their own national context, so using their robust linkages with the secondary school sector, each identified the schools for their own city sample.

New Zealand. The first two schools were selected based on their obvious ethnic diversity and the way in which each school presented to its stakeholders that particular characteristic as significant for the school community, through its website and other promotional material. Subsequent schools were identified through a snowballing technique (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The selected five schools (each of over 200 students), while different in many other respects, all had ethnoculturally diverse school populations with predominantly European

(Pakeha) students, but with a significant proportion of the remainder being Maori, Pacific Island and Chinese.

Australia. The five schools all exhibited considerable diversity in student profile. One had 450 students of whom twenty-five percent had refugee backgrounds (mainly Sudanese) and a second, of 500 students, had a large Samoan population. Those of Anglo-Celtic background in one school were described by the principal as the 'white under class'. The third school of 1300 students had 59 languages other than English spoken at home. The fourth school catered for adults as well as adolescents, with a significant refugee population as well as Aboriginal and Torres Strait students. Street-kids and impoverished young adults also attended the school. The final school also had many refugees (mainly African) as well as students from Samoa, Pacifika and the Baltic states.

Canada. The four schools were all about the same size – each enrolled between 750 and 1000 pupils – and exhibited different degrees of cultural diversity. Two had obviously high levels of cultural diversity, with visible minority students drawn from all over the world. The other two had less visible but equally significant levels of diversity among the student population. As ethnocultural diversity is a product of more than simply language and race, it was felt appropriate to include schools that represented the less visible elements of diversity.

Findings and discussion

In analyzing the data we were guided by our shared understandings of education as a social event occurring within a specific ethnocultural context. We have taken as our conceptual guide the form of critical theory espoused by Ryan (2003), one which 'is concerned first and foremost with social justice' (p. 15). This lens provided us with the opportunity to examine, albeit in a preliminary manner, the interactions of principal behaviours and school policies within ethnoculturally diverse schools in three cities. Foskett and Lumby (2003) have suggested that universalities are emerging in the role of educational leaders, universalities which 'may lie in the harmonisation of tasks or they may run deeper' (p. 181). The findings of this exploratory study indicate that indeed there exist deeper reasons for apparent role convergence than simply similar task expectations. In delving beneath the structural surface of schools to their cultural and symbolic foundations, we are able to address the local context and experience within the framework of global realities.

This section of the paper refers to the study findings and the comparisons made across the three study sites. The data sets that were collected from the different locations emerged from the use of shared key questions which were developed in order to facilitate subsequent cross-comparisons. The findings were analysed individually by the three researchers with the objective of identifying the primary themes. As each data set was analysed by the researcher in their specific context, we acknowledge the tentative nature of the comparative findings. However, we offer here two intersecting themes that we identified as being common to all three sites and discuss their implications.

Firstly, principals have individualised perceptions of what constitutes diversity within their schools, but at the same time point to increasing ethnocultural diversity as having a significant impact on the nature of their school community. Secondly, principals accept that ethnocultural diversity affects the identity of the school, providing new challenges for their form of leadership.

We provide below individualised accounts from the three locations, referring to extracts from their narratives where relevant. While these quotations serve to illustrate the two

themes under discussion, they are not analysed more fully in this paper where the emphasis is on addressing the salient elements of principal agency in all three locations. Further explanation of interview data remains the subject of future papers that focus on a single location, where there is greater scope for depth and breadth of discussion.

Our findings suggest that ethnocultural diversity would seem to be a reality of many contemporary high schools. Within such schools, there appear to be similarities in how principals perceived the effect of such diversity on their decision-making processes. Notably, the principals also had a strong influence on their context, mainly through the organizational culture they developed in their schools. Individual experience, the specific nature of the school and its ethnocultural profile affected the style and modus *operandi* of each principal, as did the community in which each school was positioned

Ethnocultural diversity

Within the three different samples of schools, principals proffered differences of opinion as to what constitutes 'diversity'.

New Zealand. Interpretations of diversity in New Zealand varied and reflect an acknowledgement of the changing school communities through increasing differences between socio-economic levels, language, ethnicity, physical and intellectual abilities and disabilities, and religious and cultural affiliations. This appreciation can be summarized through one principal's comments:

> When I think of diversity the only one that comes to me is cultural because you see it. But you've got diversity based on the backgrounds, the socioeconomic background of the person. You walk around and see diversity around (George).

Whilst all the principals in the sample acknowledged diversity of many types in their schools, they were able to distinguish *ethnocultural* diversity as having noticeably increased with the rise in immigration to New Zealand from other counties. Diana noticed that students immigrating from countries in the Middle East and Africa have selected her school as one that caters for culturally diverse students even though attendance involves significant travel from outer suburbs:

> I know that we celebrate (diversity) all the time. We (also) have an international week focused on celebrating diversity.... enabling the students to feel proud about who they are.

Tony identified ethnocultural diversity as a core element of the school identity and appoints staff who 'buy into the culture (of the school which) is trying to deal with this diversity. One of the strengths of the school ...is the degree of tolerance here from an ethnic point of view.'

Australia. Most of the Brisbane principals considered the notion of 'diversity' as embracing a very wide range of characteristics of students, including those recently arrived in the country from ethnoculturally diverse backgrounds (e.g. refugees from African states), those of indigenous backgrounds, and those who had recently returned to school as adults after poor schooling experiences as young people. For this latter group, one principal observed that his school 'gives them a second chance', noting the school was 'not a traditional school … in a sense it attracts different students because of this'.

Valerie saw the diversity in her school adding to the school's rich culture. It was something to be cherished and built on as a strength. She noted that the 'norm in the school is to be different.' Such difference is highlighted by the many languages spoken in the school and the variety of challenging experiences many students had been through in their countries of origin. These differences manifested in students holding differing values about many issues. One example cited was the attitude of some groups towards the police, of whom many refugee students were terrified.

One principal argued that diversity was not to be highlighted as an excuse for a lack of challenge being offered to students in their studies. As his school has the highest refugee population in the state, he agreed that such a mix of students did create a different climate in the school, but certainly did not detract from the need to set learning expectations for them. In earlier times, Kathy's school had been typified by a high Chinese population for many years, but in recent years, not only had the profile of the students changed to one much more diverse (in terms of their country of origin) but the profile of the Chinese students had shifted from one of mainly affluent families to those less so.

Canada. In Canada, all four principals observed that diversity among students was not restricted to issues of colour or language. Paul commented that 'the school has a reasonable amount of diversity in actual fact. ... We have a significant number of children who come from all over the world, [and] the students from a variety of socioeconomic situations which leads to a huge diversity in the school'. When asked how he understood and defined diversity, Simon said:

> Well, I guess it goes through a lot of various things. We have got quite some students in special education programs for whatever reasons, they are right from gifted to 'highly medium'. So diversity, I guess is a pretty wide range that, to be the diversity between you and me, I would define it quite broadly.

Jan explained that her school 'had a huge range of linguistic and cultural backgrounds.' She estimated that 10 per cent of her students were recent immigrants to Canada, from a range of countries. She also observed that almost 12 per cent of her students were of Aboriginal (First Nations or Métis) background, and that in her school 'there is a wide enough range of diversity so that nobody stands out.' In contrast, Heather noted that diversity:

> is a couple of individuality and differences, kind of many factors that make a place diverse. You will see very urban looking kids in clothing, you will see our cowboys, you will see our gothic element, all of the cliques, those types of things. So there is diversity in the school and kids will comment on it here as the different groups that exist.

It is apparent that in the Canadian context ethnocultural diversity is viewed quite broadly, and incorporates dimensions such as socioeconomic class, intellectual ability, and rural versus urban background, as well as race, language, and culture. The inclusive nature of the concept among Canadian educators perhaps stems from the fact that Canada is an avowedly 'multicultural' nation, a position underpinned by federal legislation (Government of Canada, 1985).

Summary. As researchers visiting schools such as those in this study, it was not hard to 'see' the diversity among the student population as one walked around the schools. The physical, cultural and ethnic differences were tangible. The artefacts and symbols permeating many of

these schools, and highlighted prominently on some schools' websites, was one of a different reality and culture from what one would have expected in these same schools probably just a decade ago. For all of the principals, these differences were seen as strengths to be celebrated.

Managing ethnocultural diversity

Principals in all three locations recognised that ethnocultural diversity was a significant factor in how their school's identity was perceived and managed, which inevitably affected relationships with community stakeholders and required positive interactions within the school community. This impacted on the way the principals lead their schools.

New Zealand. All five principals were focused on acknowledging the diversity within their schools and facilitating an environment of social equity and justice. All the schools integrated ethnocultural celebrations into their school programmes, varying from a cultural week with dance, food and performance through to costume days and having flags of every nation represented in the school (in one school 58 flags were purchased for the school hall). Each school developed its own approach to creating a community that integrated its diverse student body, although Murray did not believe that there is one simple model for achieving that:

> There has to be coherence and a strong ethos that binds it together and it can happen, different kinds of glue can do that. I am always thinking about … what are the neat things we can do to build the community, rather than thinking in terms of problems of groups. We celebrate difference but work as a family.

Michael initiated a study in his school specifically focusing on the issue of diversity in the multicultural school. The creation of a staff committee to work with new students was one strategy used to address particular student needs.

The principals facilitated varied initiatives to address the differing needs of their students. For example, Murray explained the way in which induction occurs for international students so that 'every single group in the school is enmeshed in the culture and made to feel part of things. We (also) reserve places for our international students among the prefects'. Tony spoke of the recently implemented support programmes in his school that involve community groups in the cultural education of the students. In addition, he has appointed staff from the countries now represented in New Zealand through its broader immigration policy. This assists students to identify with the background of the teaching staff and has increased the diversity within the staff as well as within the students. Tony did note that 'I sometimes think that principals in more homogeneous communities have it a lot simpler'.

George believes that 'a lot of what I do is about trying to relate to people and trying to understand where they're coming from and trying to be proactive'. This involves actively working with the community to deal with student problems. For example, he spoke of the moral obligation to ensure students are not sidelined through their ethnocultural background, especially those who arrive at the school and cannot speak English. In addition he emphasises the aim to counter the literacy and learning problems identified with Maori and Pacific Island families in his community. Handling multidimensional diversity affects many aspects of school planning, including the curriculum, and in some cases it means offering pathways to satisfy the different community needs and preferences that may not always focus on the academic. The most significant requirement for addressing this challenge is to have 'staff paddling in the same direction' (Tony).

In all five of the New Zealand interviews, the principals acknowledged the significance of ethnic diversity in their schools, and the concomitant need for an inclusive school culture. One principal pointed to an acknowledgement of diversity within the school as being part of their mission statement stating that 'we feel as if we are probably one of the most ethnically diverse schools there is.' Another spoke of recruiting ethnically diverse staff to meet the needs of the diverse student body. 'One I've just employed, chose (this school) because of the diversity, the cultural differences here.'

Whilst diversity of all types was seen as an integral part of their school communities, none of the principals believed that ethnocultural diversity caused them insurmountable problems. All principals led their schools in ways that celebrated the particular school identity, such as by making sure that 'each one gets their time in the sun' through cultural celebrations or programme initiatives. One school website articulates its values statement openly to include the 'support of the multi-cultural and diverse nature of its community' while another includes an acknowledgement of the importance of diversity in the school mission statement. Murray declared that he actively chose to 'work in multi ethnic, diverse environments, because that's where I enjoy being'. Murray also spoke of his belief that many schools celebrate differences in a way that can exacerbate problems.

In effect, all five interviewees in New Zealand asserted that diverse ethnocultural characteristics were just that, characteristics and not problems. Diana summed this up in her explanation of her school's culture as having 'an ethic of inclusion'. The five principals were vigorously enthusiastic about their positive school cultures, endeavouring to develop a community that celebrates, rather than highlights, the ethnocultural difference.

Australia. The five schools located in Brisbane present ethnoculturally diverse student profiles. Indeed, as for some of the Canadian schools, diversity was also evident in other ways, such as socio-economic and ability profiles. What is significant among all five principals interviewed is that, like their New Zealand counterparts, they did not see the diversity of their school, the ethnocultural diversity in particular, as a disadvantage or a problem. Rather it simply represented one characteristic, albeit an important one, of their school. Indeed, for four of the principals, it was to be celebrated and seen as a strength on which to build their schools. Mark indicated that to be successful in schools with ethnocultural student profiles, one needed to be able to learn and work cross-culturally – this involves being committed to a two-way strong concept where one is strong in their own/home culture and strong in the mainstream culture. On a practical level, Kathy indicated she was able to monitor what was happening in the school across the different cultural groups through her 'cultural captains', students nominated by students who kept her informed of what was happening with particular ethnic groups, particularly when trouble might be developing.

All of the schools had in-school language support units for students whose first (or home) language was other than English. Kathy noted that the ethnic diversity in her school could be somewhat problematic in response to world events, such as bombings and terrorist acts in some of the students' home countries. Tensions among different ethnic groups sometimes resulted, but, overall, the school made every effort for different student groups not to stand out, but tried to make sure 'they are integrated into the school while retaining their ethnic differences'. She noted, as did other principals, that some of the students, the refugees in particular, had experienced terrible traumas in their past. So much so, that for some students, punishment imposed in this Australian school was not seen to be a very serious matter

compared with the very negative experiences confronted earlier in life. Valerie noted that teachers needed to be alert to trauma cases and that quite unexpected things can 'set students off' because of their past.

Kathy noted two challenges arising from the diversity in the school. The first related to the fact that she was female. Her gender was a 'problem with some groups, such that they won't shake my hand'. The other issue related to the fact that some staff were not willing to accept the different groups and their customs, with some wanting to 'go back to the good old days with wealthy Chinese students and locals'. However, one principal had appointed a number of staff who were also migrants and had experienced, at least in part, similar things to the students. This helped to create an understanding and supportive environment in the school. This second point raises a critical issue about the culture developed in the schools, and led by the principals, that leads to an inclusive and supportive ethos. All principals demonstrated through their comments that they were committed to social justice principles. It was these principles that drove their focus on all students in their schools. Barry, for example, expressed strong acceptance of, and support for, 'different students', so much so that he felt the school 'attracted different students'. He noted that 'if we are not successful with them, what happens to them?'

As well as the importance of social justice principles, the principals emphasised the need to set learning expectations on all students, including those who were struggling with their English. Many refugee students were older, had very low education levels, yet they held high expectations about their academic capabilities. All principals identified specific activities that they fostered in their schools both to raise the profile of the school's ethnocultural diversity and to allow different individuals and groups to celebrate their different backgrounds and traditions. Activities in this regard included multi-cultural days, 'world cup' soccer tournaments and musical presentations. Most schools catered for the different languages spoken at home by having newsletters and other correspondence translated into various languages – as an example, Kathy indicated she would talk at her school's Speech Night in a number of different languages. Parents and students appreciated such initiatives.

Two of the Brisbane principals pointed out that they believed they did not fit the usual mould of secondary school principals – a matter of which they were proud, suggesting it was their differences that made them suitable for the schools they led. Mark suggested he 'sat outside the mainstream culture' while Barry indicated he would 'probably be unable to cope in a 'normal' secondary school.' Valerie noted that some of her principal colleagues discouraged students of different backgrounds from enrolling in their schools or manipulated things to keep their numbers down. This was not the case in the five schools involved in this study. What is interesting regarding this point is that three of the five principals made direct statements to the effect that they were different from their colleagues and at times, at odds with those in the system in terms of its expectations of what principals ought to be like and what they should do. It could be argued it was these differences that made them successful in their current schools.

Canada. In the Canadian schools there was a sense that the visible face of diversity was increasing on a weekly basis. Three of the four principals noted that by watching the television news they could predict the waves of new children who would soon be arriving at their doors. Most recently they had welcomed children from Afghanistan, Sudan, Haiti, and Iraq. Like their counterparts in Auckland and Brisbane, such challenges were not perceived as problematic, simply as a reality of life in the 21st century.

Although there was some evidence of the celebrations of diversity reported by the New Zealand principals, the Canadians did not see highlighting diversity as crucial to their work. Rather, they felt it was more important to assist students and teachers to recognise the beliefs and values of each ethnocultural group and to encourage acceptance of all these world views. To that end, the identification of specific heritage celebrations was rarely encouraged. Although there was some acknowledgement of major religious and ethnic festivals, all four principals felt that celebrating the three F's of multiculturalism – food, festivals and folk dancing – did not really allow the development of a deep understanding of 'other' in relation to the dominant society.

The Canadian schools did not enrol a large number of fee-paying international students and while there are some international students in Calgary schools, this is not a major sub-culture within the education system. More typically, the international students who registered in these schools were new immigrants to Canada. These young people shared with some second generation students, and with some Aboriginal youth, a lack of understanding of the English language. As a result they were often enrolled in English as a second language (ESL) classes and, indeed, this variable (requirement for ESL support) appears to have become a proxy marker for 'diversity and difference' within the formal school reporting process.

This focus on language is, perhaps, one of the reasons that all four Calgary area principals stressed the need for school administrators to understand the nuances of communication. As Jan said:

> It [communication] is a two way process, with many unanticipated barriers and influences between the sender and the receiver. As a principal it is really important that you don't react immediately to what seems like an inappropriate comment – first figure out what the kid was trying to say!

As a corollary of this, Paul commented that often teachers need to be reminded that ESL students can appear to be rude or insubordinate when really it's simply a lack of understanding of cultural boundaries concerning communication protocols.

Another challenge identified by the Canadian principals was the need to be aware of post-traumatic stress reactions that were triggered by seemingly innocuous events. Heather noted that 'we all think the kids from some war-torn place might be antsy about a policeman coming in to the classroom, but it's the things you don't anticipate that get you' She went on to describe a situation where a child from Somalia flew into a violent rage during a gym class, apparently because the sound made by a ball hitting another student reminded him of an event he had witnessed. Heather also observed that one of the key roles of the principal in an ethnoculturally diverse school was to ensure that the teachers were not only aware of these possibilities, but were alert to them as well.

As with the New Zealand and Australian principals described above, the Canadians all exhibited a firm belief in the principles of equity and social justice. Further, their practice was informed, in an intentional way, by those beliefs. That said, there did not seem to be the same focus on difference as was reported from the Australian and New Zealand schools. There was a recognition of diversity, but also a sense that this diversity was simply individual expressions within a coherent whole. It may be that the Canadian Multiculturalism Act (Government of Canada, 1985) has become such a part of how Canadians identify themselves, that difference, while recognised, is not emphasised so much as integration, of maintaining one's diversity while becoming part of the wider societal body politic.

Conclusions and implications

This paper has outlined a tri-nation study of school leadership in schools of ethnocultural diversity. This study was initiated to broaden the focus of research into educational leadership and place it firmly in a dynamic global and social context. Dimmock and Walker (2000) believed that 'a key direction for educational management and leadership in the twenty first century is to embrace an international, cultural and cross-cultural comparative perspective' (p. 306). The three selected contexts of Auckland, Brisbane and Calgary provide a glimpse into how nations may have dissimilar characteristics and contrasting educational systems, but show similarities in the way principals lead ethnoculturally diverse schools. The resultant individual school culture is one that emerges from context-appropriate guidance and leadership.

In this preliminary study it was found that the principals acknowledged varied forms of diversity, from ethnic, cultural, religious and socio-economic background, to diversity of learning needs and abilities. The focus on ethnocultural diversity was, for some, arbitrary, as the principals perceived this as only one dimension of the whole school community. Despite that viewpoint, they acknowledged that student differences arising from ethnic and cultural backgrounds contributed significantly to the identity of their schools. For this reason, the school's uniqueness became a reflection of the ethnocultural mix and the character of the school encompassed that.

Michael's (New Zealand) reflections have resonance with those of many of the other interviewed principals:

> It's about making sure (these) students feel that their inner beings, their culture, lifestyle and whatever it is you define it as, is acknowledged. Now what's interesting is that it may be that we are only acknowledging the surface stuff, but that's probably enough. I mean for a lot of kids that's okay.

The principals approached the issues arising from diversity as just one facet of the evolving school culture. In many cases it was their confident leadership and role modeling that developed an environment of trust, whereby problematic issues were resolved through the distribution of responsibility within the management structures.

One interesting observation in all three jurisdictions was the capacity of the principals interviewed to lead and manage highly challenging and complex organizations. None of the principals demonstrated any real anxiety or concern in dealing effectively with this complexity. Their strong social justice orientations and their capacity to build effective relationships across all members of their communities seemed to be a strong mitigating factor in managing what, for many, would present as significant challenges. It has been noted that continual and increasing immigration is putting pressure on school communities both in terms of resourcing and changing characteristics of the school community. In such a context it is imperative that schools recognise the differing needs and goals of students and respond to this diversity (Ministry of Education, 2003). So while school principals in this study exemplify positive models for leading diverse schools, it is acknowledged that educational groups of students are 'characterized by diversity or heterogeneity' and that quality teaching for heterogeneous groups remains a challenge for teachers (Ministry of Education, 2003, p. 5).

These matters raise some significant policy issues for consideration. There are two key challenges for education systems and for individual schools regarding the principalship of

such schools. The first relates to the recruitment and selection of principals to lead ethnoculturally diverse schools. There is no doubt that such schools require leaders with special capabilities and strongly articulated notions of social justice. The appointment process clearly ought take such matters into account. The second challenge is to ensure adequate professional development opportunities are provided for those aspiring to lead in these schools. This may include formal programmes, but perhaps more importantly, mentoring and work shadowing of effective principals in these schools might provide critical learning opportunities for those aspirants. This parallels the recommendations of Dimmock, Shah and Stevenson (2004) that professional development and training courses for school leadership and management include the multi-ethnic dimension in a way that is reflective and practically supported by mentoring (from within and without the institution).

Madsen and Mabokela (2002) have reflected on the critical need to accept that with increased global mobility the demographics of societies are changing, school leadership roles are becoming more pluralistic, and schools face 'critical adaptive challenges' (p. 1). This necessitates a change of emphasis to acknowledging and managing all types of individuals and groups and their differences, for 'pluralistic leadership assumes that acceptance can be reached by understanding, valuing and utilizing the differences between groups' (Avenall, 2004, p. 2). Banks (2004, p. 296) referred to this as the consequence of 'racial, ethnic, cultural and language diversity (which) is increasing in nation-states throughout the world because of worldwide immigration'.

In effect increased population movements are creating increasingly diverse communities (Dimmock, et al., 2004), in which schools are enriched by the diversity of cultures and can offer many different opportunities (Escobar-Ortloff & Ortloff, 2003). At the same time, school leaders need to ' understand the characteristics and expectations of the different cultural groups within the school community' and develop 'a proactive strategy to address any potential 'cultural' conflicts and misunderstandings that might arise' (p. 255). This exploratory study has highlighted how 'increasingly diverse student populations challenge principals to examine not whether but how they will respond to students' needs' (Merchant, 1999, p.165).

The findings reported here, whilst referring to a limited sample of schools across three locations, do provide some empirical evidence of the need to articulate diversity of leadership in context. The study explored leadership issues that arise as a result of changing global demographics and revealed the complex nature of researching school leadership. However the findings are context-specific, may not be represented across all three countries, and may well reflect more on the nature of the principals who were interviewed and the schools that constituted the sample, rather than the general school environment.

There are clearly challenges for principals working in ethnoculturally diverse schools, not the least of which can be the gender of the principal. Despite this, successful leadership seems to be achieved by what might be termed 'the four principals' principles for success' of ethnoculturally diverse schools:

- a strong commitment to social justice principles, with these embedded in school practices and culture;
- an acceptance of difference and the capacity to work across various cultures, accommodating differences and using these as strengths;
- the setting of high learning expectations for all students and avoiding an 'excuse culture';

- the celebration of the diverse ethnocultural nature of schools, with cultural and sporting activities that respect and highlight individual and group differences.

The principals interviewed have illustrated that they have confidently used individualized approaches and strategies for leading their particular schools.

This project has offered some critical insights into the complexity of the concepts within this topic and offers a preliminary exploration of the arising issues. Dimmock and Walker (2005) have argued that 'given the multi-ethnic nature of schools around the world, leaders nowadays shoulder responsibility for shaping their organisations in ways that value and integrate heterogeneity groups into successful learning communities for all.' (p. 4). This study provides examples of some of the ways in which principals are attempting to address this challenge.

Although we remain tentative in our findings and acknowledge the limitations due to the size and breadth of this exploratory study, we identify future research that could enhance our understandings of school leadership in ethno-culturally diverse schools. There are clearly a number of areas of potential further research resulting from this exploratory work. In summary these include:

(a) broadening the research data to include the views of not just principals, but other schools leaders, parent and community groups and perhaps students. This would deepen our understandings of the implications of the increasingly ethnocultural diversity of many of our schools where the student profile is significantly different from what it might have been just a decade or so ago - and from the perspective from other key school personnel.

(b) examining potential professional development needs of principals with respect to leading ethnoculturally diverse schools; the challenges facing principals in these schools are clearly different from those where such diversity is less evident, such that the different and specific leadership capabilities may need to be developed in both incumbent and aspiring principals to ensure these schools are best placed to maximise learning and the social development of their students.

(c) examining the issues identified in this study in schools where diversity is less evident among the student/community; that is, can the challenges arising for principals resulting from student diversity be similarly evident, even when the numbers of students from diverse ethnocultural backgrounds is not as large as that in the schools selected for inclusion in this study. This would provide valuable information as to how widespread such challenges are as the global movements of people continue unabated with resulting implications for schools.

(d) replicating the study with a larger number of schools, both within these three jurisdictions and also in other locales. As all three cities shared similar demographic characteristics, particularly with respect to the dominance of the English language as a medium of instruction, a similar study in schools with a different dominant language would help us to understand whether these are global or culturally-specific findings.

The above four research thrusts would add to thinking about the policy and practice implications of the findings thus far.

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Author details:

Dr Jennie Billot
Unitec, New Zealand
Private Bag 92025
Auckland, New Zealand
E mail: jbillot@unitec.ac.nz

Dr J. Tim Goddard
Faculty of Education
University of Calgary
2500 University Drive NW
Calgary, Alberta T2N 1N4 Canada
E mail: goddard@ucalgary.ca.

Associate Professor Neil Cranston
School of Education
University of Queensland
Brisbane 4072, Australia
E mail: n.cranston@uq.edu.au