

PERSONAL VALUES, PROFESSIONAL CODES OF ETHICS, AND ETHICAL
DILEMMAS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION LEADERSHIP

by

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Personal Values, Professional Codes of Ethics, and Ethical Dilemmas in Special
Education Leadership

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my family. First, to my wife who has supported me in many ways during this long and challenging process. Rather than thank her for standing behind me, I thank her for standing next to me. None of this would have been possible without her never-ending love and support. I also dedicate this to my boys, Ethan and Gabe. I started this program when Gabe was born, and Ethan was almost five. You kept me young boys, and I am proud of you. Finally, I dedicate this to James Best and Sorrell Brooke. Your gift of laughter will never be repaid in full.

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Abstract

PERSONAL VALUES, PROFESSIONAL CODES OF ETHICS, AND ETHICAL DILEMMAS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION LEADERSHIP

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Within many professions, decision-makers encounter complex situations or ethical dilemmas for which a clear resolution is not often obvious. Business and medical communities have a rich history of research focused on ethics and ethical dilemmas. While business research tends to focus on the need for establishing guidelines to promote ethical practice, medical research explores the extent to which ethical practice is consistent with the Hippocratic oath, “above all, do no harm.” Demands for ethical leadership in education reflect, in part, a focus on the best interest of the child standard (Stefkovich & Begley, 2007). Within the field of special education in particular, this directive becomes a massive challenge given the complexity and significant demands placed on special education leaders. This study focused primarily on how special education case managers address ethical dilemmas within the field.

Using the multiple paradigm model developed by Shapiro and Stefikovich (2005), this study investigated the interaction of personal values and professional codes of ethics

for case managers when faced with ethical dilemmas. Other lines of inquiry included how personal values are formed, what causes ethical dilemmas, how case managers define ethical dilemmas, and how personal values and professional codes of ethics operate for the individual acting alone, as well as within a group dynamic. A web-based survey was distributed to 10,000 randomly sampled licensed special educators throughout the United States in order to investigate five research questions. Data were analyzed and reported based on 730 completed surveys.

Despite a discussion about ethical leadership spanning three decades, scant research has been conducted in the area of ethics and decision making within the field of special education (Bon & Bigbee, 2011; Paul, French, & Cranston-Gingras, 2001; Howe & Miramontes, 1992). The present study sought to explore several areas that have received limited attention. Overall, case managers report that they were not well prepared to deal with ethical dilemmas in the field. They also indicate that more time should be spent discussing ethics within the school, and that national codes of ethics, such as the code established by the Council for Exception Children, play a relatively insignificant role in guiding their decisions when faced with ethical dilemmas.

Regarding personal values and professional codes of ethics, findings indicate that professional codes of ethics dominate the decision-making process, both individually and within a group dynamic. Case managers report that the main sources of personal values are education, family, and religion. They also report that the primary sources of ethical dilemmas were conflicts with parents, administrators, teachers, and compliance mandates. Lastly, participants also provide a definition of ethical dilemma, which

establishes five key themes that provide a clear composite of the term's fundamental components.

Findings from this study are vital in assisting pre-service special education program coordinators as well as district and school leaders in order to prepare future special education leaders to address and negotiate ethical dilemmas. This study developed a language around this discussion of ethics and ethical dilemmas. It also expanded on the powerful multiple paradigm model developed by Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005), which contends that personal and professional codes of ethics do not always exist in opposition to one another, but can co-exist to support the best interests of the child.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The claim that teaching is a moral enterprise lends itself to the notion that in order for this to be seen and practiced in the field, teachers and leaders must develop and adhere to a set of ethical standards by which conflicts can be judged and on which action can be taken. Joseph and Efron (1993) note that a significant amount of recent educational scholarship highlights that moral decision-making and moral agency are foundational components of teaching and leading in the field of education. The many decisions that are made in the field, specifically those regarding what is in the best interest of the child, have moral outcomes.

Addressing this need, Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005) developed a framework for “ethical reasoning in educational leadership to guide the decision-making of principals as they confront unfamiliar and complex dilemmas in their schools” (p. 182). The multiple paradigm framework calls for an awareness and application of the ethic of critique, justice, care, and of the profession. These individual ethics form a larger framework that allows the decision maker to understand how the ethic of critique, justice, care, and profession inform and interact with one another. The ethic of the profession is comprised of personal values and professional codes of ethics. Ideally, these codes operate in order to inform the decision maker to act in the best interest of the child. The way in which

personal values and professional codes of ethics are formed and how they inform special education leaders when attempting to resolve ethical dilemmas is the focus of this study.

In the educational field, significant pressures are placed on special education leaders from multiple sources. The call to act ethically is not adequately supported by leadership preparation programs and professional communities in which they operate through applicable and specific methods. This study investigated how special education leaders explain how their personal values and professional codes of ethics are formed, and how they use them to inform their decisions when faced with ethical dilemmas. In addition, this study investigated the way in which these values and codes are challenged when working with others to resolve ethical dilemmas. The implications of this study are significant for current as well as future special education leaders as ethics and decision-making in special education will continue to draw attention. Protecting students with special needs is an essential task for all special education leaders. In order for special education leaders to embrace this task, they must understand their own ethical framework, which includes how they form their personal values as well as their reliance on and understanding of professional ethical codes.

Problem

While the study of ethics has taken place across many academic disciplines, i.e. business, medicine, and to a lesser degree education, it has received little research attention in the field of special education leadership. Howe and Miramontes (1992) state that “Despite the ethical quagmires that special education engenders, it is safe to claim that the ethics of special education has so far received scant attention.” The topic has not

been explored in the context of special education, particularly with respect to how teachers and leaders function in their jobs. Berkeley and Ludlow (2008) state that it is essential for practitioners and researchers to address ways of drawing attention to ethics and special education.

Specifically, they highlight three significant reasons supporting the need to focus on the intersection of special education and ethics. First, special educators are under a tremendous amount of pressure. Second, administrators are not aware of the complexity of these issues, and offer little assistance to special educators. Third, higher education preparatory programs do not emphasize the importance of addressing ethical concerns. This is not to say, however, that educational preparation programs do not stress the importance of being and acting ethical. Knowledge of the extent to which special educators are trained, however, is lacking. Unless these programs address the topic of ethics and ethical development, it will remain difficult for special education teachers and leaders to optimally individualize and develop educational plans for students with special needs. Discussing ethics and working toward resolving ethical dilemmas in a collaborative manner on a regular basis “begins and expands what is a necessary learning of a language of ethics to have a firmer foundation for arriving at decisions that are ethical in protecting all stakeholders” (p. 6).

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate how personal values and professional codes of ethics are formed, and how they impact the decision making process for special education case managers as they face ethical dilemmas. Additionally, the study

investigated how these values and codes are challenged when education leaders attempt to resolve dilemmas with others. The call for learning and developing a language of ethics is heard across the literature in order to support the many needs that children with disabilities have in an educational setting. There are practical, academic, and personal perspectives that justify the need for further research in this area.

Significance

Practical. Several researchers have documented barriers to ethical decision-making such as traditional hierarchical school structures, the high cost of working collaboratively, inadequate preparation for teacher leaders, lack of administrative support for new teacher roles, and stress among teacher leaders (Murphy, 2005; Sherrill, 1999; Wasley, 1991; York-Barr & Duke, 2004; & Billingsley, 2007). Educational leaders are bombarded with challenges that require that complex decisions be made quickly and without full awareness of the potential impact that it may have on the student. Little time is available to do this kind of reflexive processing, individually or communally. Decisions that are either ill-informed, over-informed, made in haste and/or without a clear awareness of the potential outcomes often lead to decisions that do not fully adhere to ethical standards required of the leader (Billingsley, 2007). By having a clear awareness of the formation of personal values and professional codes, and by understanding how they interact to inform the decision-making process, special education leaders will be better equipped to negotiate these dilemmas. They will be better prepared to meet the needs of each student that they support. As decision-maker, they will have an

enhanced ability to promote what is in the best interest of the child given the demands of the particular situation in which they must decide and act.

Academic. Helton and Ray (2005) explored techniques that school practitioners reported using in order to resist pressures to practice unethically. They identified three primary cognitive prerequisites that must be present: knowledge of law that enabled them to recognize potential ethical dilemmas; understanding the school structures and processes; and an understanding of interpersonal relationships. The significance of their research adds to the body of knowledge regarding how leaders resist making unethical decisions. More in line with this research is the idea of how ethics are defined and followed *first*. This is significant in that the former can be viewed as a response to having (or not) an ethical framework from which one operates. The latter is the basis for informing the decision making process itself. Exploring this line of research will answer many questions raised in previous research and will guide those training future special education leaders in an academic setting.

Helton and Ray (2005) noted that research should be conducted to explore how personal values interact with the requirements of ethical codes as practitioners reason and make choices about ethical dilemmas. Additionally, inquiry into how aware they are of their codes and the sources of their formation, as well as how they guide the decision-making process is needed. Howe and Miramontes (1992, p. 122) summarized both the practical and academic significance of further research in ethics and special education leadership by stating:

The value to a profession in the initial process of clarifying ethical worries and

codifying them in a set of principles is that it enhances ethical awareness; the ongoing value of an ethical code to a profession is that it continues to serve as a general guidepost and reminder of the ethical duties and dangers peculiar to the profession.

While no code of ethics can ensure that leaders will act ethically when faced with dilemmas, failing to investigate this topic only serves to diminish the potential that an enhanced awareness of personal values and professional codes has on decision-making.

Personal. My reasons for investigating this topic stem from a basic framework that teaching is a moral enterprise. This notion has been discussed across multiple disciplines, in large part in due to Dewey in the early twentieth century (Gouinlock, 1994). Educational researchers have focused extensively on the roles of teachers and leaders as moral agents (Begley, 1999; Campbell, 1997; Pring, 2001; Strike, Haller, & Soltis, 1998). My first experience in education was in a parochial school setting. As the school based its teachings and expectations based on religious codes, faith-based values were shared in open and obvious ways. Transitioning to the public school system involved a change in how I approached this. Values were no longer connected to shared religious beliefs, whereas in the previous setting, they were routinely expressed in terms of faith.

I have also worked with special needs students for over ten years, and the concept of doing what is right is never easily defined. Especially given the complex and difficult tasks that were placed on me as a special education leader by the laws and regulations that were designed to safeguard my students. What I thought was in the best interest of

the child as theory, and what I decided to do in the school setting, were not always compatible and reconcilable. An acute awareness of how little I knew of my own value formation and reliance on professional codes became clear.

I then became interested in the role that personal values and professional codes of ethics play when ethical dilemmas are encountered. Additionally, I read articles and other texts that emphasized the need to discuss values and ethical codes with others in a communal setting. Sergiovanni (2000) used the term stewardship when he discussed values and ethics. The concept of stewardship suggests to educational leaders that ethical decisions are not made alone, but with others who share a similar sense of purpose and direction. While the process of determining whether or not a decision or action is ethical begins with the individual, the individual should not be the final resting point.

I came to believe that the possible options that I have as the decision-maker, because they impact others in a social system or network, ought to be discussed, adjusted if necessary, and finally given time in self-reflection. By doing this, I realized that I might learn from this process, and gain insight into how I function when attempting to negotiate ethical dilemmas. Gula (1989, p. 278) wrote “Instead of ethics being simply a matter of personal soul searching, the strategy is based on a sense of community; the individual making the ethical decision must ultimately be guided by a kind of communal discernment.” Gula’s words articulate my interest in how the individual comes to make decisions, and how personal values and professional codes inform this process. Investigating how they operate in the presence of other decision-makers is an important line of inquiry.

Finally, I realized that if I questioned my own level of awareness and preparedness, it is highly likely that others are experiencing the same angst, and ultimately desire to enter into difficult decisions with greater confidence. Reflecting on my own educational experiences, I became deeply aware that I am not prepared to negotiate ethical dilemmas with confidence. After a decade of teaching and functioning as a special education case manager, my level of preparedness has not progressed significantly. This realization became a key motivator for me to conduct research on ethics and decision making from the perspective of the special education case manager.

Research Questions

The following five questions guided this study on ethical decision making in the field of special education leadership:

RQ1. How prepared are case managers to deal with ethical dilemmas in the field of special education?

RQ2. When faced with ethical dilemmas, do special education case managers rely more heavily on personal values or professional codes of ethics to determine which course of action is in the best interest of the child?

RQ3. What do case managers claim are the significant causes of ethical dilemmas?

RQ4. In a group setting, do case managers report if personal or professional codes of ethics conflict? If so, which set of codes tends to dominate the decision-making process for case manager?

RQ5. How do case managers define the term *ethical dilemma*?

The research questions were explored through a framework that explains how the decision-maker operates when faced with ethical dilemmas, the factors that influence the process, and the dynamics that take place when the individual functions either alone or within a group.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework is a visual representation of ten years of direct service in the field of special education as a case manager and teacher, as well as findings from studies that focused on ethical decision-making. Three years of direct service were served in a private school, while the last seven have been served in a large public school district. The last seven years have had the most impact on the researcher's desire to explore personal values and professional codes of ethics as the adherence to federal, state, and county laws governing the implementation of special education services is significantly more involved and complex within the public school system. Throughout the graduate school experience, the researcher discovered and was guided toward articles and studies that focused on various aspects of the conceptual framework. At the same time, the researcher experienced periods where personal values and professional codes were in opposition, and the literature being read concurrently addressed what was being experienced in the field. The microcosm of the researcher's experience was explained on a macro level through the literature as a broader, more universally encountered phenomenon. The researcher's desire to investigate the process of negotiating ethical dilemmas was substantiated by research-based avenues of academic inquiry.

The concepts that make up the conceptual framework are moral agency, special education leadership, ethical dilemmas and possible causes, personal values, professional codes of ethics, best interest of the child, collaboration, and decision-making. How ethical dilemmas are negotiated through personal values and professional codes of ethics are explained through the conceptual framework. Additionally, the key terms are operationally defined or explained throughout the discussion. The following visual representation graphically represents the major concepts of the conceptual framework.

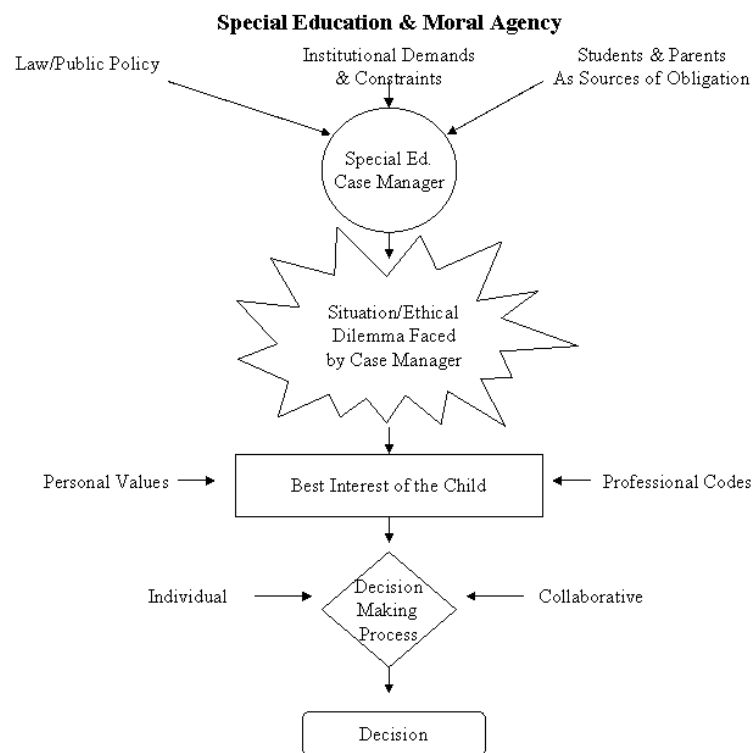


Figure 1. Ethical dilemma process in special education.

The concept of moral agency, introducing Figure 1, functions as the overarching conceptual guide for the process of addressing ethical dilemmas. A brief discussion regarding the researcher's use of the terms moral and ethical facilitates the explanation of the conceptual framework. The concept of ethical dilemma is also given careful consideration in the context of how the case manager encounters, or addresses it.

In much of the literature that discusses ethics and morality, the terms moral and ethical are commonly used in place of one another. This is also the case with their usage in conversation as well as in writing. A person can have a strong work ethic, and might also be described as having strong moral fortitude. A person can be both immoral and unethical, as can a law or policy. Both terms, however, deal with the concepts of right and wrong. The difficulty lies in understanding how these terms became associated with concepts such as right and wrong, for the individual as well as the group (and ultimately, society). Outside of the individual, provided that he or she is aware of how his or her ethics and morals are formed, it becomes increasingly more difficult to reach a consensus of what these terms mean. A sub section of the survey used in this study asked the participants to define the term ethical dilemma. The definitions, addressed in Chapter 5, contain language that was similarly ambiguous regarding the use of terms such as moral and ethical in the context of doing what is right when faced with difficult decisions.

Remley and Herlihy (2006) claim that ethics and morality require that individuals make judgments about what is good, bad, right, and wrong. These terms, then, ultimately relate to the way humans act, the values that they hold, and the relationships that they

form with one another. The difficulty with many subjective terms lies in their definition, such as good and bad, right and wrong. Personal and group filters and influences are prevalent when attempting to understand the use of these concepts. While the assumed meanings and subjective undertones are clearly evident, this does not mean that the terms moral and ethical cannot be given general characteristics or components for the purpose of this study.

Many of the articles cited in this study discuss ethics, morals, and values, using them more as descriptors rather than establishing a clear definition of them. The terms are most commonly attached to the concept of leadership. Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005) use the term ethical leadership. Sergiovanni (1992) discusses moral leadership. Begley (1999) conducted a meta-analysis of research on the role that values play in educational leadership (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2005; Starrat, 2004; Campbell, 1997; Sergiovanni, 1992). The field of medicine, however, provides a definition that gives clarity for the purpose of this study.

Weaver (2007) explored the concepts of ethics, morality and ethical sensitivity as they appear in the literature across various disciplines. Weaver claims that understanding these concepts is vital for those working in the caring sciences. Weaver acknowledges that there is a wide variation across the definitions for these terms, yet she notes their etymological similarities. This may explain why the terms are used interchangeably. *Moralis* and *ethikos* both relate to character, habits, and manners. The conceptual differences, however, are that the term ethics or ethical involve a disciplined reflection. The individual or decision-maker “stands back from everyday practices and their

embedded values to reflect on underlying principles, decisions, and problems” (p. 148). Such a person, therefore, is acting in an ethical manner.

Professional codes of ethics, seen in the light of this definition, provide a framework for this to take place. Morals, on the other hand, are a “set of norms about right and wrong conduct developed from religious and social values” (Weaver, 2007, p. 148). Weaver states that morals and ethics can, at times, be opposed to one another. Perhaps the most significant difference is that the term ethical involves principles that have been established by a profession or group of professionals for the purpose of judging the best course of action to take. When morals, or personal values, and professional ethical codes are not aligned, this possible opposition may set the stage for moments of ethical confusion, or ethical dilemmas.

Finally, a basic understanding of the term personal values needs clarification. Begley (2001) explored the nature of values within educational leadership. He proposed syntax for understanding how values are formed and used by educational leaders. At its most basic level, Begley defines values as “a conception of the desirable with motivating force” (p. 356). He continues to highlight that values come from both internal and external sources, and that both are highly interactive. Storey and Beeman (2009) explain that once internalized, values become a standard for thought and action, and that their role in decision-making is highly significant. The educational leader must be able to distinguish between the two. Begley claims that education research has primarily focused on organizational values, and that individual and professional values are disregarded as unimportant, or secondary at best. If, as Belgey reports, values operate as powerful

motivators that impact the decision-making process, it is essential that researchers explore the sources of their formation and how they function when negotiating ethical dilemmas.

Within the conceptual framework, special education leaders are charged with the task of upholding laws and policies that are designed to protect students who have been relatively unprotected through legal safeguards until the latter part of the 20th century. In the Preamble to the Code of Ethics of the Education Profession, the National Education Association (2011) states that “The educator, believing in the worth and dignity of each human being, recognizes the supreme importance of the pursuit of truth, devotion to excellence, and the nurture of the democratic principles...*The educator accepts the responsibility to adhere to the highest ethical standards* (emphasis mine).” All educators and educational leaders, including those in the field of special education, are expected to conduct themselves in an ethical manner when they interact with colleagues, parents, students, and members of the community. Training in this area typically comes through both their licensure programs, professional development, as well as through agencies that promote and protect the rights of students with special needs. Advocacy groups and agencies, such as the Council for Exceptional Children, function to ensure that each student is valued, protected, and given the same opportunities to succeed as their non-disabled peers.

One of the most well known and wide spread attempts to prepare educational leaders to act ethically by scaffolding instruction and experiences is based on ISLLC standards (Storey & Beeman, 2009). The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium

Standards for School Leaders promote six standards, or principles, that are designed to guide future educational leaders. The expected knowledge, dispositions, and performances regarding ethics are discussed specifically in Standard 5. Standard 5 states “A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner” (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008, p. 6). The language used under the knowledge, dispositions, and performances section of Standard 5 is specific, yet how the educational leader is expected to enact these directives remains ambiguously defined in both research and in the field of practice. For example, future leaders are charged with knowing “various ethical frameworks and perspectives on ethics,” they must know how to “bring ethical principles to the decision making process,” and serving as role models (Storey & Beeman, 2009, p. 766). These are but three of the twenty-nine directives under Standard 5. The directives seem to offer little more than value-based, philosophical starting points without guidelines for application. However, the directive for future leaders to function as moral agents is clearly established throughout the ISLLC standards. The language is clear and specific, yet the acquisition and application of these ethical standards remains up to the individual to explore and define.

Campbell (2004) expanded the notion that teachers and educational leaders function as moral agents by stating that moral agency is more than a given state of being brought about by chance circumstances in the learning environment. Specifically, Campbell states, “As a principle-based role, it should be considered in terms of both deliberate and spontaneous or unconscious intentions, actions and reactions in relation to

what teachers teach of a moral and ethical nature and how they interact with students” (p. 409). She adds that education leaders have an ethical knowledge that is both brought to the learning environment and developed in it. The dual components of moral agency, therefore, are what leaders set out to develop in their students, and how they themselves behave and interact. The notion that special education leaders function as moral agents is the foundational concept on which this study rests. The review of literature will establish that while special education leaders are given this directive, there is little guidance to prepare them for the role that they are asked to play. Additionally, when special education leaders are given ethical guidelines, such as the ISLCC standards, there is no mention of how leaders are supposed to address or incorporate their own personal values in the presence of professional demands. This will receive additional attention as the conceptual framework is discussed further.

The discussion of ethics in special education has primarily focused on the administrator, para-professional, teacher, and support staff (i.e. social worker, psychologist, etc.). The role in special education that has received limited attention is the case manager. In most school systems, the case manager functions as both teacher and leader. The case manager is responsible for instruction, coordinating special education services, and ensuring compliance with the Individualized Education Plan (IEP). The case manager oversees the development and implementation of agreed upon services and accommodations within the educational setting.

While the case manager is one member of the IEP team, he or she holds a significant position within the school. An interesting aspect of the role of case manager is

that the leadership component, specifically as an indirect leader, is very poorly defined within school systems. In protocols that outline special education processes, responsibilities, and hierarchies, the case manager functions as the gatekeeper between classroom teacher, parents, administration, guidance, support staff, and others. Yet, the case manager is not viewed as having a formal leadership role. Schools and school districts view them as having more of a managerial responsibility. As a result, conflicts often arise due to role confusion and ambiguity for the case manager. Without a clear understanding of role, it may be difficult for an individual to act confidently. According to Reybold (2008) “Ethical behavior results from a conscious and deliberate commitment to one’s role expectations” (p. 283). Thus, role ambiguity and the lack of clear expectations further complicate the case manager’s understanding of how to proceed when complex situations demand careful consideration.

Whereas the role of special education teacher is clearly defined through specific job descriptions, one for the case manager does not appear to exist in most public school districts. A search was conducted through public school special education websites in a large state in the southern part of the United States, and while all described the requirements of the special education teacher and administrator, none mentioned the case manager.

Role confusion is but one possible reason why case managers encounter dilemmas within the field of special education. The larger sources of this complexity and ambiguity are graphically presented in Figure 1 above the Case Manager. For this diagram, it is important to note that before the case manager addresses an ethical dilemma (located

below the Case Manager), their decisions are influenced by significant external pressures and demands. Howe and Miramontes (1992, p. 8) claim, “The federal courts, regulatory agencies, and Congress have so thoroughly insinuated themselves into various aspects of special education that there is a danger that ethical questions will be ignored in favor of legal ones.” They refer to the laws as being a blunt instrument, while the special education leader is asked to act with precision, accuracy, and compassion. They describe three major external sources that set up internal conflicts (both within the school community and the self); public policy (laws, due process, distribution of resources, and special education bureau-therapeutic structure), institutional demands and constraints (institutional unresponsiveness, special educators as brokers, labeling, and professional relationships), and students and parents as sources of obligation (conflicts about students’ welfare, confidentiality, and special allowances for special education students).

However, from the time the authors addressed these issues, many laws and policy changes have taken place in the field of special education, most notably the Individuals with Disabilities Act (2004) and the No Child Left Behind Act (2001). These federal laws have had a tremendous impact on how state and local governments, and school districts have made decisions about how special education programs, delivery of services, and instructional settings function in the schools. Regardless of the significant changes, the three sources mentioned remain viable categories for the purpose of the conceptual framework and study.

Within Figure 1, the case manager experiences an ethical dilemma. The term ethical dilemma is commonly used throughout the literature, yet it remains poorly defined

for both researchers and practitioners. The importance of a clear understanding of the term is crucial in order to understand how special education leaders articulate and use their personal values and professional ethical codes. As mentioned previously, Weaver (2007) highlighted that when personal values and organizational ethics are in opposition, tensions can arise. These tensions can exist for the individual or between the individual and other decision-makers.

Another concept that assists in explaining the concept of ethical dilemma is the condition of competing values. When values compete, conflict becomes apparent. An individual can decide to obey the speed limit in a school zone for reasons of obedience and to avoid doing harm to others. The values involved, obeying and not harming others, co-exist without opposition. However, if an educator allows a student to retake a test because he or she has knowledge of problems at home that might result in the student failing, an outside observer might determine that while it was a kind gesture, it was not fair to other students whose issues were unknown to the educator. Fox (1994) referred to this phenomenon as destructive dualism. The idea is not that personal values and ethical codes cannot exist without disruption to the individual or the environment. They can and often do. However, when they do not, the consequences can be significant. The case manager must then decide what they feel is the best course of action given the circumstances.

Bon and Bigbee (2011) describe the concept of ethical dilemma through the lens of the case managers that participated in a series of focus group discussions. Case managers report that they often feel that they are torn between oppositional ideals or

standards. Bon and Bigbee, while not defining the term *ethical dilemma*, synthesized the main themes that emerged from the discussion by stating “The special education leaders also identified certain situations as ethical dilemmas because of a perceived conflict between professional and personal codes of ethics or moral codes” (p. 337).

Acknowledging the concept of destructive dualism, there are times when a choice must be made between personal values and professional codes.

It is within these moments where uncertainty about what is the best course of action exists. Not acting in accordance with personal and professional values may potentially set up conflict within the individual both internally and externally in the environment in which the decision-maker operates. Even when values and professional codes operate without opposition, the individual cannot safeguard against the possibility of disagreement. The decision-maker may even reconsider elements of the initial decision that might impact possible outcomes.

Stevenson (2007) proposes the idea of right versus right dilemmas. Decisions, whether or they are made individually or collectively, are still attempts to determine the right or best course of action. Even this can result in an undesired outcome. This is articulated by Paul, French, and Cranston-Gingras (2001, p. 4) who wrote, “It is very common to imagine ethics as a kind of moral calculus for solving ethical dilemmas. In the real world, however, life is complex, ambiguous, and often tragic...ethics is not about being right as much as it is about being responsible.” The goal of educational decisions is to protect and uphold the best interest of the child. To consider what is in the best interest

of the child, while negotiating these external pressures, requires a framework to guide the special education leader through the complex decision-making process.

The next construct that lies directly under moral agency is the ethical framework from which special education leaders operate as moral agents. It is this framework that ideally informs the case manager when he or she is faced with an ethical dilemma. The construct is the multiple paradigm ethical framework developed by Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005). They developed a framework for “ethical reasoning in educational leadership to guide the decision-making of principals as they confront unfamiliar and complex dilemmas in their schools” (p. 182).

When attempting to understand and apply the multiple paradigm framework, it is important to note that each of the elements that make up the multiple paradigm framework is a basis from which educational leaders are guided. It is that lens through which they view its application. According to Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005), each of the ethics; justice, critique, care, and profession, has significant historical influences. Regarding the ethic of justice, the authors note the importance of Strike, Haller and Soltis (1998), Starrat (1994), Kohlberg (1981), Beauchamp and Childress (1984), Sergiovanni (1992), and others. The ethic of critique stemmed from the critical theorists such as Bourdieu (1977), Lareau (1987), as well as critical pedagogy theorists Giroux (1991) and Welsh (1991). Parker and Shapiro (1993) and Capper (1993) drew parallels between these critical theories and educational leadership. Gilligan (1982) and Noddings (1992) introduced the ethic of care, which was a significant departure from, but not mutually exclusive to, the previously mentioned ethical frameworks. Based on the work of Beck

(1994), Shapiro and Stefkovich noted that the ethic of care challenged education leaders “to move away from a top-down, hierarchical model for making moral and other decisions and, instead, turn to a leadership style that emphasizes relationships and connections” (p. 17).

The ethic of care requires that in addition to understanding that moral development occurs in stages, educational leaders must consider the concept of voice. Similar to Jorgensen (2006), who referred to the traditions of Kohlberg and Gilligan as not opposing values but rather parts of a symphony, even as a duet, Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005) claim that when these ethical paradigms are considered side by side, educational leaders are able to address ethical dilemmas in a more fully developed, informed, and responsive manner. However, they report that one key element was missing from the combination of the three. Existing previously as a subset of the ethic of justice, the ethic of the profession requires equal consideration along with care, critique, and justice. The ethic of the profession allows education leaders to understand how they form their own values and use professional ethical codes in order to do what in the best interest of the child.

The framework calls for an awareness and application of the ethic of justice, critique, care, and the profession. It is the ethic of the profession that is a focal point in this study. The authors further define the ethic of the profession as having three distinct yet complimentary components: personal values, professional codes, and doing what is in the best interest of the child. They do not insist that these components much exist in harmony with one another in order to make decisions that hold the child’s best interest as

the focal point. The components do not function like a chemical equation, requiring a specific amount of each in order to achieve an ideal or stable outcome. The framework allows the individual or group members to consider each aspect so that decisions are as well informed as possible.

Personal values are ones that are internalized in varying degrees, depending on the individual. These values are formed from many sources, including education, culture, family, and religion. Professional codes are those defined by professional communities in an effort to guide the educator as he or she makes decisions. Campbell (2004) claims that well thought out statements of ethical standards give educators the ability to voice and remain aware of the moral and ethical principles that guide them as they face ethically complex situations. Campbell warns that establishing a professional code of ethics is not a perfect blueprint for action, nor do they ensure that everyone who is aware of them will act ethically. Reybold (2008), focusing on ethical standards among higher education faculty members, made a similar statement, claiming “While standards for faculty ethics, such as those offered by the AAUP, are comprehensive in scope, their application to faculty practice is tenuous. As idealized standards, they call attention to areas of ethicality” (p. 281).

Being cautious about the effectiveness of professional codes of ethics is not a broad statement of their ineffectiveness, however. They exist as guides. Sergiovanni (1992, p. 12) claims that it is not the literal words of the code that are meant to guide, but it is the connection that they make with the “underlying ideals, the core ethical principles...that are meant to embody those principles.” Writing about organizations as

human systems, Faqua and Newman (2006) state that written codes and values are a means of staying focused on the goals and ideals of the organization. They add that they must be “formal, written, and should be reviewed regularly” (p. 210). However, they also caution that they are not a template for success, but function as guidelines.

Regardless of whether or not the case manager makes a decision alone or engages others in the discussion, a clear understanding of the term decision-making is important. For the purpose of this study, the term decision making is used interchangeably with ethical decision making. Decision making, according to Begley (1999), is simply the act of making choices. However, the process of making a decision is one that involves multiple levels of complexity involving human interaction. Complexity is caused by the presence of values and ethics, be they personal or driven by the professional community. Begley writes, “The complex area of values and ethics does not comprise a series of variables that can be mapped out on a managerial grid in order to deduce a ‘best way’ to resolve our dilemmas” (p. 159).

Several possibilities exist for the decision-maker. First, the decision-maker can disregard both personal values and professional codes. Again, if all decisions have some element of value-basis, disregarding all personal values is not a common occurrence. However, the possibility exists for both to be disregarded. Second, the decision-maker can activate personal values that either support or oppose professional codes. Third, the opposite can occur. Professional codes can oppose personal ones. Parts of either set can be used to inform the decision. Understanding how the decision-maker chooses to activate one instead of the other, or which aspects from each are activated and combined

to inform the decision is of value to the individual decision maker as sole agent and as a potential participant in a group decision-making experience. Faqua and Newman (2006) explored moral and ethical issues in human systems. The subsystems that they discuss as integral components are relatable to both the individual decision-maker as well as the group. These subsystems speak to the complexity of what is brought to the decision making experience. They describe them as being “highly overlapping, interactive, and permeable in practice” (p. 208).

Following this process, which can be instantaneous or lengthy, the case manager either finalizes the decision, or enters into a process of deciding with others. Gula (1989) refers to this process as communal discernment. If the case manager does not choose to collaborate, the decision is made and action is taken. If the case manager enters into a discussion with others, a dialogue begins for the purpose of deciding not what is a right or wrong course of action, but what is in the best interest of the child given all of the factors involved. Sergiovanni (1992; 1996) states that within the school community, educational leaders function as stewards. Ideally, they share purposes, values, beliefs, and commitments.

Another aspect of entering into a discussion with others deals more with a practical, perhaps safety element. As mentioned, some decisions do not typically present themselves as problematic. Others, however, have potentially significant consequences, ranging from inefficiency to initiating due process procedures when parents and other stake holders feel that harm has come to the child as a result of programmatic negligence. Due process decisions can result in significant monetary loss at the county level, which

then reduces the potential resources that are normally used for programs and instruction. In addition, public perception of how special education programs operate can be negatively impacted. Distrust and increased inefficiency can result, and ultimately, it is the student who stands to suffer as they are caught in a process that they do not fully understand.

Regardless of the motivation to enter into ethical deliberation with others, once the case manager involves other stake holders, he or she must then negotiate his or her thoughts and potential courses of action with them. The complexity of the decision-making process has the potential to increase, in that the individual is no longer the only decision-maker. Each participant in the discussion enters into it with his or her own set of values and professional codes.

However, a dynamic exists within a group dynamic that may not be present when the case manager decides alone. When acting alone, the individual makes decisions in a closed system. Although the individual brings a myriad of influences to the process of determining what is in the best interest of the child, the decision-maker is closed off from others and remains the sole referent. In a group, the individual operates in open system, whereby thoughts and potential courses of action are member-checked. Certainly, group decision making does not ensure a harmonious outcome in all instances, especially if the individuals are misinformed or if there is an unfair balance of power, potentially resulting in an unequal representation of voices. However, in a group setting, there is the potential for transparency to exist among stakeholders, there are multiple inputs, and the members

may adhere more closely to external guidelines that are recognized by the group, such as the presence of a professional code of ethics.

Katz and Kahn (1966) explained several key factors of the open system in organizations. One of the five components of an open system is the concept of feedback in and among organizational members. “The feedback principle has to do with information input, which is a special kind of energetic importation, a kind of signal to the system about environmental conditions and about the functioning of the system in relation to its environment (p. 4). This feedback principle allows the group to self-correct, change, and adapt. Feedback in the case of ethical deliberation allows for both personal values and professional ethics to be considered in a common forum. This does not ensure that it is harmonious, just that they are acknowledged in the group setting. This structure, according to Fuqua and Newman (2006), which has rules, norms, and expectations, guides the deliberation process. In addition to investigating the role that personal values and professional codes of ethics has on the decisions that case managers make when faced with ethical dilemmas, this study also examined how case managers report how their personal values and codes of ethics change when operating in a group setting. The scope of this study was not to gather data on how groups function when addressing ethical dilemmas, but on how the case manager’s articulation of values and codes possibly change within a group setting.

The conceptual framework presented explains the process that special education case managers enter into on a regular basis. The inputs into the model are numerous and complex. The following chapter will review the literature that informed this model. It examines the major concepts describing the process that special education case managers negotiate in order to resolve ethical dilemmas in the field. The key components of the

conceptual framework that will be discussed through the literature are moral agency, ethical leadership, and ethics and special education leadership.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Introduction

A review of literature was conducted to ground the study in current and relevant research. There are significant gaps in the literature with regard to ethics and special education leadership, especially for those in indirect leadership roles. Also lacking is an investigation into how special education case managers form and use their personal values and professional codes of ethics when faced with an ethical dilemma. Additionally, studies that discussed the need to investigate pre-service ethical training and continued discussion of ethical negotiation by special education leaders in the field are reviewed.

Literature Search Procedures

Initially, a key word search was conducted using the following concepts: ethics, special education, ethical leadership, ethical dilemma, moral agency, and codes of ethics. Multiple searches were conducted online using ERIC, PsycINFO, and Academic Search Complete (EBSCO) databases. Approximately 75 articles and documents were found. Initial reading of these yielded nearly 40 references that were relevant to this study. Additional sources were found by conducting ancestry searches using the initial pool of articles. Other sources were found through consultation with faculty, fellow doctoral candidates, and the researcher's committee members at George Mason University.

Moral Agency

The foundation of moral agency is formed by the values that guide educational leaders to act as moral agents. Educational leaders form and espouse values in their personal and professional lives. They exist and function in relation to others. Individuality finds its meaning, awareness, and value when considering the other. The I-thou relationship, as explained by Buber (1970), describes how people understand themselves in a social context. Individual's thoughts, words, and actions have the potential to impact those around them in significant ways. Actions and words hold inherent values that are transmitted to others. Values, according to Storey and Beeman (2009), are "beliefs about the desirability of some means or action. Once internalized, a value also becomes a standard for guiding one's actions and thoughts, for influencing the actions and thoughts of others, and for morally judging oneself and others (p. 762). These personal values, whether they can be clearly articulated or not, act as a platform for how education leaders relate to one another, share information, and make meaning of their interaction with other individuals and groups. The sources of and influences on value formation are many, but individuals use them as a conduit through which their thoughts and actions, and the thoughts and actions of others, must pass when making sense of life's experiences, and ultimately when making decisions in moments of uncertainty.

Along with families, education leaders have been tasked with ensuring the formal transmission of knowledge to our youth, and guiding them as they prepare for life. They hold positions of great responsibility as society seeks its continuation and progress

through educational organizations. Leonard (1999) claims that the main purpose of school is to teach students how to be productive members of society by exposing them to facts, skills, and values. Those in charge of the education process are the conduits through which facts, skills, and values pass. Sacks (1997, p. 173) describes the importance that those who lead and educate our children have by stating:

Civilization hangs suspended from generation to generation, by the gossamer strand of memory. If only one cohort of mothers and fathers fails to convey to its children what *it* has learned from its parents, then the great chain of learning and wisdom snaps. If the guardians of human knowledge stumble only one time, in their fall collapses the whole edifice of knowledge and understanding.

Pring (2001) described the process of educating young people as a moral practice. Educators have been “initiated into a social practice with its own principles and values...they embody a commitment to helping young people to learn those things which are judged to be worthwhile” (p. 105). Pring explains that what is worthwhile is often debated, but nevertheless, teachers and education leaders are tasked with the transmission of value-infused knowledge. They are also tasked with helping students to make sense of knowledge in a social context. They demonstrate to children how to relate to one another based on this information. The goal is to show students how to process and use value-rich information in order to help them to understand their experiences and to prepare them to assimilate the experiences of others as well.

Further describing the educator as a moral agent, Pring (2001) uses the term custodian. The knowledge that they pass along can be both at impersonal and personal

levels. The impersonal is comprised of “narratives within science or history or literature wherein ideas are preserved, developed, criticized within a public tradition” (p. 110). At the personal level, young people begin the process of self-discovery, and over time they grow to see themselves as part of society and to recognize themselves in relationship to others. Finally, Pring argues that young people have a capacity for having a moral seriousness. They have the potential to think reflectively on the value of what they are learning, and how it relates to making, developing, and sustaining relationships. Therefore, Pring claims that helping children to recognize, build, and nurture this moral awareness is one of the fundamental tasks given to educators and leaders.

Joseph and Efron (1993) conducted a mix-methods study involving 180 teachers who were employed in a public school system in a mid-western metropolitan area of the United States. The study attempted to determine how their personal values impacted the delivery of instruction and ways of interaction, how they dealt with value conflict, and to what extent teachers felt that they acted as moral agents, or value educators, in the classroom setting. The first phase involved a questionnaire comprised of 30 items. Of the five themes that emerged from the questionnaire, the strongest was that teachers view themselves as moral agents. The authors indicated that the results affirmed what Jackson (1986, p. 127) referred to as transformative teaching, in line with the idea that teachers and educational leaders act as moral agents:

Teachers working within the transformative tradition are actually trying to bring about changes in their students that make them better persons, not simply more knowledgeable or skillful, but better in the sense of being closer to what humans

are capable of becoming: more virtuous, fuller *participants in an evolving moral order* (emphasis mine).

The second phase involved interviews with 26 of the 180 teachers. The data revealed that while the teachers affirmed their role as a value educator, most indicated that this is lived out in more indirect ways, specifically as role models and facilitators rather than teachers who teach directly about values. Connecting to the previous discussion about moral agents as helping young people learn how to negotiate relationships, one teacher reported, “Yes, I teach values, but I don’t do it overtly. It is more the way you handle situations as they come up...by working things out, helping them overcome it, I teach values” (Joseph & Ephron, 1993, p. 212).

Finally, the data revealed the specific values that teachers attempt to transmit, in order of frequency as reported in the interviews. The values reported were respect for others, honesty, respect for oneself, responsibility, cooperation, respect/reverence for life, empathy, manners, loyalty, and persistence. None of the teachers interviewed taught these values as standalone subjects. They were all incorporated through modeling and as a part of the discussions that took place in the classroom. While it may appear that some academic subjects lend themselves more readily to discussions about ethics and values, the data did not reveal that core academic subject teachers, i.e. math, science, English, and social studies, felt any less able to function as moral agents based on their respective content areas.

Campbell (2004) conducted a qualitative study whose purpose was to investigate the “teacher’s role as moral agent and the orientation within the classroom to issues of

right and wrong as identified by teachers and the researchers” (p. 409). The study involved four researchers who interviewed a total of nine teachers, representing eight schools, ranging from public to private, elementary to secondary, and two parochial (Roman Catholic and Jewish). The primary method of data collection was through formal interviews, using open-ended protocols, and then using the coded interviews to develop emerging themes. While the study focused a great deal on the tensions that arise in the classroom setting based on teachers’ ethical standards and their interactions with students, a considerable amount of time was spent exploring the concept of teacher as moral agent. The study found a connection between “teachers’ awareness of their capacity and role as moral agents and the issue of teachers’ ethical knowledge” (p. 410).

Campbell (2004) did not set out to establish a profile or model of an ethical teacher, or to define moral agency. It was the process of how the moral agent functioned that became more evident. The themes that emerged from the data revealed several areas that the teachers spoke about in terms of their need to reflect on before, during, or after interacting with the students. She identified six areas of moral and ethical significance. They emerged as the teachers spoke of their own efficacy as moral agents, often discovered through difficult periods of self-reflection. Calling them broad but interwoven, she listed: kindness, gentleness and empathy; fostering self-responsibility; trust; fairness as equitable treatment; respect; and the spiritual journey (p. 415). How teachers teach this varies. The knowledge that they possess of these areas varies as well. The commonality found in this study is that teachers arrive with it, attempt at many levels to convey and teach it, and deliberate on it in relation to themselves and others on a daily

basis. These elements, then, make up, inform, and challenge the teachers' moral and ethical framework.

The findings in Campbell's study (2004) bear a striking similarity to discussions of ethics and moral agency that Howe (1986) discussed decades earlier. Unlike Campbell, Howe provided a conceptual basis for ethics instruction in teacher education. It is not surprising that the approach that he supported and his components of the morally educated compliment Campbell's conclusions. Howe claimed that ethics teaching ought to place critical reflection at its center. Campbell later found this to be the cornerstone for teachers and educational leaders in their role as moral agents. Wilson, et al. (1967) identified six components of the morally educated. They include appreciation for moral deliberation, empathy, interpersonal skills, knowledge, reasoning, and courage. Howe writes "Because of the nature of these components, ethics instruction should be undertaken as a largely rational activity, should be collaborative, should permit and encourage the expression of competing well-grounded viewpoints, and should use real life situations as grist for inquiry" (p. 5).

Campbell's (2004) areas of moral and ethical significance and Wilson's components of the morally educated are both found within the context of school-based interaction. The same process encouraging educators and leaders to act as moral agents *as teachers and leaders* assists them in learning how to be moral agents *as learners*. It is for this reason that great emphasis has been placed most recently on enhancing the educator's development, understanding, and application of ethical standards. The underlying message in the research previously discussed is that while content is

important, the values that function as the vehicle for its transmission are perhaps more important. Howe (1986) writes “Because teachers touch the lives of virtually everyone and unavoidably function as moral educators themselves, ethics teaching within teacher education would appear even more critical than in other areas” (p. 5). Nowhere is this more evident than within the field of ethical leadership.

Before turning to ethical leadership, it is important that a connection is made between the idea of moral agency and leadership. While many of the authors studied and wrote primarily about teachers as moral agents, the participants in this study function as both teacher and leader (in the role of case manager). The teacher-leader concept in this study does not refer to how the case manager interacts with the student within the classroom setting. The lack of a classroom as an environment for interaction does not diminish the role that the case manager plays as leader. Leadership, while indirect, refers to the role that they play in making decisions and guiding the complex process of special education service delivery with and on behalf of the student and the other stakeholders on the IEP team.

Hodgson (1994) examined morality in the context of leadership as a process of building relationships. He argued that moral leadership is less about hierarchical assumptions and more about a dynamic phenomenon based on interaction, values and other less rigid, inter-personal concepts. He identified three concepts that serve as the philosophical foundation when studying leadership as a moral activity. These include respect for basic human dignity, regard for human agency, and the recognition that

morality is a cultural institution. The moral leader within the field of education plays, in essence, the role of steward (Sergiovanni, 2000; Senge, 1990; Angus, 1989).

Ethical Leadership

Speaking directly about educators in leadership roles, Strike, Haller, and Soltis (1998, p. 6) wrote:

Human beings are moral agents. They are responsible for their choices, and they have a duty to make choices in a morally responsible way. Thus it is crucial that people be able to reflect ethically on their choices and their actions. This is especially important when individuals have power and influence over the lives of others. We can think of few areas where it is more important than in the administration of schools.

Begley (2001) explored literature on authentic school leadership practices as a vehicle for understanding how values and ethics impact administrative actions in schools. In language similar to what has been discussed previously, Begley claims that it is essential that school leaders understand how values are shaped and formed. There is a strong relationship between the leader's personal values and those of the group, organization, and society. A significant limitation in current leadership literature is that it has not assisted in understanding the nuances and relationships that function between the personal and the professional. In fact, Begley suggest, "often individual and professional values are ignored, assumed to be the same as, or fully subordinated to an organizational perspective" (p. 356).

Begley (2001) presents seven areas of administrative value formation and interaction with the self in the center. The layers emanating from the self include group, profession, organization, community, culture, and transcendental. The diagram articulates two key issues for the purpose of this study. First, it graphically demonstrates the interconnectedness and relational aspect between the individual's personal and professional codes, and external interactions and obligations. Secondly, it emphasizes administration "as something that involves multiple arenas, each with potentially competing or incompatible values" (p. 362). These competing or incompatible values set up, for the case manager, potential ethical dilemmas. This will be discussed in greater detail when addressing ethical leadership and special education.

Begley and Leithwood (1990) explored the role that values play on administrative decisions by interviewing 15 principals who were making strategic decisions about innovative uses of technology. The study attempted to challenge the idea that educational leaders function as value-free decision-makers. Results indicate that personal values were relied on more than previously thought when principals discussed making school improvement decisions. Additionally, results were consistent with a study by Leithwood and Stager (1989) who found that when administrators lacked information or when the dilemma was unique, they relied on their personal values to provide a foundation for decision-making. The present study explored similar issues among special education case managers.

Begley and Leithwood (1990) called for investigation into understanding how values inform administrative decisions, and in doing so, raised a powerful question about

the decision-making process. Without an understanding of how personal values impact decisions, how can school leaders become aware of and negotiate possible conflicts between their internal processes and the external environment? They suggested that additional research is necessary to determine “the role of values in the problem solving of school administrators in other areas of their work” (p. 350). Ethical leadership involves having a clear awareness of and the ability to articulate personal values and professional codes of ethics.

Haughey (2007) examined the dynamic between the instructor, learner, and the institution as a conceptual framework to advance the discussion of ethical relationships. The dynamic between them is complex and solutions are not adequately solved through “codified solutions and rigid rules of behavior” (p. 141). Haughey defines ethical leadership as “acting from the principles, beliefs, assumptions and values in the leader’s espoused system of ethics” (p. 141). He further claims that responsibility, authenticity, and presence form the foundation on which the educational leader acts. Responsibility, for Starratt (2004), means that the leader will act as a morally responsible agent. Authenticity in leadership terms occurs when the leader is aware of his or her “deepest held convictions, beliefs, and values,” and they remain a constant reference point when decisions are made (p. 144). Lastly, presence for leaders is making the authentic self available to others through language and physical presence.

The key component in this and other conceptual frameworks that address ethical leadership is understanding how the leader’s personal values and professional codes operate, and their ability to articulate them. This self-reflexive process, however, does not

cease with the leader being the sole reference point. Starratt (2004) explains that without recognizing the other, the individual has a limited capacity to learn who they are.

Learning about the self largely comes through reflecting on their place within relationships.

While it is beneficial to question how leaders define and explain their personal values and professional codes of ethics, it only provides a partial, theoretical understanding. When they are explained through moments of uncertainty, where dissonance exists between what is desired as an outcome and what is actually done, a richer, fuller awareness of the decision-making process becomes more evident. The ethical dilemma, then, serves as the vehicle for researchers to be able to explain how ethics function in a concrete, experienced-based manner. It can also expose the many gaps that exist in researchers' understanding of the decision-making process.

Cranston, Ehrich, and Kimber (2003) developed a model for understanding the process of how ethical dilemmas develop from the moment of critical incident to the implications that the decision has on the individual, organization, and community. The decision-maker is situated in a variety of contexts, such as professional demands, public interest, organizational culture, etc. The individual, responding to the critical incident, then reacts with his or her own internal values, beliefs, and attributes. Once the critical incident passes through the individual's filter, possible choices of action (including non-action) set up the ethical dilemma. This is then followed by a decision to ignore or act. Finally, the decision then resonates within the individual and the various member of the community in which the critical incident took place. It is their third component that the

present study attempted to illuminate. During this component, “The individual is in no way neutral but brings to the dilemma his/her own values, beliefs, ethical orientations and personal attributes that have been shaped over time by a variety of sources...” (p. 142).

Cranston, et al. (2003) claim that dilemmas “can be described as a circumstance that requires a choice between competing sets of principles in a given, usually undesirable or perplexing, situation” (p. 137). However, the key component in explaining their definition is the recognition that the dilemma itself is situated in a social context. They acknowledge that “ethics is about relationships-whether relationships with people, relationships with animals and/or relationships with the environment” (p. 137). Because of the complexity and grand nature of terms such as social context, it is relatively easy to stop with a theoretical understanding of how values and codes of ethics function in the decision-making process. However, Cranston, et al., point out “there is no theorized framework available for describing and mapping ethical dilemmas in schools,” (p. 138) it is essential that conceptual models are developed through research. The model developed in this study reflects elements that are specific to special education leaders, as well as places the ethic of the profession (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2005) at the center of the decision-making process, where personal values and professional codes of ethics interact to determine what is in the “best interest of the child.”

Building on the work of Cranston et al. (2003), Storey and Beeman (2009) interviewed twenty two high school leaders who were enrolled in an education leadership program at the time of the study. They conducted a qualitative study to explore how aware high school leaders were of their own values that informed their decision-making,

what elements the leaders reported that influenced their values, and whether the leaders could identify the elements that leveraged their decisions when dealing with ethical dilemmas. One of the most significant themes that emerged from the data was that the participants stressed the importance of moral and ethical behavior in decision-making. They viewed themselves as having a moral responsibility when addressing ethical dilemmas. The most commonly reported sources of the participants' moral development were faith, family, and early education. Only a few participants reported that their academic training or knowledge and application of a professional code of ethics were significantly influential. However, 80% claimed that "morals and ethics could be taught, although there was less certainty over the method of delivery" (p. 774).

The implication is that while participants felt that morals and ethics could be transmitted through instruction in an academic setting, most reported that their academic training was not influential. This may call into question the effectiveness that their particular leadership program had and will continue to have on their ability to negotiate ethical dilemmas. This feedback is crucial for program evaluators and directors of leadership programs in order to make instruction more meaningful to all current and future leaders in a school setting.

The participants also claimed that it was their personal experiences rather than their professional ones that established the foundation of their values. Church and family were the most significant influences reported. Although they reported a reliance on personal experiences in forming their values, they did report that it was often difficult to separate the personal from the professional. Storey and Beeman (2009) reported that

despite the fact that most participants did not rely on professional codes of ethics, or professional training, to form their values, “all participants believed that ethics and morality should be integral to any educational administrator preparation course” (p. 775). The desire among the participants to have access to a formal process to guide their decision making emerged from the interviews. The researchers suggested this as an area of future consideration.

Lastly, Storey and Beeman (2009) reported several leveraging elements that impacted the participant’s decision-making. Fifteen percent indicated that external pressures such as legal issues, compliance, and state and school regulations most significantly impacted decisions, while eighty-five percent reported personal values and ethical codes. A surprising filter through which many claimed the influence of their decisions passed was their faith and spirituality. The study gave participants an opportunity to use a guided matrix to reflect on their personal values and professional codes of ethics. It encouraged researchers to further explore the role of professional codes of ethics and the impact of faith on decision-making. However, the low number of participants and the fact that the participants attended a private, southern, Ivy League university limits the researcher’s ability to generalize the data collected.

Frick and Faircloth (2007) attempted to apply the ethic of the profession to explore how administrators perceived the concept of the best interest of the student. The qualitative study involved interviewing eleven school principals from southeastern Pennsylvania. They were given an ethical dilemma vignette, answered a series of pre-figured and open-ended follow up questions, and then were interviewed individually. Not

surprisingly, results showed that the administrators clearly expressed anxiety at frequently being caught between the unique actions required by individual students and circumstances and the formulaic procedures or regulations. The most commonly reported reason for this angst was special education policies and issues. One participant noted that when dealing with special education students as opposed to regular education students, “You look at them as separate tracks. Clearly the moral dilemma is there. How can I treat two people who do the same thing totally differently and still acquire some integrity of fairness? The answer is you can’t. So you do the best you can” (p. 27).

Another participant commented on how trying to balance what is in the best interest of the child and what is in the best interest of the group is almost impossible due to the external demands placed on the educational leader. He distinguished between what was right, legal, and kind. Speaking about conflicts in different value perspectives, he claimed:

Being all things to all people...my own personal positions are inconsequential for the most part, unless it’s a major philosophical issue...we cannot act on what we know to be true, we have to act on what the public perceives to be acceptable, so that is a dilemma sometimes (Frick & Faircloth, 2007, p. 27).

The authors reported that the participants equated the idea of the best interest of the student with being and acting fair. The meaning of fairness, however, is constantly being called into question as educational leaders attempt to negotiate “education policy, professional ethics, and personal morality” (p. 27).

Howe and Miramontes (1992) discussed the idea of the ethic of compromise. The question that arises from this perspective is “What, all things considered, ought to be done in a given situation?” (p. 98). They define moral compromise as not changing one’s mind, but “splitting the difference between one’s own viewpoint and opposing viewpoints, while at the same time preserving one’s integrity by remaining committed to one’s original beliefs and principles” (p. 99). When this is not done, this turbulence creates uncertainty, and forces the educational leader to pause in order to weight what he or she will adhere to, let go of, or take to others in order to resolve the conflict.

Howe and Miramontes (1992) question whether leaders are prepared to deal with ethical dilemmas. They state that education leadership programs require attention, along with professional development programs. The landscape that exists for school leaders will continue to require that they deepen their awareness of how they use personal values and professional codes of ethics when deciding what is in the best interest of a child. Lastly, Frick and Faircloth (2007) recommend that “more targeted investigations into special education leadership be conducted which focus on the moral and ethical distinctions between broad-reaching, policy-driven class protections and the more personal administrator-student relationship” (p. 29).

Stefkovich and Begley (2007) conducted a survey of the literature in order to expand understanding of the best interest of the student concept from the perspective of the educational leader. The concept is well documented in legal areas, but in the field of education, it remains elusive, poorly defined, and used by many, without understanding its meaning. In reviewing 71 articles that used the term, Stefkovich and Begley reported

that it was used to describe over 21 topic areas and was used in multiple areas of administrative decision-making (p. 214). For the purpose of this study, it is important to understand how the concept functions in education leadership as it remains a crucial component of the ethic of the profession in Shapiro and Stefkovich's multiple paradigm model (2005).

According to Stefkovich and Begley (2007), negotiating the influence of personal values and professional codes of ethics to arrive at a decision with the best interest of the child as its focal point is not an easy process. "It requires a great deal of self-reflection, open-mindedness, and an understanding that making ethically sound decisions profoundly influences others' lives" (p. 215). Their expanded conceptualization of the best interest of the student is made of three elements: rights, responsibility, and respect. What is clear from their review of the literature at the time is that the language surrounding the topic is murky and used in a non-systematic way by educational leaders. Being ethical, being able to determine what is in the best interest of the child, etc., are places of understanding that come from careful reflection, training, and dialogue with others.

The concepts are theoretically sound, but in the moment of conflict, theoretical frameworks alone are not enough to support the demands that are placed on the decision-maker without an awareness of practical application and understanding. Educational leaders who do not engage in this reflexive, language-developing process may continue to be at the mercy of ambiguous terms and concepts, and may have a diminished awareness of how their values and professional codes interact in moments of decision-

making. In addition, this process must be shared within the professional community where the leader practices. Developing a shared language and understanding of ethical norms among special education leaders is important if dilemmas are to be properly addressed. Campbell (2001) wrote “In order to develop ethical norms in ways that pervade all aspects of policy making and practice, professional communities of educators, within the context of their own schools, must come to terms with difficult questions and the need to communicate with each other openly” (p. 408). Nowhere is this more important than in the field of special education leadership.

Ethics and Special Education Leadership

Paul, French, and Cranston-Gingras (2001, p.1) wrote “Special education is under attack from outside the profession and is experiencing considerable dissention from inside as well” (p. 1). They speak about ethical issues that lurk boldly in front of special educators as well as subtly behind them. In broad terms, these ethical dilemmas are present in areas such as interventions, policies, research, and how teachers are prepared for service. The potential host of decisions that special education leaders must address reflect “*a priori* considerations saturated with values and meaning” (p. 1).

One deficit that the field of special education exhibits is that the practice of ethical deliberation lacks continuity between what is taught and what can be negotiated by the special education leader in the school-based setting. Comparing the field to professions such as business and medicine, special education training has “relied too much on ethical issues emerging randomly in class discussions and internships” (Paul, French & Cranston-Gingras, p. 1). The authors claim that the job that is asked of special education

leaders is firmly planted in moral and political complexity. They cite three distinct ways that society views special education. These views require different responses, and therefore set the stage for a pervasive complexity and confusion that challenge all decisions that must be made on a daily basis in every school across America. The first is that it is a “valued set of programs with an empirically validated knowledge base for practice, which meets unmet needs of children who otherwise would be unserved in the general education system” (p. 2). Second, special education once served a purpose but “still continues to separate students from their age peers and the general education curriculum” (p. 2). Third, some feel that the system is biased toward minorities, which has increased focus on exploring the over identification of certain races in special education sub groups.

The implications are vast when considering the differences in each of these critical viewpoints. The laws, policies, and regulations that are handed down might be interpreted in a host of ways. At the programmatic/instructional level, these standpoints might present the educational leader with a vast array of potential courses of action where ethics are concerned. For example, following the author’s concern over complexity as a barrier in acting ethically, a special education leader might not question why a program for students with an Intellectual Disability might have a high percentage of black males. Value-based decisions might be made simply on what is necessary in order to support them socially and instructionally. On the other hand, if the leader operates from the perspective that certain racial groups are typically over-identified, he or she might make decisions in an effort to address this issue. Neither perspective is right or wrong, but they

would certainly bring about different courses of action. Fasching (1997, p. 99) writes, “It is very common to imagine ethics as a kind of moral calculus for solving ethical dilemmas. In the real world, however, life is complex, ambiguous, and often tragic...ethics is not about being right as much as it is about being responsible.”

The authors conclude by addressing ways of improving responsibility, and how the angst that special education leaders feel can be alleviated. Most importantly is a renewal in programs that prepare special educators for the field. Paul, French, and Cranston-Gingras (2001) write, “The absence of training and research in ethics has been a regrettable omission” (p. 14). They insist that efforts need to be made and foundations established that would help special education leaders prepare for the ethical challenges that will continue to be a part of the educational landscape. The moral ambiguity that exists is one of the main challenges facing special education leaders today. What is lacking in special education is not intellectual capital. What is lacking is a “shared vision of leadership that connects us to the common moral purpose on improving the lives of children with disabilities and their families” (p. 15).

Helton and Ray (2005) conducted a qualitative study that surveyed how school psychologists and special education teachers resist administrative pressures to practice unethically. Administrative demands are but one of the many pressures that special education case managers must negotiate when making decisions. While the purpose of their study was to identify strategies that the participants reported they would use, the findings relate to the present study in several ways.

First, in order for special educators (related professionals, teachers, and leaders) to address ethical dilemmas, regardless of the source, several elements must be present. These include “the ability to recognize situations posing ethical dilemmas, the motivation to honor ethical obligations, and the skills to do so” (Helton & Ray, 2005, p. 62). These abilities are developed at the cognitive level through a working knowledge of special education law and ethics, clearly understanding the organizational and social structures and nuances where they practice, and a sound awareness of interpersonal relations. While their data suggest that these concepts potentially assist special education leaders when facing ethical dilemmas, the question of how these things are taught and developed requires careful consideration.

Helton and Ray (2005) suggest three ways that these skills can be developed. First, the individual must “seek out colleagues who embody these characteristics and strive both to learn and to gain inspiration and courage from them. (p. 63). Secondly, pre- and in-service education must provide a structured way for special education teachers and leaders to learn and deepen their awareness of ethics and ways to resolve conflicts. Lastly, they propose that additional research is necessary in order to understand the complex process of understanding ethical dilemmas and how practitioners function when trying to negotiate them. Specifically, they suggest researching the question “How do personal values interact with the requirements of ethical codes as practitioners reason and make choices about ethical dilemmas” as an area of inquiry (p. 64). In order to deepen the awareness of and promote ethical practice, the present study investigated this question, specifically how personal values relate to professional codes of ethics.

While ethical codes are one possible source that makes up an individual's professional code, it is necessary to approach the question from a more fundamental perspective first. That is, how do decision-makers define personal values and profession codes of ethics? What are their sources, and how do they define and articulate the concept of an ethical dilemma? Developing a basic language of ethics in practice is a key developmental step. March (1994) wrote, "Language is also used to create new meanings out of the old, to make metaphorical leaps, to discover what person might understand (p. 211).

Few studies have investigated how special education leaders articulate personal values and professional codes of ethics. Using a focus group methodology, Bon and Bigbee (2011) researched how special education case managers explain the formation of their personal values, and how these values interact with professional codes of ethics when facing ethical dilemmas. Participants also were asked to define, formally or experientially, the term ethical dilemma, and how prepared they were to address them in the field.

Bon and Bigbee (2011) used a semi-structured interview protocol to engage in conversations with 15 participants, organized into four focus group sessions. Regarding preparedness, the majority of the participants reported that they did not receive formal training prior in ethics before entering the field. Most instruction on ethics was woven into various topics and discussions, which interestingly surfaced when addressing laws and compliance. Not all of the participants reported that this had a negative impact on their ability to optimally perform in the field, but several did state that it made the

transition difficult. One participant claimed, “I was so naïve...unsure of the line between what was right and wrong...I knew I was stepping over the line [with her first ethical dilemma], but I had no other tool to deal with it” (p. 338).

One theme that emerged from the interviews was the confusion experienced between following a legal directive versus what was ethical. As a result, case managers reported that they gravitated toward acting in accordance with professional ethical standards rather than personal values in order to protect themselves. One participant boldly stated that she followed professional codes and standards in order to keep her job. Participants clearly expressed that tension between their personal values and professional codes of ethics is commonly experienced, especially within a group setting (Bon & Bigbee, 2011, p. 339).

Regarding the reported sources of personal codes of ethics, family was the most influential. Other influences were faith, cultural influences, societal events, and previous employment experiences (Bon & Bigbee, 2011). However, most participants clearly stated that regardless of how influential these sources were on their personal value formation, the professional emerged as the strongest factor when negotiating ethical dilemmas. In fact, one participant alarmingly reported “Your personal side is slowly being slowly squeezed out...” (p. 340). Another stated “Professional ethics kind of squeeze the moral ones down...” (p. 340).

The specific language used by the participants to define ethical dilemma supports the finding by Bon and Bigbee (2011) that personal values were often diminished by professional codes. The situation during which this commonly occurred was when

participants considered the primacy that special education compliance and laws have over personal values. “References to legal compliance came up most frequently when the participants were explaining how personal and professional codes of ethics influenced their decisions” (p. 343).

Attempting to differentiate language usage among special education teachers and leaders, Fiedler and Van Haren (2008) separate the two in terms of their awareness and use of a specific professional code. They conducted a quantitative study surveying 99 special education administrators and 525 special education teachers. The purpose was to determine the extent to which the two respondent groups possess similar or different levels of knowledge and application of the Council for Exceptional Children’s (CEC) code of ethics. They write, “Professional ethics involve core values and beliefs designed to provide guidance to the behavior of a group of professionals in relation to their interactions with clients, consumers, and colleagues” (p. 1). They continue to claim that codes of ethics, such as the one established by the CEC, are written in response to “numerous ethical dilemmas that arise in the field of special education on a routine basis” (p. 2). The CEC developed a code of ethics to guide all professionals who work with special needs students. The code is comprised of eight principles. While the code only mentions the concept of ethical, or rather unethical, behavior once, the entire code is based on an assumed set of core values that everyone must follow.

The establishment of a professional code of ethics assumes several key factors. First, enough unethical decisions have been made that advocates felt that a firm guide needed to be established to assist those in the profession. Second, individuals cannot be

left alone to develop their own in isolation from one another. Individual codes of ethics, either formal or informal, seem to leave the community of special educators lacking a uniform guide for acting ethically. The problem, according to the authors, is that there is a “paucity of research on special education professional’s knowledge levels and application of special education ethical codes of conduct, professional standards, and ethical principles” (p. 3).

Fiedler and Van Haren (2008) found several significant differences in how teachers and administrators act according to different principles within the CEC’s code of ethics. A key finding relevant to the present study is that 46% of administrators and teachers claimed minimal or no knowledge of the code. The authors proposed that an obvious reason for this lies in poor pre-service or administrative preparation programs. In addition, special education leadership programs often marginalize ethics by omitting ethical reasoning and practice from the curriculum.

One example given by the authors is the shared belief that educators should avoid conflicts, and should remain neutral when responding to policies and regulations. Collectively, these issues further demonstrate a growing research-based need to improve training, both pre-and in-service, add clarity at the individual level about ethics and values, and develop an awareness of the communal nature of how ethics are formed and inform decisions. “It is imperative that special education professionals develop expertise and comfort in engaging in systematic ethical decision making...” (p. 13).

Berkeley and Ludlow (2008) use the experience of learning Arabic to explain the importance of understanding the language of ethics for special education teachers and

leaders. Being fluent in Arabic, even for the highly educated, is a difficult process. It is infused with cultural and religious influences, which go far beyond the literal words. There is meaning in lived context. To appreciate and connect with the Arabic language, the speaker must develop an awareness of the values that are a part of the individual and collective experience. They write:

To us, ethics, given the ideals and the vast range of values we cherish and try to understand and use in our daily lives, should be a part of a lifelong self-examination and re-examination or reflection, or a part of a regular effort of continuing conversation and training in our professional lives (p. 8).

The authors recommend that special education leaders and communities consider a series of questions to better understand this process. At the individual and group level, they involve asking what values are important as special educators, are they similar or different than personal ones, how are competing interests balanced, what are the important ethical dimensions of policy and practice, what process should be used to identify and resolve ethical dilemmas, how can professionals be encouraged to deepen their understanding of ethical reasoning and decision-making, and how do professionals support one another while doing so? (p. 8).

These are questions that special education scholars are encouraged to research. Like all questions involving careful consideration and examination, researchers must build a sound structure on which theoretical frameworks and research-based practices rest. Crockett (2007) claims that the landscape of special education is changing. While change occurs, how special education leaders deal with ethical dilemmas must not be

saddled to the fickle nature of the demands placed on the special education leader. How this is done, according to Sergiovanni (1992) is by “moving the moral dimension in leadership away from the periphery and right to the center of inquiry, discussion, and practice” (p. 3).

Chapter 3: Methods

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate how personal values and professional codes of ethics are formed, and how they impact the decision making process of special education case managers as they face ethical dilemmas. Additionally, the study investigated their level of preparedness to handle ethical dilemmas in the field, as well as the importance of discussing ethics and ethical dilemmas within a communal context. Research on how special education leaders, specifically case managers, negotiate ethical dilemmas in the field of practice has not received significant attention. Previous studies have indicated that in order to assist special education leaders to prepare for addressing ethical concerns, a language of how ethics and ethical dilemmas are discussed warrants investigation. The following five research questions emerged from the researcher's experience as a special education leader, content and discussions in the classroom setting, as well as from a thorough exploration of the literature around moral agency, ethical leadership, and special education:

RQ1. How prepared are case managers to deal with ethical dilemmas in the field of special education?

RQ2. When faced with ethical dilemmas, do special education case managers rely more heavily on personal values or professional codes of ethics to determine which course of action is in the best interest of the child?

RQ3. What do case managers claim are the significant causes of ethical dilemmas?

RQ4. In a group setting, do case managers report if personal or professional codes of ethics conflict? If so, which set of codes tends to dominate the decision-making process for the case manager?

RQ5. How do case managers define the term *ethical dilemma*?

Design

In order to expose current opinions and beliefs of special education case managers, this study used a large-scale, cross-sectional survey design. According to Ornstein (1998), survey research contains three major elements. These include collecting responses through a standardized survey instrument, participants are randomly sampled from the target population, and the data are statistically analyzed in a manner that answers the research questions being asked. Of the many benefits from conducting large-scale survey research, Ornstein lists their ability to generalize about a specific population as the most significant.

Creswell (2005) defines a survey as a tool that researchers use to gather attitudes, opinions, behaviors, or characteristics of the population. Creswell continues to note that there are several benefits of a research design using surveys as a method of data collection. These benefits include that they are relatively easy to distribute, they can

reach a large number of participants quickly, the cost is significantly lower than other survey methods, and most importantly, the cross-sectional design captures attitudes, beliefs, and practices without latency (p. 354). Additionally, Frippiat and Marquis (2010) report that the proliferation of Internet use by educational professionals not only allows researchers to sample a larger population more quickly, but the data is accessible as soon as the participant takes the survey (p. 288). Researchers no longer need to rely on slower processes of returning completed surveys via mail. Additionally, when using open-ended questions as a format for gathering longer, more descriptive responses via a web-based protocol, Dillman, et al. (2009) report that open-ended responses are significantly better when compared to open-ended responses generated from the traditional pen-and-paper surveys. Web-based responses are typically longer, and are more detailed.

Web-based surveys have come under scrutiny over the past five years. Frippiat and Marquis (2010) report that at the close of 2009, The WebSM Website provided a list of over 3,500 references to web-based survey research. Problems with web-based survey research have included issues over access, low response-rates, and ambiguous findings. Researchers who counter these claims state that these issues, while potentially problematic, are reducible by carefully designing the survey, understanding the population, and making the research relevant (Muijs, 2004; Creswell, 2005).

Another criticism, due to the fact that web-based surveys are still in their relative infancy as compared to other survey methods (i.e., mail, face to face, phone, etc.), is that the data are not as reliable. The research community is not able to place significant levels of trust in the data that is collected. Therefore, findings are not able to be

generalized with as much confidence as if the data were gathered by more traditional survey methods.

However, surveys have been used and studied significantly over the past ten years. Cooper (2000) claimed that Internet-based surveys were a new territory that had yet to be fully explored. Their potential was seen as significant, as more and more professional communities were improving their technology and increasing access the Internet. Over the past ten years, most if not all school districts rely on web-based methods of communication to disseminate information to faculty and staff members. E-mails, for instance, are considered appropriate ways to document formal conversations among IEP team members. Caution should be noted, however, that increased access does not equate to more reliable tools and more valid data sets. Steps must be taken to address validity. However, the impact and use of web-based surveys has been documented and studied extensively. Witte (2009) stated, “Web-based survey research has reached a level of maturity such that it can be considered an essential part of the sociological tool kit” (p. 287).

Setting and Participants

The researcher conducted a large-scale, cross-sectional survey that was sent to participants throughout the United States of America. The purposeful sampling was homogeneous, as the researcher sought participants who shared key characteristics. The web-based survey was distributed by Market Data Retrieval (MDR). Ten thousand participants were randomly sampled from MDR’s education database, collected from state and federal educational agencies. Creswell (2005) states that the sample size must

be large enough for the researcher to make generalizations about the larger population. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, there were approximately 473,000 licensed special educators in the United States of America in 2008 (<http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos070.htm>).

For the purpose of this study, a confidence interval of 95% was used, along with a 3% margin of error. The significance level for the calculation table used was set at an $\alpha = .05$ (Lipsey, 1990, p. 137). An additional factor that the researcher considered prior to establishing the sample size was cost and access to participant trends. Based on these factors, the sample size was set at 10,000 participants.

MDR generated a list of randomly sampled participants based on several key characteristics. The characteristics for participation included: participants must be licensed to teach special education, must hold a minimum of a Bachelor's degree, and must teach between the Kindergarten and the twelfth grade levels. Support personnel, i.e. school psychologists, social workers, etc., were not included in the search process as previous studies have given significant attention to their role within the school system.

Also, as MDR does not maintain data regarding licensed teachers who also function as case managers, the component of case manager was not a search criterion. Participants were asked in the survey if they served as a case manager in addition to being a licensed special education teacher. MDR provided the researcher with a full participant analysis that described specific information about the distribution of the survey. Survey analyses included data on daily access of surveys distributed, the number

of participants who accessed the survey by state, as well as other distribution-based data. Descriptive data on the participants will be reported in the findings.

Data Collection Procedures

Once approval was granted by the Human Subject Review Board at George Mason University to proceed with data collection, the researcher determined a series of deployment dates with Market Data Retrieval (MDR staff. The researcher established two deployment dates: March 22, 2011 and April 5, 2011. The web-based survey was closed on April 29, 2011. The second deployment was identical to the first, serving as a reminder for those participants who had not accessed the survey after the first deployment. The second deployment was also sent to the same sample of participants, thereby attempting to increase the response rate.

Participants were sent an introductory e-mail by MDR on both deployment dates. The e-mail contained a hyperlink to the survey at www.ssg.gmu.edu. Prior to launch, MDR sent the researcher a test e-mail to confirm that the link was open and the survey was able to be accessed. MDR sent the e-mail in both HTML and plain text formats in order to make it more accessible in various e-mail platforms.

Once the participant clicked on the survey link, they were asked to read the informed consent letter (see Appendix B). If the participant agreed to participate, they were asked to click on an acceptance box and proceed with the survey. Several participants did not select that they gave consent, but completed the survey regardless. Their data were not used during analysis as consent could not be verified. The survey

questions required that the participant either click on a response(s) in a field below the question, or write a brief answer to an open-ended prompt.

On completion, the participants were asked to click a submission button to terminate their session. Additionally, the deployment e-mails contained the researcher's contact information. The researcher was contacted by participants for clarification purposes. Each participant was given an opportunity to opt out in the e-mail if they did not wish to participate or be contacted again. Each participant who contacted the researcher received a detailed answer to the question or concern raised. Many of the participants sought clarification about how their e-mail address was accessed. Others provided information about their own research interests and sought additional resources to investigate the topic more deeply. Each correspondence was archived in a secure folder on the researcher's laptop.

The survey was open to participants for approximately 38 calendar days. Access was closed at this time after the researcher analyzed the participant's access data through the data analysis tracking tool provided by MDR. By the end of April, the click on rate by participants had diminished significantly. Both deployments experienced initial spikes in click on rates, and smaller ones within the first week of deployment. The survey was closed in order to export the data for analysis.

After the survey was closed, the researcher exported the data from SSG to Microsoft Excel, and then to SPSS version 18.0. SSG is a survey tool available for usage by students at George Mason University (www.survey.ssg.gmu.edu). In order to take the survey, participants followed a link to SSG through the e-mail. Once submitted, each

completed survey was stored by SSG. The researcher exported the data from SSG into Microsoft Excel, in order to format the data for export to SPSS. The data were then exported to SPSS for the data analysis.

Additionally, all data from the surveys were stored online and were protected by a password that was known only by the researcher. MDR did not release the e-mail addresses or names of the participants to the researcher or anyone affiliated with the research process. The researcher used his laptop as a means of accessing and analyzing the data, which was also password protected. Backup copies of all data sets were kept on an external drive, which was kept in a secure location known only by the researcher.

Field Test

In 2009, the researcher designed a web-based survey that was sent out to special education staff members in a large public school district in the southeastern area of the United States of America. Permission was obtained from both HSRB at George Mason University, the Office of Special Education, and the Office of Research from the school district in which the survey was deployed. The survey was deployed via e-mail and contained a similar link for those participants willing to take the survey. The survey was open from November 13, 2009 to December 21, 2009. Approximately 111 participants completed the survey. Feedback was obtained from many of the participants via e-mail. Comments were reviewed by the researcher and members of the committee, and edits were made to the survey protocol. The importance of the field test will be discussed below when addressing validity.

Data Collection Instrument

The current survey protocol was created using the SSG website. Prior to deployment, the survey went through a field test process, was reviewed by the researcher's committee, approved by HSRB, and underwent test runs by MDR to ensure that the survey was accessible. In addition, multiple e-mail platforms were used to access the survey to ensure that the link was viable.

The survey was comprised of 27 questions that collected descriptive data (age, gender, years of experience, areas of licensure, level of education, etc.), opinions on pre-service ethics training, strength of reliance on personal and professional codes, current knowledge about the presence of and reliance on ethical codes, and data regarding individual or collaborative aspects of the decision making process. Many of the survey questions used a Likert-type scale to allow the participants the opportunity to report the strength of their responses. Other questions required a Yes or No response, while several allowed participants to select one or more responses from a list of options, i.e. "At what grade level(s) do you teach?" Finally, several questions asked the participants to write a short response to an open-ended question, such as "Define ethical dilemma."

Validity

According to Muijs (2004), the concept of validity asks if the researcher is in fact measuring what he or she wants to measure. Muijs claims that "Validity is probably the most important aspect of the design of any measurement instrument in educational research" (p. 66). Creswell (2005) and Muijs (2004) discuss key reasons why data may not be valid. They include: a poorly designed study; participant fatigue, stress, and

confusion regarding the questions; poor question construction; an inability to use the scores to make useful predictions or generalizations; and data that do not impact the field.

Fowler (2009) adds that validity can be improved by addressing several key elements while designing and testing the survey instrument. According to Fowler, it is essential that the participants have a knowledge base that allows them to fully understand the questions being asked about a particular topic. Participants in this study were selected based on their status as a licensed special educator.

Second, Fowler raises the question of a survey's social desirability. Not only must the survey be relevant and interesting to the participants, it must also be designed in a way that encourages participants to be honest in their response. The topic of ethical dilemmas and special education is not generally considered to be highly controversial, but it does expose the participants' thoughts and feelings that are experiential-based. Fowler stresses that the accuracy of the response is most important. When participants have to make judgment calls about the survey questions, validity is compromised.

Validity threats from the instrument required careful consideration. In order to ensure that the survey protocol was sound, the survey was field tested. Feedback was sought from a small sample of participants within a public school system in the southeast United States. Many of the participants provided feedback through follow up e-mails sent to the researcher. The survey underwent a series of edits and changes where necessary.

In addition, Bon and Bigbee (2011) conducted a focus group study in order to explore case manager's attitudes regarding personal values, professional codes, ethical dilemmas, as well as how they responded when their personal values were not aligned

with those of their fellow IEP team members. While the present study did not use the focus group as a means of collecting data, many of the conversations that were recorded and later coded allowed the researcher to reflect on and develop a stronger survey protocol. The themes that emerged helped the researcher to shape the current protocol.

The study conducted by Bon and Bigbee (2011), along with the field test, ensured that the current survey protocol was able to effectively probe for participant's attitudes and opinions with a higher degree of validity. Content validity was ensured through this process by exploring how other scholars in the field have captured opinions on this topic and by having gone through a series of reviews by the researcher's committee members.

In order to keep participant stress and fatigue as low as possible, the survey protocol was designed to be completed in approximately 10-15 minutes. McMahon, et al. (2003) compared delivery methods when a survey was sent to physicians. E-mail-based surveys were completed faster, had a higher percentage of completed questions, and participants who completed the e-mail based survey demonstrated a higher degree of accuracy. Data showed that the participants followed written directions better than participants who took the survey by fax and regular mail.

Hoonaker and Carayon (2009) report that web-based surveys show a better response quality (accuracy), respondents were more likely to provide additional information and participants were more likely to answer open-ended questions. The current study contained several open-ended questions, such as asking the participants to define ethical dilemma. As the participants were all accessible through e-mail, the web-

based survey ensured validity by providing the participants with an efficient, explicit, and technologically familiar method for completing the survey.

Reliability

Cronbach's alpha was used to determine the internal validity of the total survey items using scaled responses, as well as the four subscales. Demographic items were not included. According to Creswell (2005), the use of Cronbach's alpha is appropriate for measuring internal consistency reliability as the survey was administered once, there was only one version of the survey distributed, and only completed surveys were used to analyze the data. The total measure showed an internal consistency value of .356 ($n = 10$ items). While this alpha is low, the survey contained ten questions across the four subscales that measured attitudes or opinions. All other questions gathered descriptive data, such as the highest completed level of education.

Response Rate

Of the 10,000 randomly sampled participants from across the United States, approximately 730 participants completed the survey. The researcher took appropriate measures to ensure an adequate rate of response. A small number of participants indicated that they did not give consent, but completed the survey. Their data were removed prior to analysis. There is a significant amount of disagreement in survey research as to an expected or acceptable range for web-based response rates.

Gorard (2001) cautions that high response rates do not mean that the data are more valid, but simply that more participants took the survey. However, the problem with low response rates ultimately impacts the researcher's ability to generalize the findings

across the field of research and practice. Viswesvaran, et al. (1993) assert that the problem of non-response must be carefully addressed as a low response rate raises significant doubt about the researcher's ability to draw meaningful conclusion based on the data. The researchers thereby ensure that the survey and the data that is collected are externally valid.

Muijs (2004) suggests that in order to maximize response rates, attention must be given to several factors. They include: keep the survey short and attractive; send follow up messages or announcements, allow easy access to the survey, and demonstrate that the researcher is credible (p. 43). The survey protocol used in this study was brief, two e-mails were sent to the same sample of the population, participants were able to access the survey through the Internet at any time, and the researcher explained his connection to George Mason University as a doctoral candidate.

Hoonaker and Carayon (2009) also raise the issue of confidentiality in relation to response rates. The data collection process did not allow the researcher to capture names, e-mail addresses, or other identifying information. No personal identifiers were attached to the completed surveys. MDR tacked trend information, such as how many clicks per day, how many completed surveys were submitted per state, etc., but no personal information was stored or shared with the researcher. Several participants requested additional information about how they were selected. Each participant who desired further information was contacted via e-mail.

Statistical Data Analysis

The researcher collected data through a web-based survey. Results were analyzed using SPSS 18.0 (2009). For research questions one through four, data analysis involved generating descriptive statistics, including percentiles and frequencies. Inferential statistics are also provided where appropriate. Chi-square tests as well as two-way contingency table analyses were used to explore differences among total responses, differences between levels within responses, as well as differences between multiple factors. The data are visually presented through tables and figures within the text as the research questions and subsections are reported and then discussed.

The researcher also asked the participants open-ended questions. Of particular focus was research question five, which probed special education case managers for definitions of the term *ethical dilemma*. Analyzing responses from open ended questions requires a different process than analysis for questions where responses are selected from a list of options. Creswell (2005) states that in order to analyze open-ended questions, researchers must spend considerable time categorizing the responses into themes. While the process of coding can be difficult and often time-consuming, open-ended question provide a depth of response that is not possible with closed-ended questions. Participants are able to formulate individual responses based on their cultural and social experiences, rather than select responses provided by the researcher. Holland and Christian (2009) refer to open-ended questions as an important tool that goes beyond locked in responses. They also found that the interactive nature of open-ended questions acts to increase the

participants' interest. As they respond in writing, they begin to view themselves as a co-creator of knowledge rather than just a respondent.

However, some caution is worth noting when including open-ended questions in a survey. Muijs (2004) warns that with open-ended responses, there is a potential "loss of standardization and comparability of answers across respondents" (p. 46). However, if a rigorous method of content analysis is used, emergent themes can provide rich, valuable information. In order to explore trends in language used by case managers to define *ethical dilemma*, responses were analyzed using an open and axial coding procedure. Strauss and Corbin (1990) describe these coding procedures as inductive processes that attempt to discover patterns, themes and categories in the data.

First, the researcher began the open coding process by reading through each of the responses multiple times. Each of the definitions was hand coded. Key words, concepts, and phrases were highlighted for each response. A chart was created that noted each significant key word or concept. In order to ensure that no key words or concepts were omitted, the definitions were coded several times independently and then compared for accuracy. A final chart was generated that listed key words or concepts per definition.

The second phase of the process involved axial coding. Axial coding allows the researcher to create meaning among responses that explain the phenomenon being explored. In this case, it allowed the researcher to establish relational components within the phenomenon of an ethical dilemma as reported by the participants (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The researcher explored the chart by noting reoccurring words, concepts, or phrases across the definitions. This process was done several times to allow the

researcher to establish patterns, or themes, across the definitions given by the participants. By establishing themes across the definitions, the researcher was able to make connections between them. Relationships between thematic categories emerged, which established components of the term *ethical dilemma* rather than generate a definition of it.

The goal of analyzing the content was not to establish a single definition of *ethical dilemma*. The researcher did not pre-suppose that each participant would generate a similar response. Participants defined the term based on their own experiences; cultural, religious, educational, familial, etc. Components of the terms that were generated through open and axial coding procedures are reported in Chapter 4.

Summary

Chapter three described how the researcher used a cross-sectional, web-based survey design to gather data in order to explore the use of personal values and professional codes of ethics among special education case managers as they negotiate ethical dilemmas in the field. Ten thousand randomly sampled special education teachers and case managers received an e-mail based request to participate. Approximately 730 participants completed the survey. Key elements of the chapter included how the survey was designed, field tested, and distributed to a randomly sampled group of special educators throughout the United States.

Additionally, the researcher discussed the limitations of web-based survey research, yet established this method as a viable way to collect data that is both accurate and able to be generalized across the larger population of special education case

managers. Lastly, Chapter three outlined several data analysis procedures for both closed and open-ended questions. These results will be discussed in Chapter four.

Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from the web-based survey sent to 10,000 randomly selected participants. Participants are licensed to teach special education within the K-12 system in their respective school districts throughout the United States. The majority of the special education teachers report that they also function as a special education case manager. The role of case manager as leader is a key component of this study. The findings reflect data analyzed from 730 completed surveys.

The purpose of this study was to examine how special education case managers form and use their personal values and professional codes of ethics when encountering ethical dilemmas in the field. It also sought to clarify how ethical dilemmas are defined, and determine the major factors that contribute to them. Other areas such as preparedness and how personal values and professional codes of ethics function in a group setting were investigated. The study was guided by the following research questions:

RQ1. How prepared are case managers to deal with ethical dilemmas in the field of special education?

RQ2. When faced with ethical dilemmas, do special education case managers rely more heavily on personal values or professional codes of ethics to determine which course of action is in the best interest of the child?

RQ3. What do case managers claim are the significant causes of ethical dilemmas?

RQ4. In a group setting, do case managers report if personal or professional codes of ethics conflict? If so, which set of codes tends to dominate the decision-making process for the case manager?

RQ5. How do case managers define the term *ethical dilemma*?

First, descriptive statistics for the demographic data are provided, which includes the following factors: gender, age, race, level of education, grade level taught, licensure areas, case manager status, as well as the number of year in this capacity. Based on the descriptive data, a profile of a special education case manager is presented.

Second, descriptive and inferential statistics are reported for each research question. Data are visually presented within the text through tables and figures. The survey is divided into four subsections. The four subsections within this chapter are presented with the intent to correspond to the five research questions as follows:

RQ1: Preparedness

RQ2: Personal Values and Professional Codes of Ethics

RQ3 & 5: Ethical Dilemmas

RQ4: Group Dynamics and Ethical Dilemmas.

Particular attention is paid to the topics of pre-service preparation and code dominance when case managers are confronted with ethical dilemmas. Findings report whether or not these sub topics relate to other questions with statistical significance.

Reliability

As reported in Chapter 3, Cronbach's alpha was used to determine the internal validity of the total measure, which yielded an internal consistency value of .356 ($n = 10$ items). Cronbach's alpha was also used to determine the score for each subscale within the survey. The subscale Preparedness yielded a score of .339 ($n = 4$), Personal and Professional Codes of Ethics showed a value of .053 ($n = 2$), Ethical Dilemmas had only one question that was neither open-ended nor required participants to "check all that apply," and therefore, no value was obtained. Lastly, Group Dynamics and Ethical Dilemmas yielded a score of .09 ($n = 3$). Two questions within the survey sought to capture data on code dominance by the individual, and within the group. This yielded an internal consistency value of .711 ($n = 2$).

A low internal consistency measure does not indicate that the measure is invalid. The survey contained only ten questions that were used to measure the total survey internal consistency value. These questions were distributed across four subscales, which further decrease the alpha values. In addition, the inter-item correlation was low. Questions within the subscales measured different aspects of preparedness, personal and professional codes of ethics, ethical dilemmas, and group dynamics. This further impacts the internal consistency value within the subscales.

Response Rate

The survey was deployed to 10,000 randomly sampled participants. The number of participants who completed the survey was 730, resulting in a response rate of 7.30%. However, this does not take into consideration the number of participants who did not

open the e-mail, follow the link once opened, or provide consent. In addition, this does not reflect the number of e-mails that were blocked, returned, or were unable to be delivered. During the first deployment, 754 participants followed the link to the survey. During the second, 473 opted to follow the link. Of those who followed the link during both deployments, there was a 60% response rate.

Quantitative Analyses

Descriptive statistics were generated for each of the survey items. Frequencies and percentiles were reported for items that used a Likert-type scale, multiple option response items, as well as items where the participants were forced to select a single response. Non-parametric tests were conducted to determine statistical significance among responses and levels.

In order to determine if the differences were statistically significant, a pre-determined alpha level of .05 was used. It is anticipated that given multiple analyses involving a small data set, a certain number of completed tests may have yielded significant results by chance. Based on the total number of tests ($N = 25$) with a .05 alpha, it is expected that one test would yield statistically significant results due to chance. Appendix C outlines the inferential statistics used, and the significance of each test performed. As reported in Appendix C, a total of 28 statistical tests were performed. Of those tests, 89% ($N = 25$) yielded statistically significant results, whereas 11% ($N = 3$) yielded results that were not significant. Based on the high percentage of results that were statistically significant, it is not likely that the testing outcomes occurred by chance.

Statistical Analysis for Demographic Data

Gender. Of the 730 completed surveys, 725 participants reported their gender. Participants were given the options Male and Female. Approximately 17% ($n = 123$) of the participants responded Male, while 83% ($n = 602$) responded Female. Of the 730 participants, less than 1% ($n = 5$) of the participants did not respond to this question.

Race. Descriptive data on participants' race was recorded by categories; including African-American, Caucasian, Hispanic, Asian, and Other. Based on 709 total responses, Table 1 shows that Caucasian was the highest percentage (84%), followed by African-American (7%), Hispanic (4%), Asian (1%), and Other (<1%). Twenty-three participants did not respond to this question.

Table 1

Race Categories Reported by Participants

		<i>N</i>	Percent
Valid	African-American	51	7.0
	Caucasian	616	84.2
	Hispanic	29	4.0
	Asian	9	1.2
	Other	4	.5
	Total	709	96.9
Missing	System	23	3.1
Total		732	100.0

Note. Traditional race categories were used rather than more numerous ethnicity categories in order to facilitate group comparisons.

Age. A total of 725 participants reported their age range based on five options. Five participants did not respond to this question. Age ranges included: 20-30, 31-40, 41-50, 51-60, and 60+ years old. Table 2 shows that the frequency of age ranges varied. However, over 60% of the respondents are over 40 years old. The lowest percentages were found within the first and last age ranges. Almost 80% of the participants are between 30 and 60 years old. Table 2 also shows a lower percentage of case managers who fell within the 20-30 year range. The significance of this will be discussed in the case manager profile.

Table 2

Participants' Age Ranges

		<i>N</i>	Percent
Valid	20-30	119	16.3
	31-40	161	22.0
	41-50	175	23.9
	51-60	224	30.6
	60+	46	6.3
	Total	725	99.0
Missing	System	7	1.0
Total		732	100.0

Education. Participants were asked to select their highest completed level of education from a list including: Bachelor's Degree, Master's Degree, Ed.D., Ph.D., and

Administrative Endorsement. All of the participants ($n = 730$) who answered this question indicated that they hold a Bachelor's (B.A. or B.S) degree. The percentage of participants who earned a Master's degree was 70%, Ed.D. was 3%, and Ph.D. was 1%. While an Administrative Endorsement is not considered to be an academic degree, it is a requirement if an educator wants to become an administrator at the building or district level. Approximately 6% of all participants reported that they hold an administrative endorsement.

Grade level. The current study surveyed licensed teachers in the K-12 system across the United States. Participants were asked to report the grade level(s) in which they operate. Choices included Elementary, Middle, and Secondary. As some participants function within multiple levels, the data are reported as the total number of participants per grade level, rather than across multiple categories. Approximately 299 participants work within the Elementary level (41%), 201 participants within the Middle level (28%), and 290 at the Secondary level (40%).

Areas of licensure. Participants were asked to indicate from a list in which area(s) of special education they were licensed. Again, the data are reported for each area of licensure, rather than combinations of licensure areas. Special education programs offer multiple endorsements, with Emotional Disabilities and Learning Disabilities typically grouped together as one endorsement program. The highest represented areas of licensure were Learning Disabilities (598) and Emotional Disabilities (406). The third most represented was Intellectual Disabilities (387), followed by Autism (282), Severe

Disabilities (217), Traumatic Brain Injury (130), Speech and Language (99), Hearing Impairment (89), and lastly, Visual Disabilities (79).

Case manager status. The secondary position of case manager is a commonly held indirect leadership role for special education teachers. Participants were asked if they also managed cases for students with special needs in addition to teaching or performing another primary role within their school. Approximately 722 participants answered this question. Eighty-two percent ($n = 591$) reported that they function as a case managers, while eighteen percent ($n = 131$) reported that they are not. Ten participants chose to disregard this question.

Years as case manager. Those participants who indicated that they function as a case manager were asked to respond to a follow up question, indicating how many years they have been a special education case manager. The participants were given five choices, which included: 1-5, 6-10, 11-15, 16-20, and 21+ years of experience. Table 3 shows that the highest percentage was within the 1-5 year range at 25%, followed by 22% within the 6-10 year range, 13% in the 11-15 range, and 12% falling within the 21+ years of experience range. Approximately 18% of the participants did not respond to this question.

Table 3

Years of Experience as Case Manager

		<i>N</i>	Percent
Valid	1-5	185	25.3
	6-10	163	22.3
	11-15	101	13.8
	16-20	60	8.2
	21+	90	12.3
	Total	599	81.8
Missing	System	133	18.2
Total		732	100.0

Number of students on caseload. Again, for those participants who responded that they function as a case manager, the next question asked participant to report how many special education students are currently on their caseload. Response options included 0-10, 11-20, 21-30, and 30+ students. Table 4 demonstrates that nearly 50% of the participants reported that they have 11-20 students, approximately 30% have 0-10, 12% have 21-30, and almost 8% have 30 or more students on their caseload.

Table 4

Number of Students on Caseload

		<i>N</i>	Percent
Valid	0-10	195	26.6
	11-20	341	46.6
	21-30	88	12.0
	30+	59	8.1
	Total	683	93.3
Missing	System	49	6.7
Total		732	100.0

Case Manager Profile

As previously discussed, existing research on special education case managers is lacking. This is in part due to the fact that the case manager position is a secondary function of special educators, and has not been regarded as a formal leadership role in the literature. Searches were conducted for national and state demographics on this job description, but none were found. Market Data Retrieval confirmed that no data has been kept on case manager status by federal and state education agencies. However, because case managers are contractually hired as special educators, this profile presents a composite of individuals who function as both.

Over 80% of all participants reported that they also function as a case manager for students with special needs. Overall, the descriptive statistics reveal that the majority of the participants are Caucasian, female, with an average age between 35 to 40 years old. The majority of case managers hold a Master’s degree, and they are equally represented

across elementary (42%) and high school levels (40%). Percentages are based on total frequencies across categories, as case managers were able to report more than one level at which they function.

While some case managers are licensed in more than once disability area, the highest frequency of case managers are licensed to work with students with learning and emotional disabilities. Lastly, case managers have an average of 10 to 15 years experience, and carry a case load of slightly over 10 students. The importance of this profile will be addressed in Chapter 5.

Statistical Results for Research Questions

Research question 1: preparedness. Research question number one focuses primarily on case managers' level of preparedness to address the ethical challenges in special education, what they report as desired methods for improving their skills to address ethical challenges, and ways of improving their level of knowledge and use of professional codes of ethics to guide their decisions after entering into the field. The first research question is based upon the compilation of participants' responses to six questions in the survey instrument. Findings for each are presented in their corresponding sub-section.

Pre-service training. Survey questions one, two and three in the Preparedness section of the survey addressed preparedness based on pre-service training received by the respondents. Question one asked participants if they received formal instruction regarding ethics in special education, ethical decision-making, or how to negotiate ethical dilemmas in the field. Approximately 475 participants indicated that they had received

some form of formal ethics training. Approximately 250 participants responded that they did not receive formal training as a part of their pre-service training program. Eight participants did not respond to this question. A one sample chi-square test was conducted to analyze participants' responses concerning formal ethical instruction in their pre-service training. Results from the test were significant $\chi^2(1, N = 725) = 69.828, p = 000$, indicating an overall difference among responses.

As discussed in the review of literature, pre-service training is an important factor when discussing the ability of case managers to negotiate ethical dilemmas in the field. In order to determine if pre-service instruction had a significant impact on the multiple domains represented in the survey, a two way contingency table analysis was conducted. Where appropriate, significance in relation to preparedness will be reported. The significance of each analysis will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Sources of formal training in ethics. The second question within the section on Preparedness asked participants to select from a list of options the ways in which they received formal training on ethics. Options included Class on ethics, Discussions in other classes, Internships, as well as Conferences. Of the 730 participants who answered this question, Figure 2 shows that Discussions in other classes was the highest selected option at 66% ($n = 484$), followed by Class on ethics at 34% ($n = 245$), Conferences was 23% ($n = 166$), and lastly, Internships was 14% ($n = 101$). Participants were able to select one or any number of the options. Figure 2 graphically presents these data graphically.

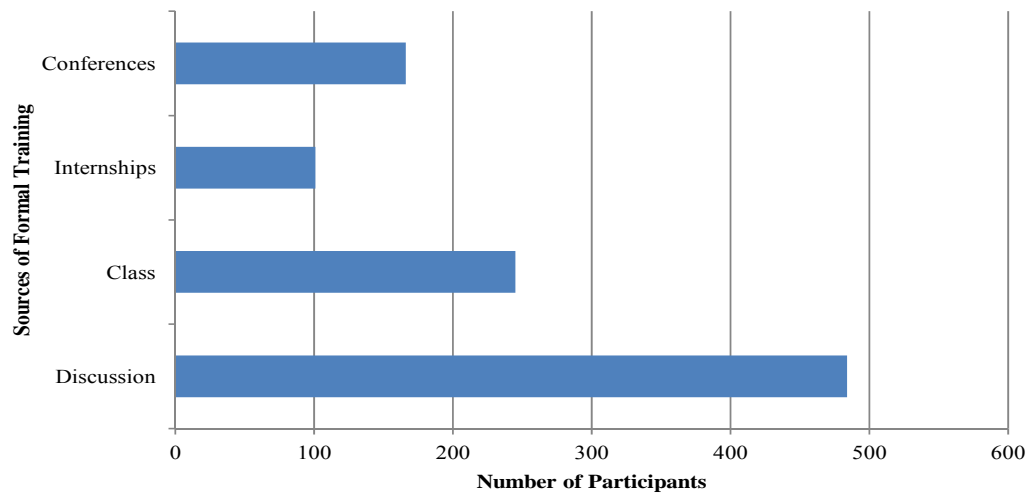


Figure 2. Sources of formal methods pre-service ethical training.

Pre-service preparedness. The third question focused specifically on perceived levels of preparedness to address ethical dilemmas based upon pre-service training and instruction. Participants were asked to select responses from a list, including Not at all, Poorly, Adequately, and Well. As shown in Table 5, Adequately was the most commonly selected option at 56%, followed by Poorly, Not at All, and Well.

Table 5

Levels of Preparedness to Address Ethical Dilemmas

		<i>N</i>	Percent
Valid	Not at all	52	7.1
	Poorly	190	26.0
	Adequately	401	54.8
	Well	69	9.4
	Total	712	97.3
Missing	System	20	2.7
Total		732	100.0

A one sample chi-square test was conducted to determine whether participants are prepared to address ethical dilemmas based on their level of pre-service training in ethics. The results were significant $\chi^2(3, N = 712) = 436.124, p = 000$, indicating an overall difference among responses. A follow up chi-square analysis across the levels of Adequately versus Well prepared was conducted and yielded a significant difference, $\chi^2(1, N = 470) = 234.519, p = 000$. Additionally, a follow up chi-square analysis was conducted with Adequately and Poorly prepared, which was also yielded a significant difference, $\chi^2(1, N = 591) = 75.332, p = 000$.

In order to evaluate the extent to which case managers who received pre-service training in ethics rate themselves along a continuum of preparedness to deal with ethical dilemmas from Not at all, Poorly, Adequately, or Well, a two-way contingency table analysis was conducted. Pre-service ethics instruction and perception of preparedness were found to be significantly related $\chi^2(3, N = 710) = 174.539, p = 000$, Cramer's $V =$

.49. The proportion of individuals who received no pre-service ethics training who perceived themselves as Not at all prepared was 90%, as Poorly prepared = 56%, Adequately prepared = 19%, or Well prepared = 10%. Conversely, case managers who reported that they did receive pre-service training reported themselves as Not at all prepared was 10%, Poorly prepared = 44%, Adequately prepared was 81%, and Well prepared was 90%. These data are displayed graphically in Figure 3.

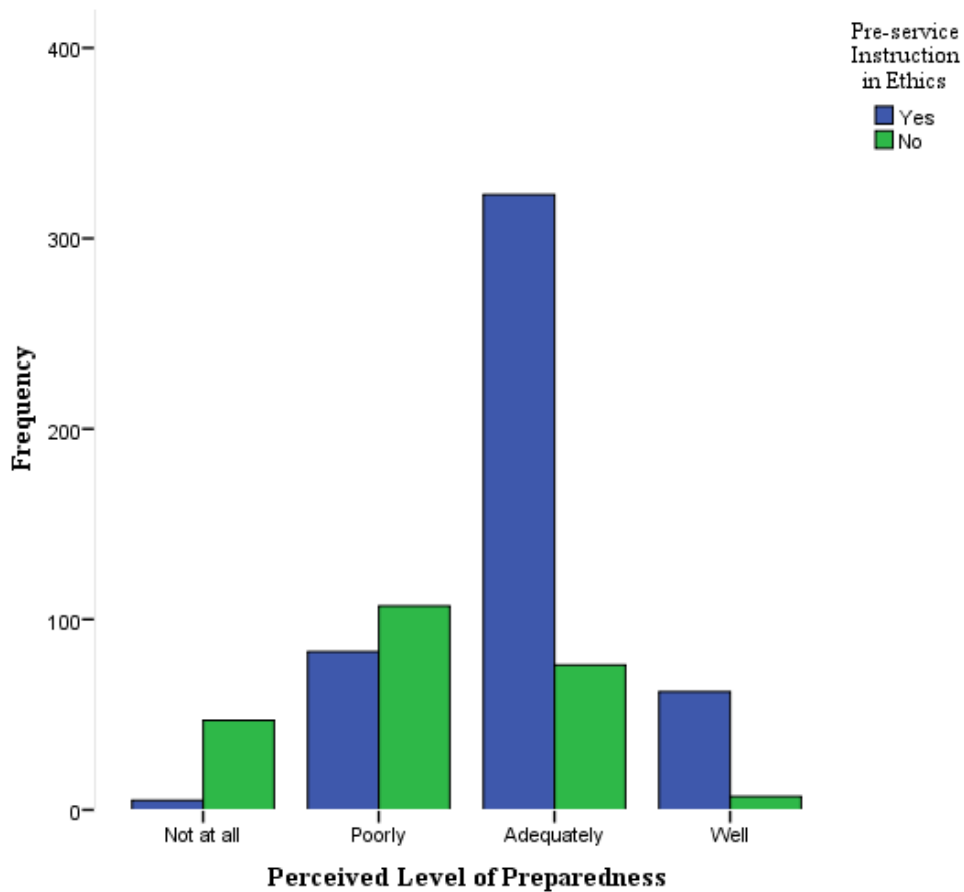


Figure 3. The number of individuals reporting pre-service preparation by their perceptions of ability to handle ethical decision-making.

Another aspect that merits analysis in relation to pre-service instruction is the knowledge that participants have regarding professional codes established by advocacy groups, such as the Council for Exceptional Children. A two way contingency table was conducted to evaluate whether or not case managers who received pre-service training were more likely to rate themselves across a spectrum professional code knowledge from Not at all, Somewhat, or Very. Pre-service training and professional code knowledge were found to be significantly related, $\chi^2(2, N = 720) = 21.604, p = .000$, Cramer's $V = .713$. The proportion of individuals who received no pre-service training who rated themselves as Not at all knowledgeable was 51%, as Somewhat knowledgeable = 31%, or Very knowledgeable = 27%. Conversely, the proportion of case managers who received pre-service training who rated themselves as Not at all knowledgeable was 49%, Somewhat knowledgeable = 69%, or Very knowledgeable = 72%. These data are represented in Figure 4.

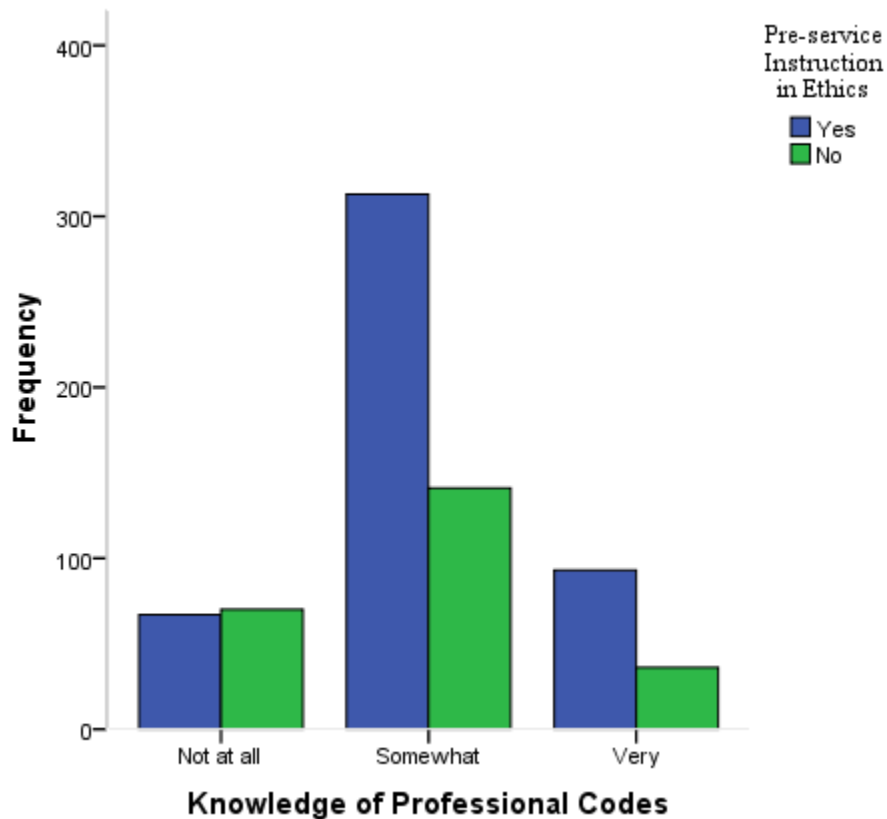


Figure 4. The number of participants reporting pre-service preparation by their knowledge level of professional codes of ethics.

Code dominance is another significant area of exploration in the present study. The relationship between personal or professional code dominance within the decision-making process and pre-service training in ethics requires attention. A two-way contingency table analysis was conducted to evaluate whether or not case managers who received pre-service ethics training were more likely to report if personal or professional codes dominate their decision-making process. Pre-service preparation and code dominance were found to be not significantly related, $\chi^2(1, N = 708) = 1.099, p = .294$,

Cramer's $V = .039$. The proportion of case managers who received pre-service ethics training and reported that their personal code dominates was 64%, and those whose professional code dominates was 67%. No significant relationship was found. Data are presented in Figure 5.

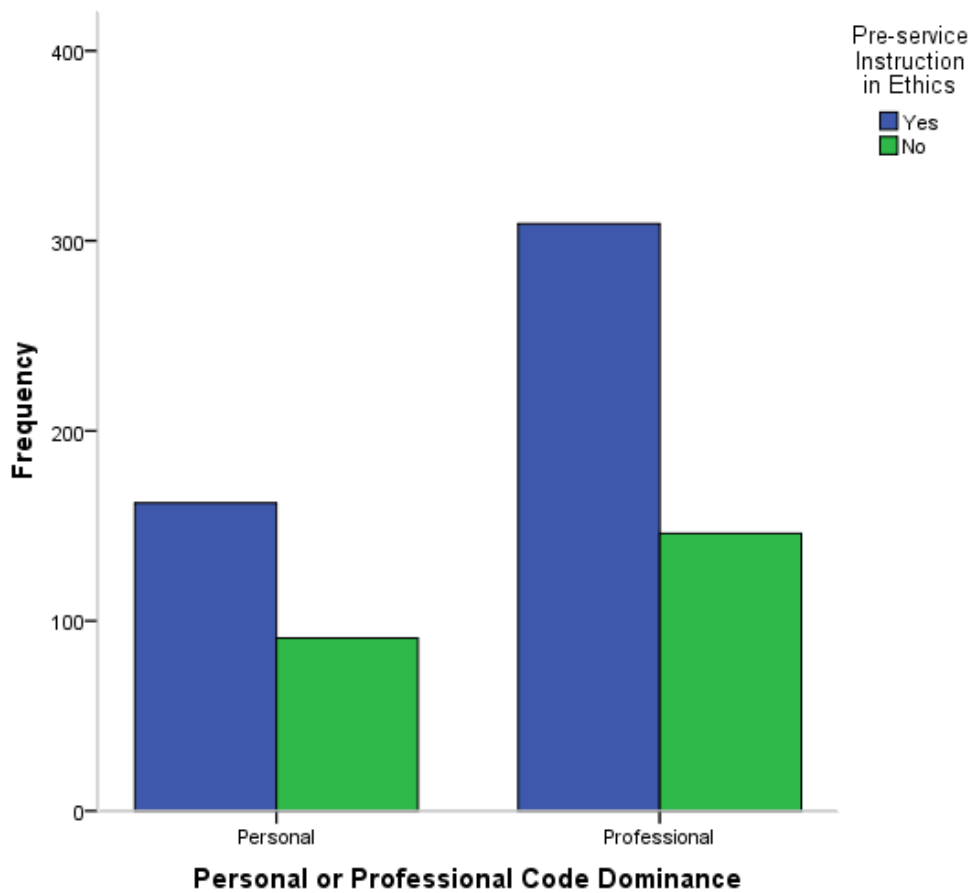


Figure 5. The number of individuals who report pre-service ethics training by personal or professional code dominance in the decision-making process.

The last area explored as it relates to pre-service ethics training is how likely case managers are to consult with others when faced with an ethical dilemma. A two-way contingency table analysis was conducted to evaluate whether or not case managers who received ethics training were more likely to rate themselves along a continuum of the frequency at which they consult colleagues before making decisions from Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Often, or Always. Results indicate that they are significantly related, $\chi^2(4, N = 714) = 10.928, p = .027$, Cramer's $V = .124$. The proportion of individuals who reported that they did not receive pre-service training and who Never consult colleagues was 67%, Rarely = 42%, Sometimes = 36%, Often = 36%, or always = 24%. Conversely, case managers who did receive training and who Never consult colleagues was 33%, Rarely = 58%, Sometimes = 64%, Often = 64%, or Always = 76%. These data are represented in Figure 6.

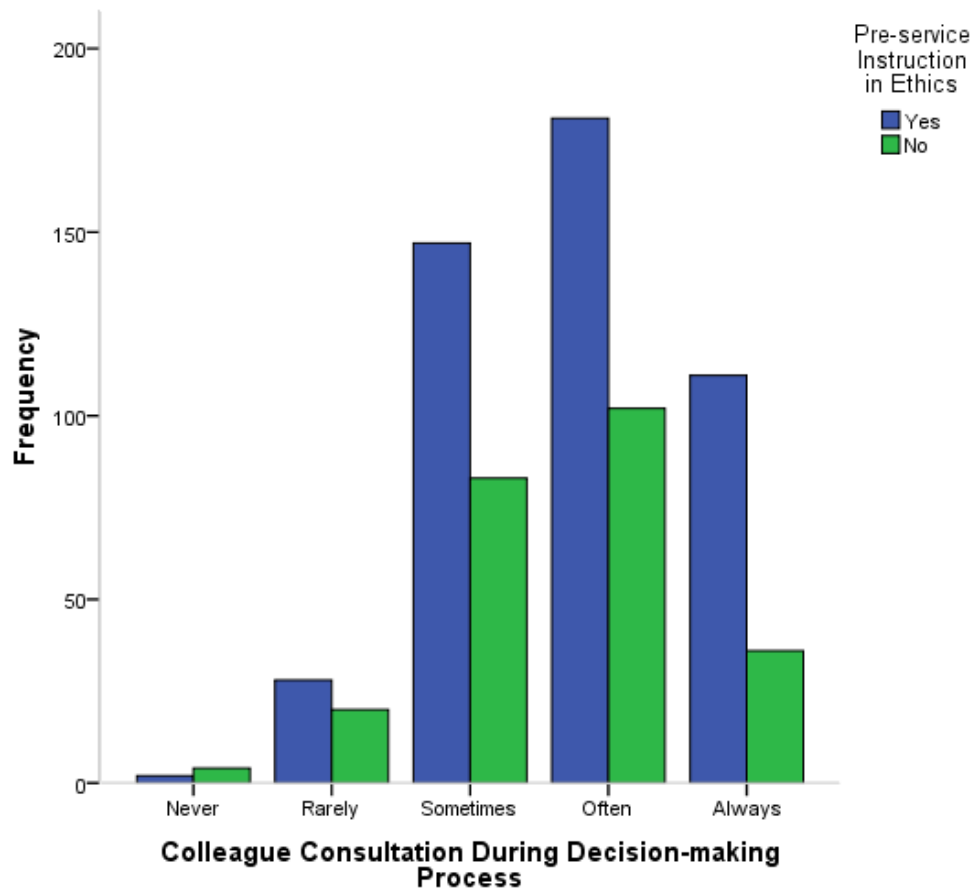


Figure 6. The number of case managers who received pre-service ethics training and the frequency at which they consult colleagues prior to making decision regarding an ethical dilemma.

In-service training and support. Survey question four asked participants to select possible ways to help them deal with or become better prepared to address ethical dilemmas in the field from a list of options. The options included: Professional development in the topic of ethics, Forming a committee, Developing a school-wide code

of ethics, Taking a course on ethics, and Attending conferences where ethics and education are discussed. Participants were able to select any number of options. Data are presented in *Figure 7* based on the frequency of responses as participants were not asked to select options based on order or rank of importance.

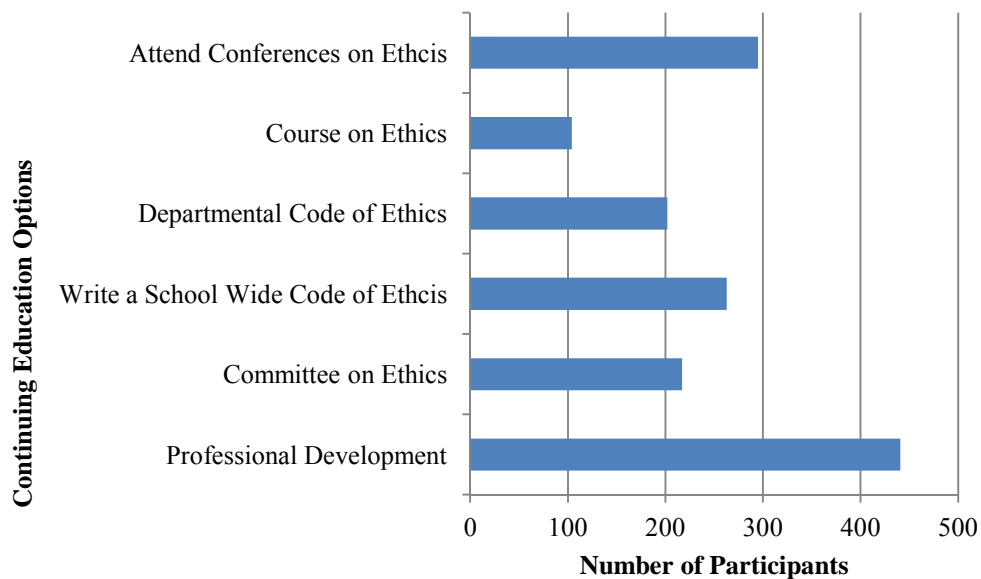


Figure 7. Desired methods of continuing education ethics training.

Professional code knowledge and use. Survey questions five and six asked participants to report on their knowledge of professional codes of ethics, as well as how often they refer to them when negotiating an ethical dilemma. Question five asked participants to indicate their knowledge of professional codes of ethics developed by national advocacy groups such as the Council for Exceptional Children. Response options

included Not at all, Somewhat, and Very. Table 6 presents the percentage of each response.

A one sample chi-square test was conducted to assess the participant's level of knowledge of the professional code of ethics established by the CEC. The results were significant $\chi^2(2, N = 724) = 289.196, p = 000$, indicating an overall difference among responses. A follow up chi-square analysis across the levels Somewhat versus Very knowledgeable was conducted and demonstrated a significant difference, $\chi^2(1, N = 587) = 182.162, p = 000$. Additionally, a secondary follow up chi-square analysis across levels Somewhat versus Not at all knowledgeable was conducted, which also yielded a significant difference, $\chi^2(1, N = 594) = 172.391, p = 000$.

Table 6

Knowledge of Professional Codes of Ethics

		<i>N</i>	Percent
Valid	Not at all	137	18.7
	Somewhat	457	62.3
	Very	130	17.7
	Total	724	98.8
Missing	System	9	1.2
Total		733	100.0

Survey question six asked participants a follow up question regarding the use of professional codes of ethics. In addition to inquiring about their level of knowledge,

participants reported how often they refer to these codes when they attempt to negotiate ethical dilemmas. Choices included Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Often, or Always. Table 7 shows the percentage of responses by option.

A one sample chi-square test was run to determine how often participants refer to the CEC’s professional code of ethics when faced with an ethical dilemma. The results of the test are significant $\chi^2(4, N = 725) = 141.448, p = 000$, indicating an overall difference among responses. A follow up chi-square analysis across the levels of Sometime versus Never was conducted and yielded a significant difference, $\chi^2(1, N = 360) = 20.544, p = 000$. Additionally, a second follow up chi-square analysis across the levels Sometimes and Always was conducted, which also yielded a significant difference, $\chi^2(1, N = 269) = 116.465, p = 000$.

Table 7
Referencing Professional Codes of Ethics

		<i>N</i>	Percent
Valid	Never	137	18.7
	Rarely	205	28.0
	Sometimes	223	30.4
	Often	114	15.6
	Always	46	6.3
	Total	725	98.9
Missing	System	8	1.1
Total		733	100.0

Research question 2: personal values and professional codes of ethics.

Research question two focused primarily upon how personal values and professional codes of ethics inform the manner in which case managers address ethical challenges commonly experienced in special education. It also addressed the significant sources that make up their personal values. Research question two was comprised of five survey questions. Particular attention is paid to the relationship that personal and professional code dominance has on specific domains across the survey. The need to explore personal and professional codes and how they impact decisions is heard across the literature discussed in Chapter 2.

Sources of personal values. Survey questions seven and eight explored the sources that make up participants' personal values as well as the most influential sources that impacted their decision-making process. Participants were given six choices, which included: Family, Religion, Education, Culture, Friends, and Politics. Options were based on categories discussed in the review of literature; (Lincoln & Holmes, 2010; Storey & Beeman, 2009; Frick & Faircloth, 2007; Begley & Leithwood, 1990). *Figure 8* presents the frequency of each response.

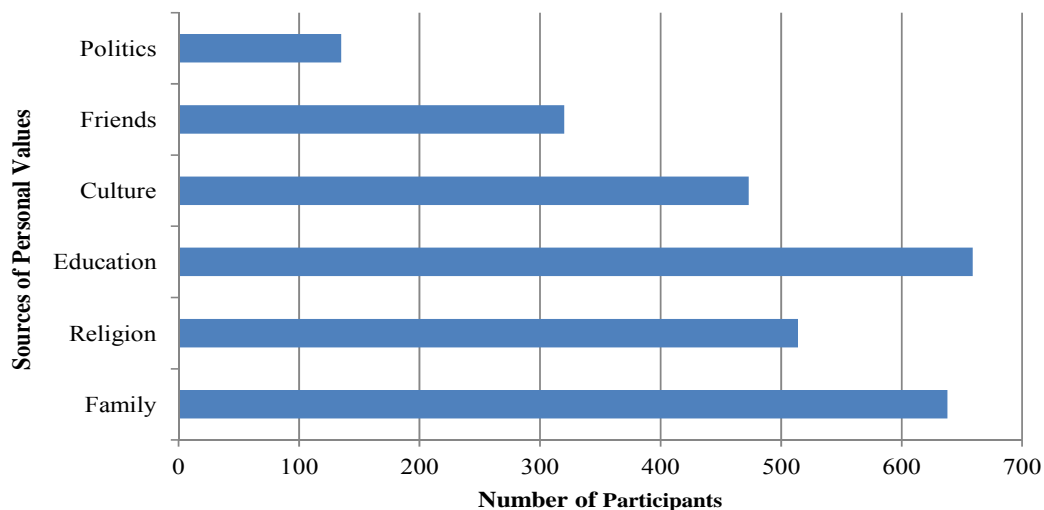


Figure 8. Sources of personal values.

Personal values and professional code conflict and dominance. Survey

questions nine, ten, and eleven explored whether or not participants' personal values and professional ethical codes conflict, as well as which code dominates when participants consider possible actions when faced with an ethical dilemmas. When asked if personal values conflict with professional codes, participants responded by selecting Yes or No. Sixty-two percent ($n = 453$) of the participants report that their personal values do not conflict with their professional codes, while thirty-eight percent ($n = 274$) report that they do conflict. Six participants did not answer this question. A one sample chi-square test was conducted to assess whether personal or professional ethical codes conflict when participant's make decisions regarding ethical dilemmas. The results of the test were

significant $\chi^2(1, N = 727) = 44.073, p = 000$, indicating an overall difference among responses.

Participants were then asked about code dominance. Given the choices Personal and Professional, participants indicated which of the two is dominant when they encounter a situation that is ethically challenging. Participants selected Professional as the most dominant at 64% ($n = 458$), with Personal at 36% ($n = 254$). A one sample chi-square test was conducted to determine if personal or professional codes dominate the decision-making process when participants are faced with an ethical dilemma. Results of the test show that the differences are significant $\chi^2(1, N = 712) = 58.449, p = 000$, indicating an overall difference among responses.

The first area of comparison by code dominance is preparedness based on pre-service training. A two-way contingency table analysis was conducted to evaluate whether or not case managers who indicated that their personal or professional codes dominated their decision-making process were more likely to rate themselves along a scale of preparedness to deal with ethical dilemmas from Not at all, Poorly, Adequately, or Well. Code dominance was found to be significantly related, $\chi^2(3, N = 696) = 8.906, p = .031$, Cramer's $V = .113$. The proportion of case managers whose professional codes dominate and who rate themselves as Not at all prepared was 51%, Poorly prepared = 60%, Adequately = 67%, or Well = 74%. Conversely, the proportion of case managers who reported that their personal codes dominate the decision-making process and who rate themselves as Not at all prepared was 49%, Poorly = 40%, Adequately = 33%, or Well = 27%. These data are represented in Figure 9.

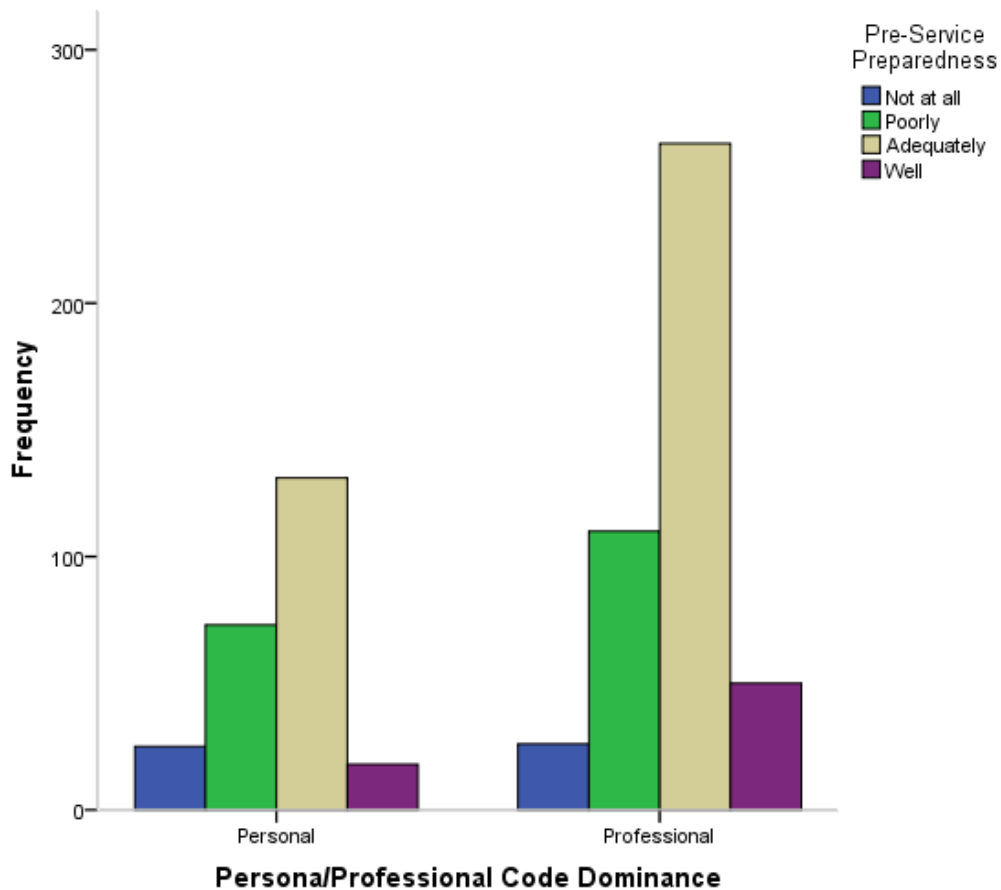


Figure 9. The number of individuals reporting personal or professional code dominance by their perception of pre-service preparedness.

The next area of comparison by code dominance is the frequency that case managers refer to professional codes of ethics, such as the ethical code created by the Council for Exceptional Children. A two-way contingency table analysis was performed to evaluate whether or not case managers whose personal or professional codes dominate the decision-making process are more likely to rate themselves on a continuum of how

often they refer to professional codes of ethics from Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Often, or Always. The results found that they are significantly related, $\chi^2(4, N = 708) = 11.168, p = .025$, Cramer's $V = .126$. The proportion of case managers whose professional codes dominate who indicated that they Never refer to professional codes was 55%, Rarely = 61%, Sometimes = 71%, Often = 70%, or Always = 64%. Conversely, the proportion of case managers who personal codes dominate who indicated that they Never refer to professional codes of ethics was 45%, Rarely = 39%, Sometimes = 29%, Often = 30%, or Always = 36%. Data are graphically represented in Figure 10.

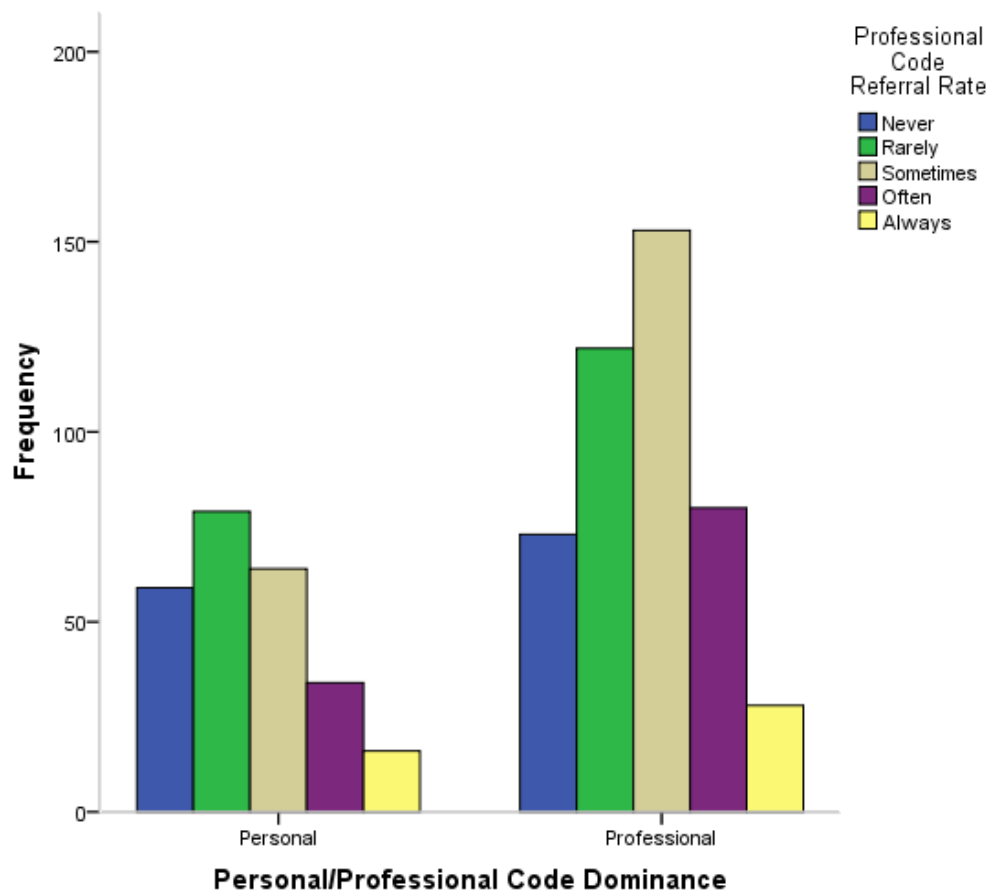


Figure 10. The number of individuals whose professional or personal codes dominate when making decisions by the frequency of referring to professional codes of ethics.

The next area of comparison by personal or professional code dominance during the decision-making process is code conflict. A two-way contingency table analysis was conducted to determine whether or not case managers whose personal or professional codes dominate the decision-making process are more likely to report that their personal codes conflict with their professional ones. The results indicate that they are not significantly related, $\chi^2(1, N = 711) = .537, p = .464, \text{Cramer's } V = .027$. These data are graphically presented in Figure 11.

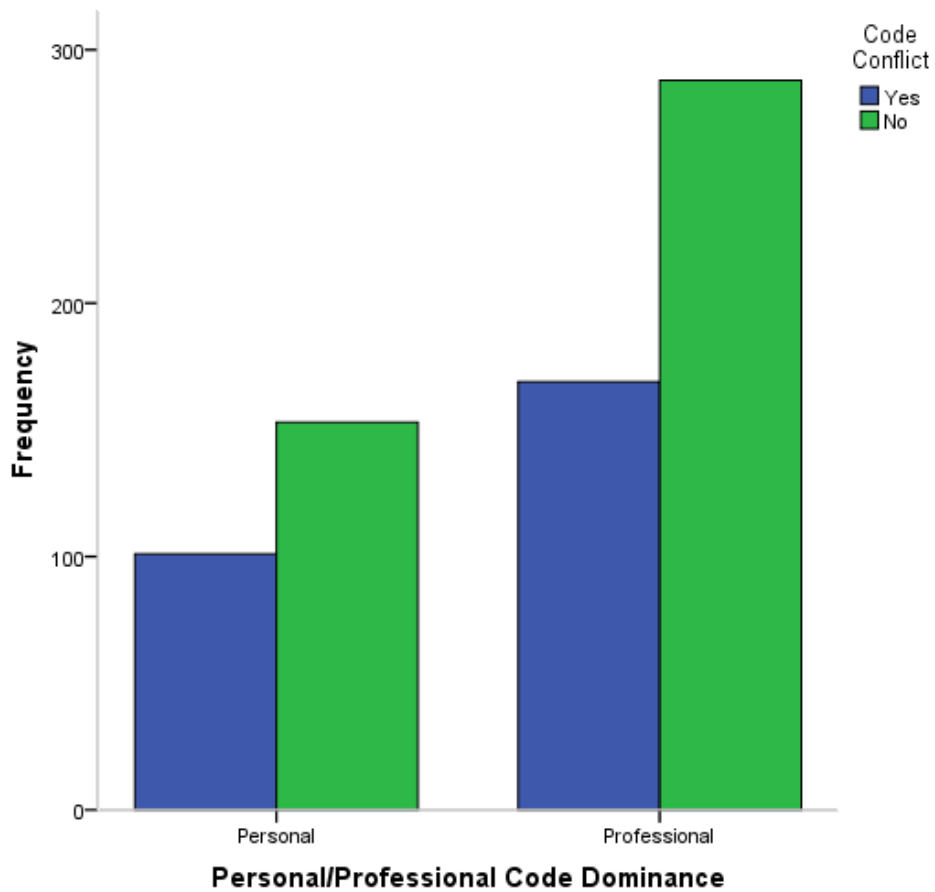


Figure 11. The number of individuals reporting code conflict and code dominance.

The final area of comparison by code dominance is colleague consultation. A two-way contingency analysis table was conducted to evaluate whether or not case managers who personal or professional codes dominate are more likely to rate themselves along a continuum of colleague consultation from Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Often, or Always. Results indicate that they are not significantly related, $\chi^2(4, N = 703) = 6.783, p = .148$, Cramer's $V = .098$. Data are represented in Figure 12.

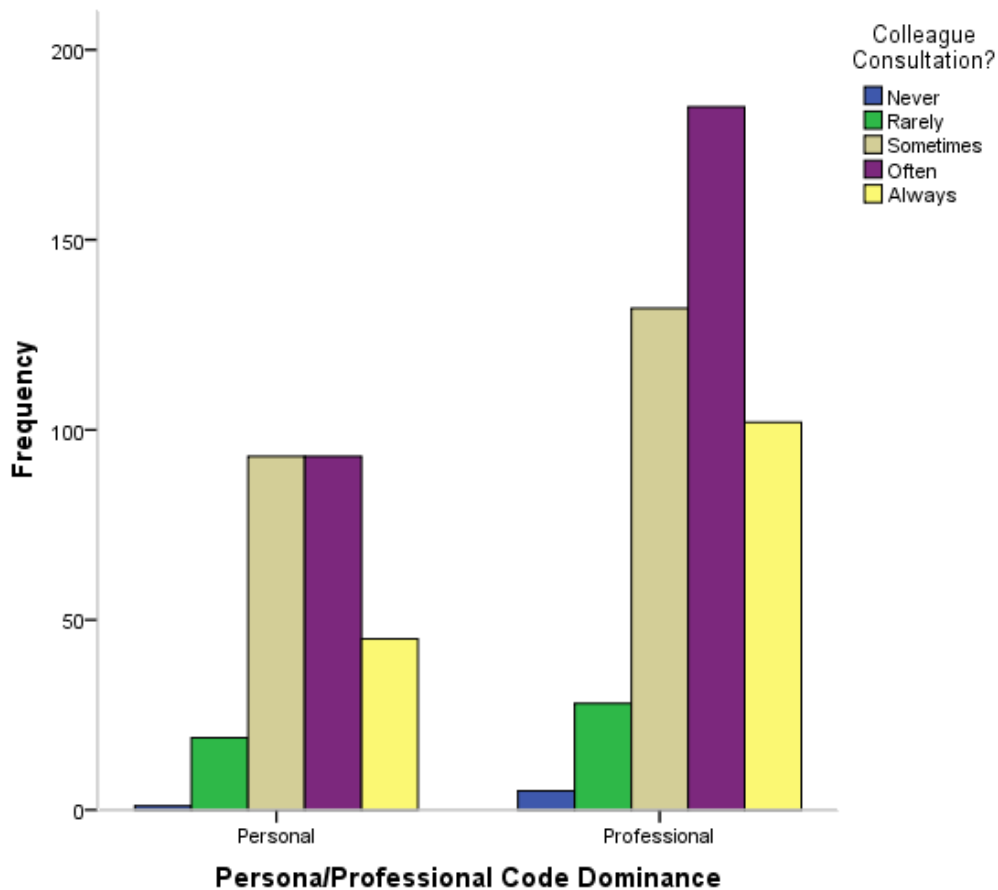


Figure 12. Number of individuals reporting code dominance by the frequency of consultation with colleagues when faced with ethical decisions.

Research question 3 and 5: ethical dilemmas. Research questions three and five focused specifically on the phenomenon of the ethical dilemma. This included how the participants defined the term, what they reported as the most significant sources of ethical dilemmas, as well as commenting on how much attention should be spent discussing them within their department or school. Research questions three and five were represented in the survey by four questions.

Definitions of ethical dilemmas. Survey question twelve asked participants to define the term *ethical dilemma* in an open-ended format. Participants were not restricted by length or given any specific guidelines for providing a definition. Using an open coding method, five significant themes emerged from the data. Emergent themes included: conflict, mandatory choice, oppositional values, consequence uncertainty, and compromised values. The significance of these themes is discussed in Chapter 5.

Conflict. The use of the term *conflict* occurred 137 times within the definitions. *Problem* was recorded 50 times. Participants also used other terms such as *issue*, and *debate*. Multiple words were used to voice an internal condition that was described as highly problematic. In addition, many descriptor words were used to qualify the strength of the conflict, such as *serious*, *complex*, and *difficult*. For the majority of the participants, the definition of *ethical dilemma* began with the recognition that a serious conflict was present.

Mandatory choice. The second theme that emerged from the data was the recognition that a choice had to be made. Within the definitions, participants used phrases such as *must choose*, *have to decide*, *forced to make a decision*, and *have to make a decision*. None of the participants wrote that they could opt out of deciding, pass the decision on to someone else, or ignore it. A final element that was not specifically stated by the participants but was implied within the responses was a sense of urgency. One participant wrote, “When I believe I know what is best for a student, yet I cannot implement it because of resources, time, or acceptability of stakeholders.”

Oppositional values. Participants provided many examples of opposing values or forces within the definitions. The use of the term *between* was used 94 times. Often, the term *between* was followed by *right* and *wrong*, *personal* and *professional*, *ethics* and *personal beliefs*, and *two choices*. One participant stated “An ethical dilemma is a situation that involves a conflict *between two moral choices*” (emphasis mine). Another claimed “A pull *between two factions of a moral issue*.” A third defined an ethical dilemma as a situation “when a person is stuck between two choices that have two totally different outcomes.”

Consequence uncertainty. Within the definition, participants indicated that there is absolute certainty that a choice must be made. However, there is absolute uncertainty about the consequences of the final decision. Many definitions contained terms such as *two outcomes*, *multiple outcomes*, *multiple possibilities*, and *different outcomes*. In addition, the severity of the consequence was often mentioned. Which outcome would be less damaging or harmful was a commonly reported factor when making a final decision. One participant stated that an ethical dilemma is “a quandary about what action is *least harmful* to the people and institutions involved.” Another demonstrated consequence uncertainty by defining ethical dilemma as a “situation that has no clear, correct answer and may harm someone involved.” The possible outcome and consequence exists as a real threat to those involved according to several participants.

Compromised values. Lastly, participants reported that their values are compromised in the process of making a choice. One participant indicated that “his or her own personal or professional ethics might be compromised.” Another claimed that

“...either option includes some compromise of values.” The term *compromise* used by many of the participants is not describing a sense of balance or finding a resolution between two or more opposing forces. It is a laying aside or removal rather than an agreement. Participants reported this as an extremely negative aspect of the nature of ethical dilemmas. One participant captured this as a sense of loss. They wrote, “Any possible outcome to the situation is morally intolerable.”

Sources of ethical dilemmas. Survey questions thirteen and fourteen sought information regarding the sources of ethical dilemmas, and what issues were typically the most significant in terms of causing or setting up the conditions for an ethical dilemma to be present in the field. Participants were given a list of possible sources of ethical dilemmas from which to choose. They were also provided space to discuss their perception of the most significant issues that result in an ethical dilemma.

Participants were permitted to select any number of options that they felt was influential ($n = 730$). Options were not ranked according to significant of impact or degree of severity. The options included Students, Parents, Administration, Teachers/staff members, Compliance/regulations, Law, Time limitations, and Resource limitations. *Figure 13* lists the frequency of participants’ selections. Parents was selected by 638 participants, followed by Compliance 519, Administration at 515, Teachers/staff 509, Students 495, Resource limitations 398, Law 387, and Time Limitations at 379. *Figure 13* graphically presents these data.

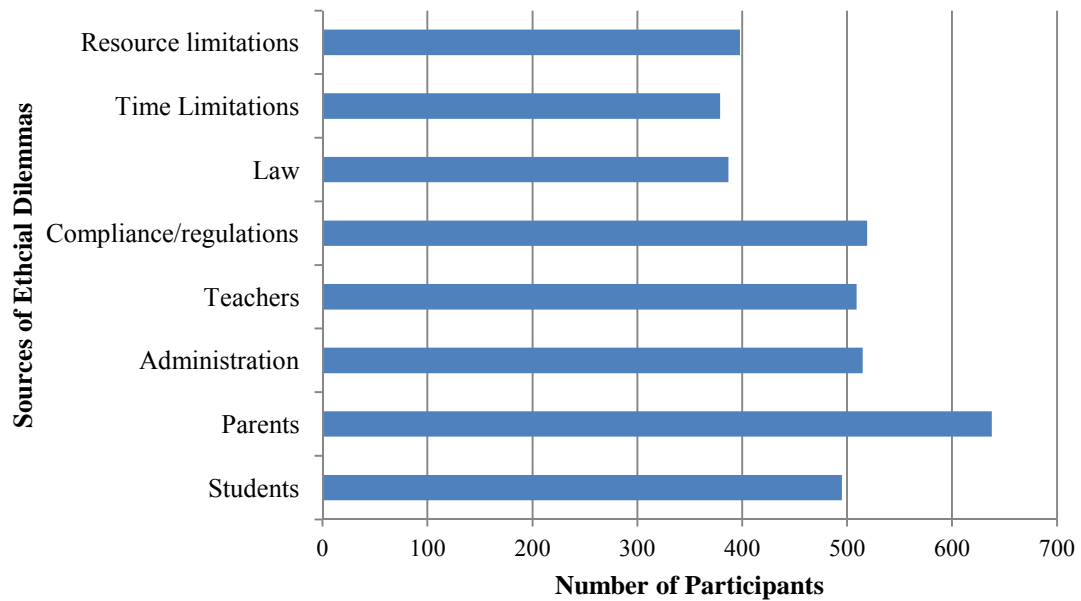


Figure 13. Significant sources of ethical dilemmas.

Additional time discussing ethical dilemmas. Survey question fifteen asked participants to indicate if they felt that more time should be spent discussing ethical dilemmas in their department or school. Participants were asked to indicate Yes or No. They were not asked to qualify in what manner this might take place. Approximately 71% ($n = 509$) of the participants reported that more time should be spent discussing ethical dilemmas within their department. Twenty-nine percent ($n = 210$) responded that more time should not be spent discussing ethics within their department. A one sample chi-square test was conducted to assess whether participants felt that more time should be spent discussing ethical dilemmas within their department or school. The

results were significant $\chi^2(1, N = 719) = 124.341, p = 000$, indicating an overall difference among responses.

Research question 4: group dynamics and ethical dilemmas. The final question addressed the extent to which participants rely on others for guidance when faced with an ethical dilemma. In addition, participants were asked if their reliance on personal values or professional codes changes within the group dynamic. These questions were designed to probe for possible inconsistencies in how personal values and professional codes are used in individual versus cooperative settings.

Consultation with colleagues. Survey question sixteen asked participants to report how often they consult with colleagues, specifically when faced with an ethical dilemma. Response options included: Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Often, and Always. Table 8 displays the percentages of participants' responses. Respondents chose Often with the highest percentage at 40%, with Sometimes at 32%, Always (21%), Rarely (7%), and Never (<1.0%).

A one sample chi-square test was conducted to determine the extent to which participants consult colleagues before making a decision regarding an ethical dilemma. The results of the test were significant $\chi^2(4, N = 719) = 384.303, p = 000$, indicating an overall difference among responses. A follow up chi-square analysis across the responses Sometimes with Rarely was conducted and yielded a significant difference, $\chi^2(1, N = 280) = 118.300, p = 000$. Additionally, a follow up chi-square analysis across the responses Sometimes versus Often was conducted, yielding a significant difference, $\chi^2(1, N = 515) = 5.454, p = .020$.

Table 8

Consultation When Negotiating Ethical Dilemmas

		<i>N</i>	Percent
Valid	Never	6	.8
	Rarely	49	6.7
	Sometimes	231	31.5
	Often	284	38.7
	Always	149	20.3
	Total	719	98.1
Missing	System	14	1.9
Total		733	100.0

Challenging decisions and code dominance. After asking participants about consultation, survey questions seventeen and eighteen asked participants if they challenge decisions that conflict with their personal values when operating in a group dynamic. Lastly, participants were asked to indicate if their personal values or professional code of ethics dominate their decisions within a group setting as opposed to when they decide alone.

Participants were given five options when asked about challenging decisions and their personal values. The choices included: Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Often, and Always. Sometimes was chosen by 55% of the participants, followed by Often (24%), Rarely (15%), Always (4%), and finally Never (2%). Table 9 shows percentages of responses made by the participants.

A one sample chi-square test was conducted to determine how likely the participants are to challenge decisions that oppose their personal values when in a group setting. The results of the test were significant $\chi^2(4, N = 722) = 678.942, p = 000$, indicating an overall difference among responses. A follow up chi-square analysis across levels of Sometimes with Rarely was conducted and yielded a significant difference, $\chi^2(1, N = 510) = 162.635, p = 000$. Additionally, a second follow up chi-square analysis across levels of Sometimes with Often was conducted, also yielding a significant difference, $\chi^2(1, N = 572) = 89.294, p = 000$.

Table 9

Challenging Decisions and Personal Value Conflicts

		<i>N</i>	Percent
Valid	Never	13	1.8
	Rarely	111	15.2
	Sometimes	399	54.5
	Often	173	23.6
	Always	26	3.6
	Total	722	98.6
Missing	System	10	1.4
Total		732	100.0

The final survey question probed participants for differences in personal and professional code dominance when addressing ethical dilemmas in a group setting as

opposed to when participants decide alone. Options for response included Personal or Professional. Professional was selected by 65% of the participants ($n = 471$), while Personal was 35% ($n = 250$). These data are almost identical to those found in relation to personal or professional code dominance when participants decide alone.

A one sample chi-square test was conducted to assess whether personal or professional codes tend to dominate the decision-making process within the group setting. The results of the test were significant $\chi^2(1, N = 721) = 67.74, p = .000$, indicating an overall difference among responses.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Summary of Research Findings

In order to probe special education case managers for perceptions and awareness of various aspects of ethics and decision-making, participants were asked to respond to a series of questions through a web-based survey. The survey was distributed to 10,000 randomly sampled participants via e-mail on two separate occasions. Approximately 730 participants completed the survey. Findings were reported by research question and corresponding sub sections of the survey. These included:

RQ1: Preparedness,

RQ2: Personal Values and Professional Codes of Ethics,

RQ3 & 5: Ethical Dilemmas, and

RQ4: Group Dynamics and Ethical Dilemmas.

Research question one focused on case manager pre-service training and preparedness when encountering and dealing with ethical dilemmas. It also explored how case managers might be better trained and supported in the field. Lastly, participants were asked to indicate their knowledge of usage of professional codes of ethics, such as the code developed by the Council for Exceptional Children.

Findings for research question one show that the majority of participants received formal training on ethics (66%), yet less than 10% stated that they were Well prepared. Almost 35% of the respondents were Not at all or Poorly prepared. During pre-service training, the most commonly selected method of training was through Discussions in

other classes (66%) rather than through a formal class on ethics. Regarding possible ways of helping case managers to become better trained to address ethical dilemmas, Professional development was the highest selected preferred option (66%). Lastly, while the majority of the participants claimed that they were Somewhat knowledgeable of professional codes of ethics, almost 50% stated that they Never or Rarely refer to them.

A one sample chi-square test was conducted for each question. Results indicated that overall, the differences among responses were statistically significant with regard to receiving pre-service training in ethics, reported levels of preparedness, knowledge of professional codes of ethics, as well as how often participants refer to them when faced with ethical dilemmas in the field. Additionally, a two-way contingency table analysis was conducted in order to determine if pre-service instruction had a statistically significant relationship among responses to questions involving preparedness, knowledge of professional codes of ethics, code dominance, and colleague consultation. Results indicated that Preparedness, professional code knowledge, and colleague consultation were found to be statistically significant.

Research question two focused on the interplay between personal values and professional codes of ethics. Participants were asked to indicate the most significant sources of their personal value development, whether or not personal values conflict with their professional code of ethics, and which of the two tends to dominate when making a decision. Of the sources given, Education, Family, and Religion were the most important. Only Friends and Politics were selected by fewer than 50% of the participants. The majority of the participants reported that personal values and professional codes do

conflict, and when decisions have to be made when faced with an ethical dilemma, professional codes dominate over personal values.

Overall, a statistically significant difference among responses was determined through a one sample chi-square test for questions regarding personal and professional code conflict as well as which of the two dominates the decision-making process when faced with an ethical dilemma. A two-way contingency table analysis was conducted to determine if there was a statistically significant association among code dominance and preparedness, frequency of referring to professional codes of ethics, code conflict, and colleague consultation. Results indicated that there was a statistically significant relationship between code dominance and preparedness as well as frequency of referring to professional codes of ethics.

Research questions three and five were reported together as the sources of ethical dilemmas are a key factor in understanding and explaining how ethical dilemmas is defined. The most commonly reported sources by participants are Parents, Administration, Compliance/regulations, and Teachers. All of the choices were selected as an important source by the majority of the participants.

The majority of case managers reported that more time should be spent within their department or school discussing ethical dilemmas. Over 70% of the participants stated that they feel that additional time discussing ethics would be beneficial. According to the Pearson's Chi Square Test, there is a statistically significant difference among responses.

By defining the term *ethical dilemma* in an open-ended format, participants provided rich information that yielded five main themes after the researcher coded the data. The themes included: Conflict, Mandatory choice, Oppositional values, Consequence uncertainty, and Compromised values. The data do not provide a precise definition of the term, but rather highlight key elements that were commonly reported. Each theme is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5.

Lastly, Research question four sought to deepen awareness of how case managers operate within a group dynamic as opposed to acting alone when dealing with an ethical dilemma. Approximately 60% of the participants reported that they Often or Always consult others when they encounter a dilemma. When deciding with others, case managers also reported that their Professional codes dominate (65%), similar to when they operate alone. However, when group decisions were in conflict with their personal values, only 17% of the respondents reported that they Never or Rarely challenge these decisions. Even though professional codes dominate, personal values remain important to the case manager when he or she operates in a group setting. For all three questions within the Group Dynamic and Ethical Dilemma section, the differences among responses were statistically significant according to the Pearson's Chi Square Test.

Chapter 4 presented descriptive and inferential statistics that were generated from questions designed to probe multiple areas of ethics and decision-making for special education case managers in the field. Each research question was addressed by multiple survey questions. The significance of the findings for each question by corresponding survey section is discussed in Chapter 5.

Introduction

This study used a web-based survey protocol to explore perceptions that case managers have about their use of personal values and professional codes of ethics when faced with ethical dilemmas in the field of special education. Specific attention was paid to the indirect leadership role of case manager. Chapter 4 reported descriptive data on participant's gender, race, age, level of education, assigned grade level, areas of licensure, case manager status, years of case management experience, and the number of students on their caseload. Inferential statistics were also reported on preparedness, personal and professional codes, ethical dilemmas, as well as ethical dilemmas and group dynamics.

Based on the results from one sample chi-square tests, differences among responses for each of the questions within the subscales were found to be statistically significant. Additionally, a two-way contingency table analysis was used to explore the relationship between code dominance and pre-service instruction on multiple factors within subscales. Pre-service ethics instruction and code dominance was a primary focus of this study, as significant gaps exist within the literature.

The relationship between pre-service ethics instruction and preparedness, knowledge of professional codes of ethics, and the frequency of colleague consultation were found to be statistically significant. Additionally, the relationship between code dominance and preparedness, as well as the frequency of referring to professional codes of ethics, were also found to be statistically significant. Specific aspects of significance

related to pre-service ethics training and code dominance are considered throughout the discussion.

Chapter 5 explores the significance of the findings reported in Chapter 4. The discussion is organized according to survey subsection. Chapter 5 concludes with a discussion of the study's significance, limitations, as well as recommendations for future research.

Case Manager Profile

The demographic information presented in Chapter 4 regarding the general characteristics of a case manager is beneficial for several reasons. First, no profile for special education case managers available. Establishing a profile may guide special education recruiters and higher education coordinators in making more informed decisions about how to increase the number of special educators. In addition to improving recruitment, this profile may address the problem of underrepresentation of certain groups within the teaching corps. The sample showed a significant underrepresentation of males, and people of various races and ethnicities. Additionally, underrepresentation in certain age groups is worthy of attention.

Based on the data, the profile for the *typical* special education case manager is a Caucasian female, between the ages of 35 to 40 years old. The case manager has earned a Master's degree, and is licensed in the areas of Emotional and Learning Disabilities. The grade levels at which he or she works is evenly distributed between Elementary and Secondary levels.

A particular area of importance is related to the reported age groups represented in the data. Sixteen percent of the participants are between the ages of 20-30, which reflects that they are still in the early stage of their careers. The majority of participants are between the ages of 31-50, which might typically be considered the mid-career age range. Finally, over 37% of respondents are over 51 years of age, which suggests that they are nearing the retirement age. These demographics demonstrate that the number of special educators nearing retirement is considerably higher than special educators who are in the beginning stage of their career. A possible implication based on this is that the field of special education may be facing a shortage of experienced teachers and case managers if careful attention is not paid to these trends. These and other considerations might provide researchers with possible areas of inquiry in an effort to increase participation and diversity in special education preparation programs.

Research question 1: preparedness.

When entering the field, special educators must have a diverse skill set that will support them as they begin working with students with special needs. Knowledge increases and deepens over time through experience and by participating in continuing education opportunities. Pre-service programs train special educators in several key areas including; understanding various disabilities, evidenced-based interventions, differentiation of curricula, etc. However, technical skills and evidenced-based practice instruction does not prepare special educators to address the myriad of complexities and pressures that they face on a regular basis. In their overview of special education and ethics, Paul, French, and Cranston-Gingras (2001) state that graduate programs in special

education lack a clear focus on ethical issues, and that they rely too heavily on internships and classroom discussions that emerge randomly. Other disciplines, such as psychology and medicine, incorporate ethics instruction in a more formal manner into training programs, whereas many special education preparation programs do not. The findings in this study reveal that this is still a current trend in the field of special education.

The pressures that case managers encounter come from both internal and external sources. Externally, these include parents, administration, laws, regulations, and other staff members. Internally, pressures often arise from faith, education, social, and familial sources. These internal and external pressures often compete for attention, and potentially place the special education case manager at a point of indecision, confusion, and angst about the best course of action to take in order to resolve an ethical dilemma (Howe and Miramontes, 1992). For the special education case manager, the question is not a matter of *if* ethical dilemmas will arise, but rather, *when* they will arise.

Survey section one, Preparedness, asked participants to respond to several questions targeting pre-service training and preparedness. First, they were asked how prepared they were in order to negotiate ethical dilemmas based on their pre-service training. Categories included Well, Adequately, Poorly, and Not at all. Only 9.7% of the participants reported that they were Well prepared. A higher percentage of the participants reported that they were either Not at all prepared, or Poorly prepared (34%). Over half of the participants stated that they were Adequately prepared (56%). These findings indicate that over 90% of the participants reported that they entered into the field lacking necessary training to some extent. Overall, participants were not prepared well

enough to address ethical dilemmas in the field with a high degree of confidence based on their training. Findings also indicate that overall differences among responses are statistically significant.

Second, participants were asked if they received formal training on ethics in their pre-service programs by selecting Yes or No. The majority of the participants (65.5%) stated that they had received formal training prior to entering the field. Findings indicate that overall differences among responses are statistically significant.

A follow up question asked the participants to select the means by which they received ethics training during their pre-service preparation from a list of responses. Choices included Class on ethics, Discussions in other classes regarding the topic of ethics, Internships, and Conferences. The highest percentage selected was Discussion in other classes regarding ethics (66.3%), with Class on ethics at 33.6%, Conferences at 22.7%, and Internships with 13.8%. Based on this information, it can be inferred that most of the participants gained indirect instruction about how to address ethical dilemmas from interaction or assignments in other classes whose primary focus was not ethics instruction and guidance. This supports the findings from Paul, French, and Cranston-Gingras (2001), who claim that a significant amount of ethics training comes from informal classroom discussions. These discussions may primarily focus on topics such as disability awareness and advocacy, legal and compliance issues, as well as education policy and reform. Regardless, only a third of the participants received formal ethics instruction in a class specifically dedicated to the topic.

When considering these descriptive statistics, several trends emerge from the data. Given that only 9.7% reported that they were Well prepared, and 65.5% stated that they received some degree of formal training in ethics, it appears that the extent of training in ethics may not be sufficient enough to prepare participants to address ethical dilemmas. However, a positive aspect of the findings regarding how participants were trained did emerge. Fourteen percent of the participants gained knowledge on ethical deliberation through internships, and twenty three percent through conferences. This is promising in that the topic of ethics and decision-making is spreading across many domains of learning within the pre-service programs. Through classes on ethics, discussions in other classes, conferences, and internships, participants received some form of training, either directly or indirectly.

However, it remains highly problematic that less than 10% of the participants felt that they were well prepared to deal with ethical dilemmas once in the field. Bon and Bigbee (2011) claim that “the ability to scaffold a system for articulating ethical issues is a professional skill that is vital to the decision-making process” (p. 355). It is highly unreasonable to expect that special education case managers are able to enter the field and negotiate ethical dilemmas without having established a basic but strong foundation for negotiating ethical challenges.

The transition from pre-service preparation to placement in a school system is not a standardized process across colleges and universities. While some function as student-teachers and then become employees in the same district, not all pre-service programs assist in placing and transitioning them into the school system. Future employees must

then seek out positions in the field. Once disconnected from their pre-service program, how special education case managers continue to deepen their ethical knowledge and awareness varies from district to district. This study sought to gain insight into what participants feel would help them in terms of ongoing training in ethics and ethical dilemma negotiation.

In order to explore this gap in the literature, participants were asked to choose what they consider to be beneficial from a list of continuing education opportunities. The options included: Professional development, Committee on ethics, Develop a school-wide code of ethics, Develop a departmental code of ethics, Taking a course on ethics, and Attend a conference on ethics. Only professional development was selected by the majority of the participants (60%). The other options fell at or below 40%. The least selected was Taking a course on ethics at 14%. It is not surprising that 60% of the participants selected professional development, as these opportunities tend to focus on current trends in research and practice. It is typically more focused on integrating the material into the instructional setting or improving skills that are currently being used by the educational professional receiving the training.

In addition, professional development opportunities are designed with the needs of the school or division in mind, thus focusing on site-based concerns. The majority of the participants (63.9%) reported that more time should be spent discussing ethics and ethical dilemmas. Howe (1986) claims that successfully learning and teaching ethics requires developing the ability to critically reflect. Critical reflection is stimulated by “things such as values-clarification experiences” (p. 10). Based on the data, a high

percentage of participants felt that professional development opportunities would benefit them as they seek to deepen their ethical knowledge and ability to reflect on how they face dilemmas in the field.

Several data points regarding the selection of Formal classes on ethics are worth noting as they relate to preparedness. As previously mentioned, only 14.2% of the participants felt that taking a class on ethics after entering the field would improve their ability to address ethical dilemmas. Approximately 34% of the participants received formal training in their pre-service program through a dedicated class on ethics, and less than 10% of the participants reported that they were Well prepared to address ethical dilemmas. Findings indicate that the relationship between pre-service ethics training and preparedness once in the field was statistically significant. The proportion of those who reported that they received ethics training and who are Adequately or Well prepared was significantly higher than those who reported that they did not receive ethics training.

However, once in the field, case managers did not feel that a class dedicated to the formal study of ethics would be the best way to increase their ethical deliberation skills. The two most frequently selected options by case managers for potentially improving their skills were Professional development opportunities (60.4%) and Conferences (40.4%). Conferences and professional development opportunities might be comparable options for improving ethical skills as they expose case managers to current and useful information that is related to their area of interest or expertise. Case managers can then apply this information to their own practice as necessary. Case managers did not report

that they were reluctant to take a formal class on ethics, but overall, it was not the most frequently selected option.

A final component of preparedness that also focused on case managers' perceptions once in the field was the level of knowledge and the frequency of referencing professional codes of ethics in the field. Findings indicate that for both questions, differences among responses were statistically significant. As previously discussed, professional codes of ethics are not meant to function as a template for behavior and decision-making. They do, however, point the decision-maker toward a means for considering how decisions are made, and the standards that are recognized by professional communities (Campbell, 1997; 2004). They function as a guide, rather than a list of rules and regulations. Of benefit, therefore, is an awareness of case managers' knowledge of them and the extent to which they use them in practice.

First, participants were asked to select their level of knowledge of professional codes, such as the code established by the Council for Exceptional Children. Sixty-three percent claimed that they were Somewhat knowledgeable. The percentages of participants who responded that they were Not at all or Very knowledgeable were evenly divided (19% and 18% respectively). That almost 20% reported that they were Not at all knowledgeable of them is significant, given that advocacy groups and special education agencies are widely known throughout the national, state, and local school systems. Additionally, they are widely discussed in special education training programs. This confirms findings from Fiedler and Van Haren (2008), who report that 18.2% of their survey respondents ($n = 624$) claimed no knowledge of the CEC's code of ethics.

Similarly, they also report that almost 12% reported substantial knowledge, whereas the present study showed 18%. Fiedler and Van Haren urge special education leaders “to develop expertise and comfort in engaging in systematic ethical decision-making that is informed by professional ethical codes and standards for professional practice, such as that promulgated by the CEC” (p.13). The need for increased awareness and reliance on them remains important in order to assist case managers as they encounter ethical dilemmas.

Equally alarming is the low percentage of participants who report that they are Very knowledgeable about professional codes of ethics. With only 18% at a Very knowledgeable level, it is likely that these and other professional codes of ethics are not having the desired impact on special education personnel. Knowing if case managers became aware of them before or after entering the field might be helpful to those who design and plan pre-service programs. Increased emphasis on professional codes of ethics during training and beyond may improve the case managers’ level of preparedness and comfort when dealing with ethical dilemmas in the field. Fiedler and Van Haren (2008) explain that because the field of special education is filled with ethical dilemmas, special education leaders must “learn and apply the relevant ethical standards” (p. 2).

Case managers were then asked to report how often they refer to professional codes of ethics when addressing an ethical dilemma. This question attempted to target the frequency of usage rather than knowledge of them. The frequency of their usage in practice may be a stronger indicator of the importance that they hold for case managers as they make difficult decisions. The literature on how often the CEC’s professional code of

ethics is used is limited. In the earliest study that focused on the frequency of its usage, Cobb and Horn (1989) report that 87% of their survey respondents ($n = 330$) did not have a copy of the code and never referred to them when making decisions. In the present study, nearly 47% of respondents claim that they Never or Rarely refer to them when negotiating an ethical dilemma. While this shows a positive trend in usage, it is concerning that nearly half of the participants do not use them. The improvement may be explained by the increase in technology usage over the past 20 years, thus allowing case managers greater access to information to materials provided by advocacy groups and agencies. However, only 22% Often or Always refer to them, with slightly over 30% stating that they Sometimes refer to them. Jacob and Hartshorne (2003) claimed that one of the key competencies for educational leaders is having a thorough knowledge of professional codes of ethics. A lack of knowledge in this area limits the ability of the decision-maker to effectively negotiate ethical dilemmas.

These percentages must be viewed in light of the fact that almost 20% of the participants reported that they are Not at all aware of the codes. Due to the fact that a high percentage of participants (47%) reported that they Never or Rarely use them requires careful consideration as it reflects an already decreased percentage of the participants. Of those who have knowledge (80%), almost half of them Never or Rarely refer to them. Reybold (2008) stated that in order to understand and make decisions about ethical dilemmas, the decision-maker must understand their professional guidelines. Without this understanding, the individual is often “left to rely on personal standards of integrity when faced with ethical dilemmas” (p. 280). It is evident that the reliance on and

relative importance of these codes in the field is not significant enough. The impact that this has on future theoretical, practical, and research considerations will be discussed below.

Research question 2: personal values and professional codes of ethics.

Helton and Ray (2005) suggest that in order to better understand how educational professionals should react and respond to ethical dilemmas, several key questions must be explored. They ask, “How aware are practitioners of ethical codes and how do they use them? How do personal values interact with the requirements of ethical codes as practitioners reason and make choices about ethical dilemmas?” (p. 64). It is the ethic of the profession that provides a model for understanding how this occurs in practice. The model considers the role that both personal values and professional codes play in this process. They interact to provide guidance for the educational leader as they attempt to safeguard the student’s best interests (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2005).

The multiple paradigm model, however, does not presuppose that personal values and professional codes only function as competing forces. Personal values can co-exist with professional values as they interact within the decision-maker. Bon and Bigbee (2011) found that there is an integral relationship between personal values and professional codes (p. 345). However, the model allows each to be considered separately when ethical dilemmas exist.

According to Shapiro and Gross (2008), the ethic of the profession as a framework for addressing ethical dilemmas raises certain questions about and for the decision-maker. The first question that they pose is, “What are the personal and

professional codes of an educational leader?” Second, given the existence of an ethical dilemma, they ask, “What is the appropriate way for a professional to act in this particular situation?” (p. 7). By investigating not only the sources that impact the development of personal codes, but also whether personal values or professional codes dominate the decision-making process, researchers and practitioners will be able to understand and apply the multiple paradigm model with greater depth and accuracy.

While it is not possible to list every source when considering the sources that make up an individual’s set of personal values, several domains are recognized in the literature. Cranston, et al. (2003) developed a matrix for understanding how values compete when school leaders make decisions. They listed five key areas for categorizing values. Each includes multiple sub-sections. The categories included: academic, political, professional, societal, and spiritual. The present study modified the categories in order to provide more familiar terms for the participants. The options included: family, religion, education, cultural, friends, and politics. The researcher chose to separate family and friends as standalone source options. The professional category was replaced by education as the focus of this study emphasized pre-service training and experiences.

Storey and Beeman (2009) report that participants had difficulty identifying specific sources that impact their personal values when making decisions. When provided with a written matrix, which listed examples under each category, i.e. societal included ethnic group, friends, relatives, community, etc., participants were able to provide specific answers. Interestingly, the researchers report that by allowing them to see a list of examples and providing time to reflect on their experiences, participants were able to

make connections and form a framework for discussing their values in relation to the decisions that they make. They began to create a language around the topic of ethics and decision-making for the first time.

Findings from the current study substantiate results from Storey and Beeman (2009) regarding the significance that specific values have on decision-making. Storey and Beeman report that faith, family, and early education were the most significant influences on value formation and decision-making. In the present study, education, family, and religion were the most commonly selected sources that formed the case managers' personal values. Storey and Beeman listed faith as the strongest of the three. The present study found that education was the highest (90%).

Knowing how personal values are formed is critical so that individuals can analyze their own patterns within the decision-making process, articulate to others how and why they support certain actions, and help others to increase their ability to self-reflect. After seeking information on how case managers form their personal values, they were then asked to reflect on how their personal values and professional codes of ethics interact. At the heart of the multiple ethical paradigm lies the student's best interest. The ethic of the profession presents personal values and professional codes of ethics as two forces that inform the decision-maker as he or she attempts to uphold this goal.

The first question which sought to explore the interaction between personal values and professional codes of ethics asked participants to report the frequency of code opposition. The majority of the participants reported that they do not conflict (62%). When asked which of the two dominates their decision-making process when faced with

an ethical dilemma, 64% of the participants reported that their professional code of ethics dominates. Results for both questions are almost identical. On initial consideration, it may appear that these results are somewhat contradictory. However, the first question is pre-conditional to the second. As previously stated, personal values and professional codes of ethics do not always compete. They can be aligned. When they do conflict, as evidenced by the recognition that an ethical dilemma is present, professional codes of ethics tend to dominate the decision-making process.

A possible explanation as to why the majority of participants reported that personal values and professional codes do not conflict might be connected to the how personal values were formed. Participants listed Education as the most important source when considering personal value formation. For 90% of the participants, education was the most significant influence on their personal value formation. Professional codes of ethics in an educational setting are more likely to be embraced by those who hold education in such high regard. The results of this study show that they are clearly aligned.

Storey and Beeman (2009) recommend that future researchers study the alignment of personal values to those of schools. While the present study did not ask participants to reflect on their particular school while answering the survey questions, several connections can be made. Almost 38% of the participants reported that their personal values were not aligned with their professional codes of ethics. It may be unreasonable to expect that every educational leader's values are aligned with the current professional codes of ethics, but reducing this is worthy of future attention. The same can be stated about the fact that almost 36% of the respondents reported that their personal codes

dominated when faced with a dilemma. If this percentage steadily decreases over time, it may be an indicator that professional codes are more closely aligned with the personal values of those who lead others within the schools, more so than they do now.

Research question 3 and 5: ethical dilemmas.

When reviewing the literature on the topic of ethics and ethical dilemmas, results were limited in terms of explaining and defining ethical dilemmas from the perspective of special education teachers and leaders. The term *ethical dilemma* is commonly used, but poorly defined within the context of special education or educational leadership.

Examples of ethical dilemmas are commonly presented through case studies that are based on previous incidents or hypothetical situations. It remains difficult, however, to improve a person's ability to negotiate ethical dilemmas without experiencing them. Howe and Miramontes (1992) discuss the major external pressures that contribute to internal conflicts, or dilemmas, in the field of education, yet what is lacking is a clear understanding of what sets these conflicts up from the perspective of the special education leader.

The perspective of the case manager provides a unique window into the conflict process as he or she guides the student and the other team members through the life of special education service delivery; from initial evaluation to the implementation of services. They interact with administration, teachers, family, outside agencies, para-professionals, and a host of others who are a part of the student's IEP team. Research questions 3 and 5 sought to gather data on both the reported sources of conflict as well as to provide a more concrete awareness of what an ethical dilemma is from the perspective

of the special education case manager. These questions explore the language of ethical dilemmas. This, in turn, will give researchers, practitioners, as well as higher education faculty members a framework for future discussion and training.

The framework for considering the sources or potential causes of ethical dilemmas from Howe and Miramontes (1992) is used to scaffold the discussion. The authors did not prioritize the sources in terms of significance of impact, but categorized them into three major areas of importance. While this will be discussed in more detail when considering the definitions of ethical dilemmas, a basic understanding about the role that personal values and professional codes of ethics have in the ethical dilemma negotiation process is worthy of attention.

The areas outlined by Howe and Miramontes interact with personal values and professional codes to create a conflict that many participants report as being as an ethical dilemma. The discussion of the sources assumes that the dilemma occurs when these intersect. For example, a dilemma may occur when a case manager considers how the law interacts with their personal values. This intersection will be explored in greater detail.

The three major sources of conflict outlined by Howe and Miramontes (1992) include: public policy, institutional demands and constraints, and students and parents as sources of obligation. The survey listed eight choices for participants to select as possible sources of an ethical dilemma. Participants were not asked to rank them on order of frequency or severity, but to select all that contribute. In addition, the survey did not ask participants to describe how these sources interact with one another. It is probable that some exist simultaneously to cause conflicts. As reflected in Table 10, each of the eight

choices falls under the categories listed by Howe and Miramontes. Public policy includes compliance/regulations and laws, as well as time and resource limitations; Institutional demands and constraints contains teachers and administration; and student and parents as sources of obligation is represented by students and student's parents or guardians.

When considered individually, the most commonly selected source of ethical dilemmas was parents, followed by administration, compliance, teachers, students, resource limitations, law, and time limitations. Using the categories provided by Howe and Miramontes (1992) as a grouping framework, students and parents was most reported at 76%, with institutional demands at 71%, and public policy at 58%.

Given the significant attention surrounding the No Child Left Behind Act (2001), the reauthorization of the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (2004), as well as the tremendous impact that special education laws have on case managers (Bon & Bigbee 2011), it is noteworthy that laws received the second lowest individual percentage at 53%, with limited time resources only slightly lower at 52%. Careful examination of the data, however, shows that compliance, listed separately on the survey, was reported by 71% of the participants as a source of conflict. These results indicate that case managers may view special education laws and compliance as two distinct sources of potential conflict, with compliance being higher in terms of their ability to impact decisions.

Table 10

Sources of Ethical Dilemmas for Case Managers

Sources of Ethical Dilemmas	Participant Response
<i>Howe & Miramontes</i>	<i>Survey Subtopics for Sources of Ethical Dilemmas</i>
Public Policy:	Compliance/regulations and laws; time and resource limitations 58%
Institutional Demands & Constraints:	Teachers, administration 71%
Students/Parents as Sources of Obligation:	Students, parents or guardians 76%

Examining the distribution of reported percentages of sources across the three categories reveals that the participants consider each to be significant contributors to creating conflict in their role as case manager. No particular category, including the individual choices represented by each of the three categories, are under-represented. While Parents, Administration, Compliance, and Teachers were all selected by over 70% of the participants, the lowest, Time limitations, was still chosen by over 50% of the participants.

As the findings show that all sources are regarded as important, no particular category should receive more emphasis than the other. Each source of conflict must be considered when developing strategies to help case managers to negotiate ethical

dilemmas. Surveys that focus on a particular state or region might yield more specific results as to the needs of the area in which the research is conducted. What is important to note is that based on these data, all potential sources of conflict are worthy of consideration when preparing future special education leaders.

Although they are not extensively documented through research, enough evidence exists to provide direction for understanding the major sources of conflict that special education leaders must address in the field (Bon & Bigbee, 2011; Bays & Crockett, 2007; Howe & Miramontes, 1992). Based on a series of focus group interviews, Bon and Bigbee (2011) report that special education case managers are particularly impacted by sources of conflict such as adherence to compliance/law, administrative directives, and employment security. These primary conflicts, then, disrupt the case manager's ability to make decisions that are in the best interest of the child. When exploring the data for themes, it became evident in the current study that a primary focus for case managers was attempting to make decisions made in the student's best interest. What also became clear is that while attempting to uphold the student's best interests, the case manager experiences significant angst, and the realization that no solution is optimal becomes clear.

In addition to clarifying the sources of conflict, a significant area of need is establishing a better understanding of the term *ethical dilemma*. In order to improve this limitation in the literature, case managers were asked to define the term. No limit was placed on them in terms of length. The researcher felt that it was important to give participants the opportunity to create their own definition rather than provide one for

them. This allowed them to provide information that was not influenced by the researcher's biases or direction. Holland and Christian (2009) claim that open ended questions are particularly important as they allow respondents to answer more honestly. By not providing pre-determined examples or explanations, participants are not influenced by the researcher, and can therefore provide unbiased definitions based on their experience. Holland and Christian also claim that open-ended questions that are embedded within a web-based survey allow for lengthier and more carefully thought out answers. They state that web-based surveys can improve motivation and decrease distraction.

Using a focus group design, Bon and Bigbee (2011) asked participants to define the term *ethical dilemma*. Researchers noted during each of the sessions that the participants had significant difficulty providing a clear definition. They were able to give examples of ethical dilemmas from their own experience. As the focus group interactions progressed, case managers were able to articulate their definitions based on a shared dialogue with the other participants. However, the researchers stated that it was obvious that the task was a struggle. The need to develop language around ethics and conflict (Berkeley & Ludlow, 2008; Starrat, 1994) was further supported by these focus group interviews. Case managers in the current study were not given the opportunity to converse with one another, but were simply asked to define the term.

As reported in Chapter 4, several themes emerged from the open coding process. The themes expressed by the participants were conflict, mandatory choice, oppositional values, consequence uncertainty, and compromised values. Again, the goal of this

discussion is not to provide a set definition based on the responses, but to outline the term's key components. It is not possible to distill such a vast collection of responses into one set definition. However, being able to articulate the components is a significant step toward operationally defining the term, and enhancing how researchers use and apply it.

The first theme that emerged was the recognition by the decision-maker that a conflict existed. The conflict(s) within the ethical dilemma are of a significant nature. The central problem or issue is not one that is resolved easily. The term *dilemma* was used 160 times, *conflict* was used 130 times, and *problem* 50 times. Multiple qualifiers were used to strengthen the participant's description of the dilemma or conflict. Terms such as *complex*, *serious*, and *difficult* were used to indicate the severity of the internal struggle.

The second theme was mandatory choice. A key element of the ethical dilemma is the apparent requirement that a choice *must* be made. None of the participants expressed the option of not acting or ignoring the issue. One participant wrote that "One has to make a decision." Another expressed that "A decision must be made." Lastly, one participant claimed that ethical dilemmas are situations "which require you to make a decision." Inherent in this theme is the idea that the decision-maker must finalize his or her choice alone, or without a significant level of support. However, participants did not claim that they were unable or unwilling to consult others. At the moment of finalizing a decision, case managers report that the burden appears to rest primarily on them.

The third theme that emerged was the concept of oppositional values or forces. Once the decision-maker recognizes that a conflict exists, and that he or she must make a

choice, the decision-maker must then negotiate oppositional forces, or competing values. This phenomenon is reported across the literature (Bon & Bigbee; 2011; Storey & Beeman, 2009; Reybold, 2008; and Cranston, Ehrich, & Kimber, 2003). Many of the participants reported opposition between personal values and professional codes of ethics, morals and legal directives, differing moral imperatives, best interest of the child and institutional demands, as well as societal and personal beliefs.

The language used by the participants varied, but most of the language used around oppositional forces fit within these categories. The significance of this is the recognition that the case manager is trapped, or placed in a position of significant angst between two competing sets of values. It is also important to note that participants did not express thoughts that these competing values were able to coexist through compromise. One participant reported that the decision that must be made is “a choice between equally undesirable alternatives.” The decision that must be made is not done by *compromising*, per se, but rather by a process where certain values are *compromised*. This key distinction will be explained when addressing the theme of compromised values.

The next theme is consequence uncertainty. An important aspect of how participants defined *ethical dilemma* is that while the participants reported that values compete, or that they find themselves caught between recognizable, opposing values, the outcome is the opposite; uncertainty. The decision-maker has limited or no assurance that the student will benefit from the decision. He or she only hopes that the decision that they make will allow the student’s best interests to be safeguarded. One participant stated “There is no real answer. It is simply a matter of what one believes.” The consequence,

therefore, rests on the subjectivity of what the decision-maker feels is best in that situation, and can only hope that the result is beneficial to the child.

Another participant asked if he or she should “buck the system, take hell from administration, possibly even lose my job, or do I do what I know to be in the student’s best interest--damn the torpedoes, full steam ahead!” In this instance, unlike sending real torpedoes to a known target, the decision-maker does not have any degree of certainty that the results will be positive. However, in this participant’s case, he or she is confident that they have made the best decision that they can, given the circumstances.

The last significant theme that emerged from the definitions was the idea of compromised values. The typical understanding of the term *compromise* is that there is some measure of an agreement reached, given a conflict. Even though the outcome might be less than ideal for those involved, some sense of satisfaction typically exists among the decision-makers. *Compromised*, however, implies that something significant was lost, or diminished due to another influence. One participant stated “You know what’s right to do but to do it you must compromise something else.” The decision is not in concert with the decision-makers’ values or professional code of ethics. Another participant expressed the idea of compromised values in a unique way. Defining the term *ethical dilemma*, the participant stated that it is “a quandary about what action is least harmful to the people and institutions involved.” This participant focused on the idea of minimizing damage, rather than expressing that the outcome might be positive.

Due to the fact that some part of the personal value set or professional code are compromised, the outcome is seen as a loss, regardless of the decision. Reybold (2008)

refers to the ethic of integrity as a measure of consistency across personal values and professional ethical codes. In the participants' responses, they report that their personal values and professional ethical codes are not interwoven. While Reybold addresses the idea of integrity in terms of the entwinement of personal and professional goals, this principle speaks to the condition reported by the participants in this study. The condition of the participants' integrity within the decision-making process was not one where there was a "completeness or unity of self" (p. 289). Rather, opposing values demonstrate that there is a lack of integrity when negotiating ethical dilemmas.

Based on the themes that emerged from the definitions of *ethical dilemma*, a stable composite of the term has become clear. Each of the participant's definitions was unique, and contained subtleties that cannot be perfectly captured when generating themes based on a high number of responses. Some contained examples, and as previously mentioned, examples do not define, they describe. However, what did emerge was a set of components that describe the phenomenon. An ethical dilemma, therefore, is a situation when the decision-maker recognizes that a conflict exists, which in turn mandates that a choice must be made between two opposing values. The consequences of this choice contain a high level of uncertainty. The overall deliberation process requires that values are compromised in order to safeguard the child's best interests.

Research question 4: group dynamics and ethical dilemmas.

Many of the definitions of *ethical dilemma* express the perception that case managers report of feeling isolated when face with an ethical dilemma. Participants used language that indicated a feeling of burden, or a sense that it is primarily their

responsibility to make decisions and address the conflict on their own. Case managers appear to struggle from external demands from sources such as parents, administration, students, etc., as well as significant internal pressures. However, as case managers function as the coordinator for a student's special education services, it is important to understand how they operate in a group dynamic.

Case managers typically inform other members of the IEP team when they become aware of information relating to the student, often acting as a filter of information. For example, case managers are routinely made aware of sensitive information that might involve abuse, drug usage, court involvement, or other confidential family information. This information may come from family members, guidance counselors, other faculty, as well as outside agencies. Deciding what to share with the group might pose as dilemma, and then attempting to make educational decisions in a group setting based on this information may pose as another set of dilemmas. The dilemma itself may be further compounded when case managers debate whether or not to make others aware of these matters.

Faqua and Newman (2006) claim that the function that values have on decision-making is often found to be different when examining how individuals use values as opposed to how values are used within a group setting. They explain that "The values and virtues of individuals have direct relationships with the system's core values and essential principles" (p. 209). When they are not aligned, the individual can experience a sense of separation and isolation. Research question 4 sought to explore possible differences in how case managers function independently versus in a group setting.

Given the significant presence of conflict reported by the participants in their definitions of *ethical dilemma*, it is reasonable to assume that most would consult others for guidance and assistance when they experience an ethical dilemma. The findings support this assumption. The findings indicate that differences among responses were statistically significant. Only a small percentage of participants reported that they never or rarely consult others (7%). Over 60% of the participants indicated that they often or always consult others, with 32% claiming that they sometimes consult others. Clearly, seeking assistance from other members of the IEP team, or other educational colleagues within the school, is seen as a necessary course of action.

Faqua and Newman (2006) refer to this process as moral discourse. It is a process through which individuals work to understand how their values impact the decisions that they make, and how they fit in with the values and decisions of others. They claim that because ethical dilemmas are commonly experienced, individuals must engage in moral discourse on a regular basis. Moral discourse remains essential to the health of any organization. However, research question four did not attempt to clarify under what conditions or at what point case managers seek guidance from others. It does provide evidence that participants feel that the dialogue around ethical dilemmas is important and necessary. Findings indicate that the majority of the case managers engage in this process, and that they routinely seek others for guidance.

Although the practice of moral discourse as described by Faqua and Newman (2006) is an essential element to the health of an organization, including schools, not all group discussions result in complete agreement. Individuals bring their own personal

values, professional code awareness, and suggestions for potential actions to the group. In order to understand this process, participants were asked if they ever challenge decisions in a group setting that are in opposition with their own personal values, and if they rely more heavily on personal values or professional codes of ethics when interacting with others to resolve ethical dilemmas.

As previously discussed, the majority of the participants reported that their professional codes (64%) dominated the decision-making process over personal values (36%) when making decisions alone. Within a group dynamic, the results were almost identical. Reliance on professional codes was highest at 65%, with personal values at 35%. Virtually no change was reported based on individual and group dynamics. Both demonstrate the important role that professional codes have on participants when making decisions about ethical dilemmas, both individually and in a group. Additionally, findings indicate that overall differences among responses for each question were statistically significant. This, however, does not minimize the importance that personal values have on the decision maker in a group setting.

The importance that personal values have on participants' decisions in a group setting becomes clear when they were asked how likely they are to challenge decisions that oppose their personal values. Only 17% of the participants reported that they Never or Rarely challenge decisions that oppose their personal values. This might be explained by the fear of possible loss of job, reprimand, power dynamics within the group, self-doubt, self-interest, etc. (Bigbee & Bon, 2011; Storey & Beeman, 2009). Over 60% of the

participants claimed that they Often or Always challenge decisions that are in opposition to their personal values. The inclusion of Sometimes increases the percentage to 80%.

Given the powerful factors that often silence individuals who disagree with the group's direction, it is noteworthy that such a high percentage of the participants are willing to speak out when their personal values are challenged. However, findings indicate that the relationship between code dominance and code conflict is not statistically significant. While personal codes are highly regarded, and multiple sources are reported as significant formation influences, participants rely on their professional codes, both alone and in a group dynamic. As previously discussed, they do not appear to be in constant opposition. It is possible that the opposition that exists, especially when exploring the definitions provided by the participants, lies more in the participants' lack of a clear understanding of what their professional codes really are, rather than from tension between personal and professional codes of ethics.

Summary of the Results

Chapter 5 discussed the significance of the data collected from a national web-based survey on special education case managers' perceptions of ethics and ethical dilemmas. The survey was distributed to 10,000 randomly sampled licensed special educators across the United States. The discussion was organized by survey section and the corresponding research question(s) associated with it. Sections included Demographics, Preparedness, Personal and Professional Codes of Ethics, Ethical Dilemmas, and Group Dynamics and Ethical Dilemmas. For each section, descriptive and inferential data were discussed where appropriate.

The demographics section provided descriptive data on participants' gender, race/ethnicity, age, completed levels of education, grade level assignment, areas of licensure, case manager status, and the number of students on participants' caseload. Based on the data, a case manager profile was generated. By establishing a case manager profile, pre-service preparation program will be better equipped to address certain areas of the population that are underrepresented in the field of special education; such as males, people within the 20-30 year old age range, and individuals who represent diverse ethnic groups.

Several key elements emerged from the data on Preparedness. First, the majority of participants reported that they did receive formal ethics training throughout their pre-service training program. However, the more frequently reported means of acquiring ethics training was from discussions in other classes, not from classes specifically dedicated to the study of ethics. While the majority of the participants indicated that they felt Adequately prepared to handle ethical dilemmas based on their pre-service training, over 30% reported that they were Not at all or Poorly prepared. Differences among responses in both questions regarding receiving pre-service training and preparedness were statistically significant. Additionally, a two-way contingency table analysis revealed that there is a statistically significant relationship between pre-service ethics training and perceptions about preparedness, knowledge of professional codes, as well as personal or professional code dominance.

Case managers reported that once in the field, professional development opportunities as well as conferences are the most preferred means of acquiring additional

knowledge about ethics. Regarding the knowledge and usage of professional codes of ethics, the majority of respondents claim that they are Somewhat knowledgeable, yet fewer than 25% report that they Often or Always refer to them. The relationship between pre-service training and professional code knowledgeable was found to be significant.

Within the subscale of Personal and Professional Codes of Ethics, participants reported that Education, Family, and Religion are the main sources that make up their personal code of ethics, with Education being the most frequently reported. The majority of the participants claimed that their personal codes do not conflict with their professional ones, and that their professional codes dominate their decision-making process. Results indicate that there is no statistically significant relationship between code dominance and code conflict. Given the fact that Education was the more frequently reported source of personal value formation, this may indicate that personal and professional codes of ethics are more aligned than previously thought.

When questioning participants about their perceptions of the sources of ethical dilemmas, respondents selected parents at the highest frequency, followed by administration, compliance, teachers, students, resource limitations, law, and time limitations. Case managers also indicated that they felt that more time should be spent within their school discussing ethics. Lastly, case managers were asked to define the term *ethical dilemma*. Several themes emerged from the definitions provided by the participants. Themes that emerged include conflict, mandatory choice, oppositional values, consequence uncertainty, and compromised values. While a set definition was not established, these components were present across the definitions provided by the

respondents. This will help to diminish much of the ambiguous language used around the discussion of ethical dilemmas.

The last section, Group Dynamics and Ethical Dilemmas, explored aspects of consultation, challenging decisions that oppose personal codes, as well as code dominance within a group setting. Findings indicate that the majority of participants Often or Always consult colleagues when they are faced with an ethical dilemma. The relationship between pre-service instruction and the frequency of consulting colleagues was found to be statistically significant. Similar to the findings reported on individual code dominance, group code dominance also shows that professional codes are used over personal codes. While participants report that they are able to challenge decisions that challenge their personal codes, professional codes still dominate in the group setting. As discussed previously, it is likely that personal and professional codes are more closely aligned than previously thought.

Implications

Theoretical implications. The conceptual framework described in this study focuses on the ethic of the profession as the *pointe vierge*, or the moment when the decision-maker must decide how he or she is going to respond to a perceived crisis. When first encountering an ethical dilemma, multiple options exist for the decision-maker. Personal values and professional codes of ethics inform the decision-maker as he or she attempts to resolve the dilemma. However, decisions are typically made in haste, and often without a clear awareness of how personal values and/or professional codes of ethics interact to guide the decision-maker (Billingsley, 2007).

The current study expanded on and confirmed findings from Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005), who designed a multiple paradigm model to help educational leaders understand what ought to be considered when making difficult decisions about a student's best interest. Along with the ethics of care, critique, and justice, the ethic of the profession must be understood by the decision-maker in order to uphold the best interest of the student. As the model is more deeply explained, the student's best interest becomes a more significant focal point. By exploring how personal values and professional codes of ethics are activated, explained, and interact, this study provided clarity to the multiple paradigm model.

A secondary theoretical implication centers on the development of the language of ethics. As previously noted, language remains a significant barrier when discussing ethics, morals, values, and ethical dilemmas (Weaver, 2007; Berkeley & Ludlow, 2008; Bon & Bigbee, 2011). The fact that the language of ethics has received limited attention in research and remains largely ambiguous in terms of its usage in the literature limits the ability of explanatory frameworks such as the multiple paradigm model to be used more effectively by researchers and practitioners. First, the current study provided valuable data on the sources of personal values. Second, participants helped to develop a better understanding of the components of an ethical dilemma. Theoretical improvements may come from being able to shift awareness toward specific components of an ethical dilemma based on the findings. Future models will have the potential to guide researchers or practitioners based on an improved ability to break down and understand the ethical dilemma process.

Practical implications. One of the key components of the current study was investigating case managers' levels of preparedness based on pre-service training when negotiating ethical dilemmas. Participants were asked to respond to questions about their perceived level of preparedness, the methods of formal training that they received, what might help them to deepen their ability to address ethical dilemmas in the field. In addition, they indicated their level of knowledge and use of professional codes of ethics. The literature calls for a deeper exploration into how special education leaders are prepared to address ethical dilemmas and moral challenges in the field (Paul, French & Cranston-Gingras, 2001; Haughey, 2007; Berkeley & Ludlow, 2008; and Fiedler & Van Haren; 2008).

Haughey (2007) states that institutions, by design, ought to do more to facilitate the learning and discussion of the ethical dimensions in education. He writes, "Institutional support for students and instructors in trying to grapple with the challenges of accepting and responding to the ethical issues they face is critical" (p. 146). Results from this study may guide institutions of higher learning when designing programs that emphasize exposing future special education case managers to formal ethics training prior to entering into the field. It is clear based on the data that the majority of the participants received some kind of formally trained, yet less than 10% were well trained to negotiate ethical dilemmas. Without attention and improvement, the lack of preparedness will remain a significant barrier for those who attempt to uphold the student's best interest.

Additionally, once students leave their pre-service training program, it is vital that district level staff members within school divisions help them to develop their ethical knowledge and ability to handle complex challenges and decisions. Based on the data, continuing education centered around professional development opportunities in ethics, conferences on ethics, and developing a school wide professional code of ethics should be considered in order to improve preparedness once special education leaders are placed in the field. Findings in this study show that there is a significant relationship between pre-service training and preparedness. Therefore, attention must be made in both pre-service and post-training settings in order to more fully support case managers.

Lastly, as nearly 50% of the participants reported that they never or rarely refer to professional codes of ethics, educational agencies, advocacy groups, and other disability organizations ought to explore better ways to expand awareness, access, and the use of professional codes of ethics. Campbell (2001) claims that the principles that make up professional codes of ethics should be so deeply engrained into who we are and what we do, that we no longer need to refer to these codes. Ethical codes cannot be imposed or forced. However, these codes begin this internalization process as *guides*. Much like a map for an explorer; with time and knowledge that is based on experience, the map may no longer necessary.

Research Implications. The current study extends previous research across several areas of inquiry with regard to personal values formation and how they interact with professional codes, language ambiguity, preparedness, and the sources of ethical

dilemmas faced by special education case managers. A deeper awareness and understanding was gained in each of these domains of ethical investigation.

In addition to extending previous research in a more comprehensive manner based on these areas of inquiry, the current study provides researchers with data that is generalizable across the national special education community. The current study is the most widely distributed survey to date that focuses on ethics in the field of special education. While similar studies have been conducted in more limited scope, both qualitative and quantitative, the current study involves a larger number of participants from multiple states and school districts.

Limitations of the Study

Several limitations became evident throughout the course of the study. While it has been noted that using a survey as a method of data collection is widely accepted and valid as long as the instrument is well designed, the survey is distributed to a meaningful number of participants in a given population, as well as other considerations, the following limitations require consideration:

1. Survey design/access: Although the survey was field tested and informed by previous research (Bon & Bigbee, 2011), no survey is perfectly designed. During the data collection process, several participants sent correspondence to the researcher with suggestions for improvement. Considerations of length and the time required to complete the survey is worthy of future attention. Access to the survey is also a potential limitation. When consulting with staff members at Market Data Retrieval (MDR), a reported limitation for all web-based survey

research is designing the e-mail in a manner that reduces delivery blockage by e-mail filters. Strategies were used based on survey tracking statistics, but no strategy can ensure that all e-mails avoid filtering;

2. Response rate: The survey was sent to 10,000 randomly sampled participants throughout the United States. Approximately 730 completed surveys were submitted. While this study is the first national study to investigate how special education case managers respond to questions regarding ethics, the response rate was lower than anticipated. Findings from this study may be somewhat limited in terms of the researcher's ability to make generalizations across the population. Increased efforts to improve response rates are worthy of future consideration. Recommendations include additional reminder messages, deploying at different times of the school year, as well as using a variety of methods to disseminate the survey to potential participants;
3. Language: A significant focus of this study was clarifying the language around ethics and ethical dilemmas. Exploring the sources of personal code development and ethical conflict, and how personal values interact with professional codes helped to solidify certain concepts. Although participants did not help to operationally define the term *ethical dilemma*, the themes that emerged from the definitions helped to clarify its meaning in terms of its key components. However, the language used to describe ethical dilemmas remains subjective and limited. Participants reported their definitions based on their own personal and educational experiences. Language issues remain problematic as individuals filter their

understanding through these experiences. Concepts such as values, morals, and ethics require further investigation in order to enhance ethics discussion and research; and

4. *Ex post facto* reflections on ethical dilemmas: An additional limitation of the study is that participants responded to some of the questions based on previously experienced ethical dilemmas. As it is not possible to create real ethical dilemmas for the sake of study, participants had to draw on dilemmas that they encountered in the past. Typically, the longer that an individual is distanced from an experience, they are less likely to remember the event with the same level of accuracy and situational awareness. Caution should be taken when considering the findings as the data were based on participant's recall about past events.

Recommendations for Future Research

Although the topic of ethics in education has been studied extensively, investigations within the field of special education remain in a relative state of infancy. As previously stated, studies spanning three decades continue to call for the same lines of research inquiry. Many avenues for future research exist and great benefit would be gained from continued investigation. These opportunities include research recommendations in the areas of preparedness, personal values and professional codes of ethics, personal value formation, sources of ethical dilemmas, and group ethical decision-making.

As special education licensure and administrative endorsement programs are not standardized across the country, it is difficult to study preparedness based solely on

course offerings and experiences to which students are exposed prior to entering into the field. However, encountering ethical dilemmas is considered to be a universal experience among special education case managers. Future research may consider following special educators who have been exposed to formalized training through specific means versus those who have not. Additionally, following cohorts of special educators may provide beneficial longitudinal data regarding the effectiveness of pre-service training as they enter into the field, and then gain experience over time. Probing case managers in the field through interviews or focus groups would provide rich and detailed information in specific areas of pre-service program effectiveness to assist program developers and faculty members.

The current study provided a deeper awareness of how personal values are formed. Family and religious influence were considered an important source, but education was most commonly reported. The possible connection and alignment of personal values and professional codes of ethics through educational experiences have not been researched in the field of special education. Several studies have confirmed that professional codes tend to dominate the decision-making process when professionals encounter dilemmas in the field. Longitudinal inquiry into alignment as well as professional code and personal value dominance may be worthy of attention as district leaders consider how to provide their staff members with meaningful professional development opportunities.

The current study found that participants lack a high level of knowledgeable about professional codes of ethics established by larger agencies and advocacy groups. Of those

who are Somewhat or Very aware, almost half Never or Rarely refer to them. The role that they play in guiding special education leaders requires more attention at the pre-service level to determine how they are being presented, and what function they serve in the field. To what extent these codes are being integrated into the education and practice of special education teachers and leaders is an important area of future investigation.

Defining difficult terms such as *values*, *morals*, *ethics*, etc., remains an ongoing challenge. Participants in the current study provided the researcher with a fundamental composite of the term *ethical dilemma*. However, varied meanings of words used by the participants indicate that there is still much to research regarding the language of ethical practice. Continued investigation is necessary in order to guide pre-service programming and well as continuing education opportunities. Difficulty with the language around the study of ethical decision-making must not remain a barrier for special educators.

Lastly, this study's investigation into ethical decision-making in a group setting sought to gain general information about how case managers balance their personal values and professional codes of ethics. Findings indicate that most special education case managers turn to their peers or colleagues in an effort to resolve ethical dilemmas, yet a strong sense remains that the burden rests primarily on them despite guidance from others. The theme of self-burden emerged through participants' definitions of *ethical dilemma*. Further investigation into the roles that other stakeholders play as an IEP team member may expose additional pressures and perspectives outside of the special education case manager. As previously mentioned, the goal of group interaction is to work collaboratively to support the student's best interests. Feedback from other team

members regarding how their personal values and professional codes interact with those of other members of the team may help to establish norms or develop a framework for understanding how differing professional role-based values interact.

The present study sought to explore many aspects of ethical decision-making using the ethic of the profession as the center of the conceptual framework. There are many areas of inquiry that are needed to deepen knowledge and improve practice. These recommendations are initial suggestions for future research, and are not an exhaustive list of possible avenues for future exploration.

Conclusion

Nearly two decades ago, Howe and Miramontes (1992) wrote that special education training programs have paid little attention to how special educators should go about resolving ethical problems. Paul, French, and Cranston-Gingras (2001) shared that it is highly problematic that the field of special education, which is filled with complex and conflicting agendas, has continued to place the teaching and researching of ethics in a position of relative unimportance. Bon and Bigbee (2011) claim that while some studies have explored specific areas of ethics in special education, their scope is small and limited. The study and practical aspects of special education and ethics is continuously pushed to the periphery by practitioners and researchers alike. Across 30 years of research recommendations, the need to explore ethics more deeply is reaching a critical mass. Crockett (2007) claims that where special education and educational leadership meet, research must take root. The landscape of special education leadership is indeed

changing. Researchers must provide special educators with the tools necessary to address these changes, and exploring ethical decision-making is a vital step in this process.

This study investigated several key areas of ethics and special education. These areas included preparedness, the interaction between personal values and professional codes of ethics, the sources of ethical dilemmas and how special education case managers define the term, and finally, how personal values and professional codes of ethics influence the decisions that case managers make within a group. The differences among responses within each individual question were found to be statistically significant.

Based on the findings, it is evident that case managers receive ethical training not primarily through formal classes on ethics, but in indirect ways such in discussions that involved other topics. In addition, case managers are not as prepared as they should be, and that the support that they are receiving once in the field is not sufficient enough to help them to address the complex problems that they encounter on a regular basis. Participants desire professional development opportunities, and feel that more time should be spent discussing ethics within their schools.

A key element discussed this study is the topic of pre-service instruction. The findings report that the relationship between pre-service instruction and preparedness, knowledge of professional codes of ethics, and the frequency that case managers consult with colleagues when faced with dilemmas is significant. Case managers who received pre-service training report that they are better prepared, more knowledgeable about codes of ethics, and consult colleagues more often.

Another key element within this study was the interaction between personal values and professional codes of ethics. Personal values and professional codes of ethics do not always exist as oppositional forces when negotiating ethical dilemmas, but when they do, participants in this study report that they tend to rely more heavily on their professional codes rather than their personal values. Code dominance was explored among several factors. Code dominance was found to have a significant relationship among participant's responses to levels of preparedness and the frequency that they refer to professional codes of ethics. Yet, the data also show that participants report that they are largely unaware of widely referred to professional codes of ethics, and do not use them with significant frequency. The question then remains, on what professional codes are they relying?

Participants revealed a number of sources that make up their personal values; education, family, and religion being the most commonly reported. This offers a possible connection between the impact that education has on personal value formation and the dominance that professional codes of ethics play on the decision-making process. This may indicate that personal and educational values are becoming more and more aligned. Lastly, the majority of the participants regularly seek out others when faced with an ethical dilemma. Sharing the experience is a vital step in ensuring that the decisions that are made focus on the best interest of the child.

The need to deepen ethical awareness and understanding is critical in order to support special education leaders. Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005) claim that any attempt to do so must place the student at the center of any inquiry or endeavor. The best interests

of the child, therefore, function as the moral imperative for the educational leader.

Shapiro and Stefkovich's multiple paradigm ethical model places the best interest of the student in the center, around which are four ethical frameworks that guide educational leaders toward this end. The ethic of care, justice, critique, and the profession form a dynamic that ideally interacts to help educational leaders focus on the student. This study investigated the ethic of the profession.

The ethic of the profession requires that the special education leader fully understand his or her personal values as well as the ethical codes put in place by the education community. Pre-service programs lack a clear focus on developing an awareness of either, leaving the individual in a state of further uncertainty where personal values and professional codes of ethics do little to help the decision-maker. Instead, personal values and professional codes of ethics are often left to compete for primacy in each moment of uncertainty. The ultimate goal of understanding these matters is not to promote one over the other in a place of supremacy, but rather to work toward aligning them for the good of the child. Campbell (2001) states that educating children is a moral endeavor. Learning how values and professional codes are used acts as a "catalyst for ethical discussion among groups...about the core principles that should underpin their decisions, both individual and collective" (p. 402). It is this catalyst, this process of change, which will lead special education leaders *ex umbra in solem*; from the shadows into the light.

Appendix A

Dear Fellow Special Educator:

I am currently working on my dissertation at George Mason University in the College of Education and Human Development. I am researching how special educators use personal and professional codes of ethics when negotiating ethical dilemmas in the field. This research will improve the understanding of how ethical dilemmas impact the decision-making process. It will also offer guidance to higher education professionals who seek to improve teacher preparation programs for future special education teachers and leaders.

As a participant, you will be asked to complete an online survey. It should take no longer than 10-15 minutes of your time. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at the e-mail address listed below. You will also find a hyperlink to the survey. I appreciate your time and willingness to participate in this important field of study.

Kind regards,

Adam J. Bigbee, M.Ed.
Ph.D. Candidate
George Mason University
abigbee1@gmu.edu

Survey Link:

<http://websurvey.gmu.edu/preview.jsp?surveyId=1284670662053&url=http://websurvey.gmu.edu/survey/entry.jsp?id=1284670662053>

Appendix B

Ethics and Special Education

Values, Codes of Ethics, and Dilemmas in Special Education Leadership

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

RESEARCH PROCEDURES

This research is being conducted to study the way in which personal and professional ethics inform the decision-making process of special education case managers. Additionally, this study will build on current research that emphasizes the importance of discussing ethics and ethical dilemmas within a communal context among special education leaders. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to take a survey that will last approximately 10-15 minutes.

RISKS

There are no foreseeable risks for participating in this research.

BENEFITS

There are no benefits to you as a participant other than to further research needs and inform program development for the preparation of special education personnel.

CONFIDENTIALITY

All data gathered from this computer-based survey will be kept confidential. Your identity, including your name and e-mail address, will not be connected to your survey submission. While it is understood that no computer transmission can be perfectly secure, reasonable efforts will be made to protect the confidentiality of your transmission.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time and

for any reason. If you decide not to participate, or if you withdraw from the study, there is no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. There are no costs to you or any other party for participating in the research.

CONTACT

This research is being conducted by Adam J. Bigbee, Ph.D. candidate from the Education Leadership program in the College of Education and Human Development at George Mason University under the supervision of Susan Bon, JD, Ph.D. You may contact Mr. Bigbee at 571-338-2510. You may also contact the George Mason University Office of Research Subject Protections at 703-993-4121 if you have questions or comments regarding your rights as a participant in the research.

CONSENT

I have read this form and I agree to participate in this study. I recommend that you print a copy of this page to keep a copy of this informed consent for your records. The George Mason University Human Subjects Review Board has waived the requirement for a signature on this consent form. However, if you wish to sign a consent, please print a copy of this form, sign it and mail to:

Adam J. Bigbee
George Mason University
College of Education and Human Development
2203 West Building, MSN 6D1
Fairfax, VA 22030-4444

I meet all of the criteria for participation in this study as explained in the invitational e-mail.

Please indicate if you consent to participate in the survey.

- I consent to participate in this research
- I do not consent to participate in this research

Demographics

I am <input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female

What is your race/ethnicity? <input type="checkbox"/> African-American <input type="checkbox"/> Caucasian <input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic <input type="checkbox"/> Asian <input type="checkbox"/> other: <input type="text"/>

What is your current age in years? <input type="checkbox"/> 20-30 <input type="checkbox"/> 31-40 <input type="checkbox"/> 41-50 <input type="checkbox"/> 51-60 <input type="checkbox"/> 60+

Select the levels of education that you have completed?

- Bachelor's Degree
- Master's Degree
- Ed.D
- Ph.D.
- Administrative Endorsement

At what grade level(s) do you teach?

- Elementary
- Middle
- Secondary

In which areas of Special Education are you licensed?

- Emotional Disabilities
- Learning Disabilities
- Intellectual Disabilities
- Autism
- Severe Disabilities
- Hearing Impairments
- Visual Disabilities
- Traumatic Brain Injuries
- Speech & Language Disabilities

In addition to teaching special education, are you also a case manager of students with special needs?

- Yes
- No

If so, how many years have you been a case manager?

- 1-5
- 6-10
- 11-15
- 16-20
- 21+

How many students do you have on your caseload?

- 0-10
- 11-20
- 21-30
- 30+

Preparedness

In your pre-service training to become a special education teacher, did you receive formal instruction regarding ethics in special education, ethical decision-making, or how to negotiate ethical dilemmas in the field?

- Yes
- No

What were the means by which you received ethics training or instruction during your pre-service program?

- Class on ethics
- Discussions in other classes regarding the topic of ethics
- Internships
- Conferences (academic, advocacy, etc.)

Based specifically on your pre-service training/instruction, how prepared do you think you were to address ethical dilemmas?

- 1 Not at all
- 2 Poorly
- 3 Adequately
- 4 Well

What might be beneficial in helping you to deal with ethical dilemmas?

- Professional development on the topic of ethics
- Forming a committee to address specific dilemmas as they arise

- Developing a school-wide code of ethics
- Developing a departmental code of ethics
- Taking a course on ethics
- Attending conferences where ethics and education are discussed

How knowledgeable are you of professional codes of ethics established by special education advocacy groups such as the Council for Exceptional Children?

- 1 Not at all
- 2 Somewhat
- 3 Very

How often do you refer to professional codes of ethics when dealing with an ethical dilemma?

- 1 Never
- 2 Rarely
- 3 Sometimes
- 4 Often
- 5 Always

Personal and Professional Codes of Ethics

What are the sources that make up your personal code of ethics?

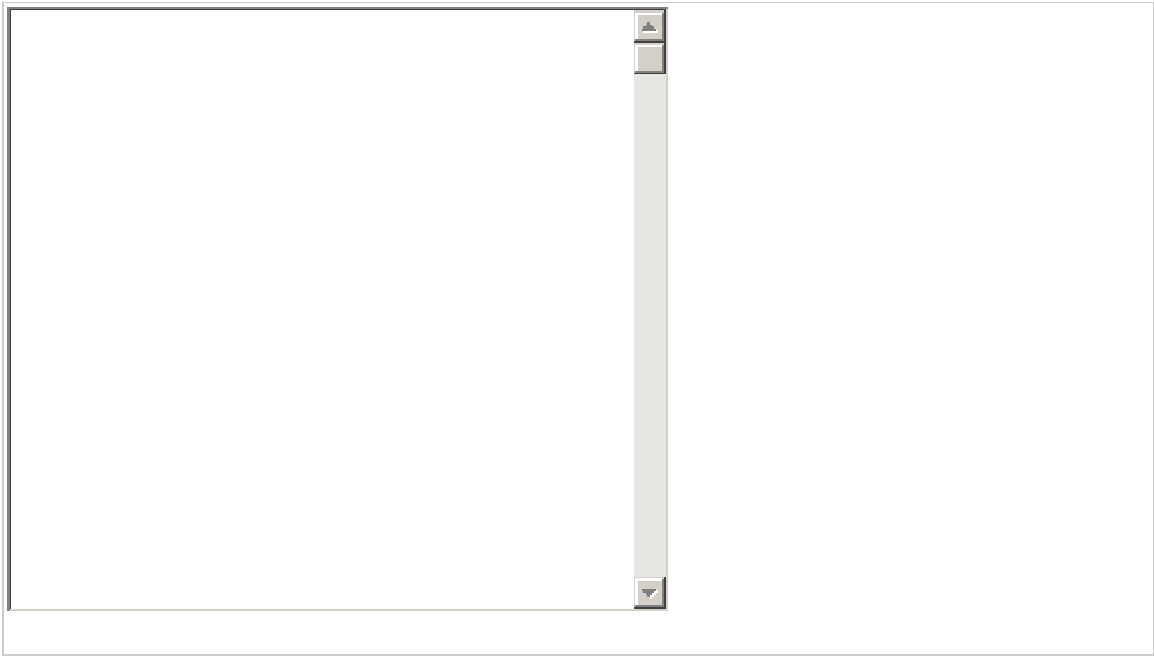
- Family

Religion
 Education
 Culture
 Friends
 Politics
other:

When faced with an ethical dilemma, which is the most influential source listed above that impacts your decision-making?

Does your personal code of ethics ever conflict with your professional code?
 Yes
 No

If so, please explain.



When faced with an ethical dilemma, which code (personal or professional) dominates your decision making process?

- Personal
- Professional

Ethical Dilemmas

Define "ethical dilemma."

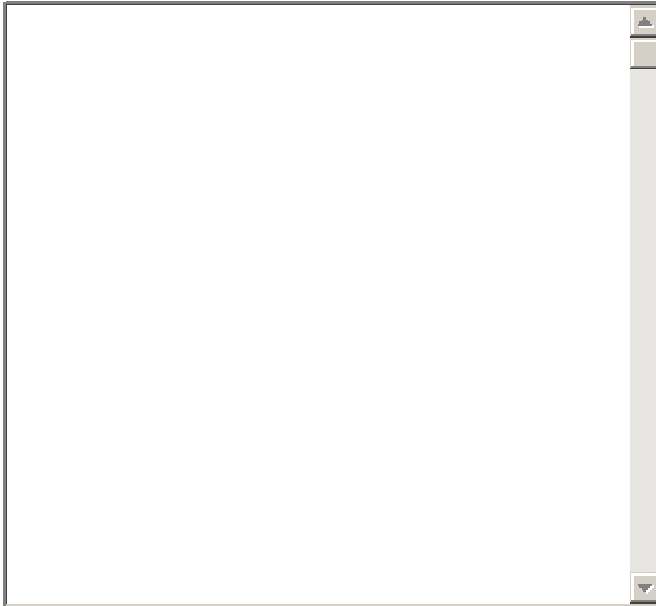


What are possible sources of ethical dilemmas for special education case managers?

- Students
- Student's parents or guardians
- Administration
- Other teachers/staff members
- Compliance/regulations (federal, state, or local)
- Laws
- Time limitations
- Resource limitations

other:

What are the most significant issues that you encounter that cause or result in ethical dilemmas?



Should more time be spent within your department or school discussing ethical dilemmas?

- Yes
- No

Group Dynamics and Ethical Dilemmas

When faced with an ethical dilemma, do you consult a colleague(s) before making a decision?

- Never

- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often
- Always

When you consult with others, how likely are you to challenge decisions that are in opposition to your personal codes of ethics?

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often
- Always

When discussing an ethical dilemma in a group setting, which of your codes of ethics tends to dominate your decision-making process?

- Personal
- Professional

Thank you for participating in this survey. Your time is appreciated, and it is the goal of this study to improve awareness of how educational leaders address ethical dilemma in the field of special education.

Appendix C

<i>Statistical Test</i>	<i>Result</i>	<i>Total Significant</i>	<i>Total Not Significant</i>
Cronbach's Alpha	Low internal consistency on total measure (.356), as well as low internal consistency on all subscales (.053 - .339).	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
One-way Chi-square Test	10 significant differences among overall responses	10	0
Two-way Chi-square Test	10 significant differences among levels within responses	10	0
Two-way Contingency Table Analysis	5 significant differences among factors	5	3
Summary of Test Significance		25 (89%)	3 (11%)

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Curriculum Vitae

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