ETHICAL CHALLENGES AND DILEMMAS IN TEACHING STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN INCLUSIVE CLASSROOMS: EXPLORING THE PERSPECTIVES OF ONTARIO TEACHERS

by

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Abstract

This study examines the ethical challenges and dilemmas that teachers experience in their work with students who have special needs\(^1\) in inclusive classrooms. Moreover, it investigates the ways in which teachers cope with or resolve such difficulties, the supports currently available to assist them in managing ethical issues, and their recommendations for potential supports.

Accounts of ethical challenges reported by 12 teacher participants working at the elementary and secondary level were interpreted from two stages of interviews. Data were analyzed qualitatively using a constant comparison method, with data analysis occurring during and after each stage. Emergent themes were coded and categorized to elicit major and sub-themes.

The ethical challenges reported by the participants primarily dealt with issues of care, equity, and fairness, where participants felt that the best interests of students were not being met. Difficulties occurred in the context of accommodations and modifications, assessment and evaluation, discipline, distribution of time and resources, and the rights of the individual student versus the group. In the accounts provided, participants consistently raised concerns about ethical dilemmas they experienced as a result of colleagues. In all of the situations that dealt with

\(^1\) The term special needs will be used interchangeably to include those with disabilities, exceptionalities, those who are gifted, those formally identified as exceptional through an Identification Placement Review Committee, and those receiving special education programming and/or accommodations based on an Individual Education Plan without a formal identification.
colleagues, teachers were unwilling to confront the unethical behaviors of co-workers despite their potential to harm the student. All of the teachers faced ethical challenges in the context of inclusion. While most support the practice of inclusion, concerns were raised about existing inequities, specifically in regard to the degree of inclusivity and access to learning opportunities. Shortages in supports, resources, and training were the primary reasons attributed to the teachers’ struggles. The participants’ recommendations for supports consisted of collaborative professional development opportunities, specifically in special and inclusive education.

This study contributes to the growing body of literature in the ethics of inclusive and special education. It has significant implications for policy makers, certifying bodies, teacher education programs, and teachers’ professional lives as it provides insights into the ethical challenges faced by teachers in inclusive classrooms. The results of the study have the potential to influence the development of policies and practices to support both teachers and students.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Special education has its own constellation of ethical problems that have grown out of its own history and mission. This does not mean, however, that ethics in special education can be understood apart from the larger set of ethical issues pertaining to schooling more generally. (Howe, 1996, p. 46)

Background of the Study

My involvement and interest in research concerning professional ethics in teaching prompted me to spend a considerable amount of time reflecting on ethical practice while working in schools and classrooms as a substitute teacher. Through my observations and casual conversations with teachers, I realized that in working with students who have special needs the teachers were presented with ethical challenges that tugged at their conscience – challenges which teachers often did not know how to manage and those which caused them to question their choices. One situation that troubled me in particular was that of Sarah. Perhaps it was Sarah’s personal sense of injustice that struck me; yet, while I empathized with Sarah, I identified with Sarah’s teacher and the extremely difficult position in which she found herself. I considered what I would do if I were Sarah’s teacher. Would I stand up to the principal in order to guard Sarah’s welfare? Or would I comply and assist with the implementation of a practice I believed to be unfair and inequitable? This predicament led me to ask further questions which I address in this empirical study. Sarah’s case, which I describe below, inspired me to engage in this work.

While supervising students in detention hall at a public high school, I was approached by Sarah, a ninth grade student identified as being learning disabled, and asked to proof read a
letter she was directed to write as a consequence for her refusal to participate in the school’s recycling program. At this school, only the students in special education were involved with the program, which required them, each week for an entire afternoon, to clean out the recycling bins from every classroom in the building. Sarah was deeply upset by the situation. In her letter to the principal, Sarah indicated that all students were responsible for making a mess, which meant that all, not only those with special needs, should be required to assist with the clean up. She believed that she was being treated unfairly, forced to lose valuable learning time on a task that was neither going to contribute to her academic advancement nor future ambitions. She questioned the school’s motivation for implementing a program that purported to value the learning of general education students above those in special education. Moreover, Sarah expressed the stigma and degradation that she, as a student with special needs, experienced from her general education peers; stigma she felt was being legitimized by the school through a recycling program that designated students with special needs the official “garbage collectors.”

Deeply concerned for Sarah, I took the initiative to address this issue with her teacher. I was saddened to discover that Sarah’s teacher had attempted to provide Sarah with an alternative to the recycling program, but her request was rejected by administration. The recycling program was implemented for students with special needs to fulfill the compulsory community service hours required for graduation from high school. The administrators believed that it was in the best interest of the special education students to complete these hours during the school day under teacher supervision. Accordingly, Sarah’s teacher was required to enforce a school policy she did not support. Consequently, she felt torn between her obligations to Sarah, her administrators, and her own personal convictions (Kieltyka, 2006a).
The education system has come a long way in restructuring special education to improve services for students with diverse learning needs. With the movement away from segregation, the preferred placement of students with special needs is in inclusive settings. As such, today’s general education classrooms are composed of students with a multitude of needs and abilities (Bennett, 2009; Jordan, 2001, 2007; Lipsky & Gartner, 1998; McLaughlin & Jordan, 2005; Meyen, Vergason, & Whelan, 1993; Ministry of Education, 2005; Norwich, 2005; Polat, 2011; Stainback & Stainback, 1992; Stanovich & Jordan, 2002, 2004; Statistics Canada, 2001). In Canada, an average of 59 percent of students identified for special education spend at least half of their instructional day in the general education classroom and are taught by regular classroom teachers (Statistics Canada, 2001). In Ontario, this number increases to 80 percent of identified students spending more than half of their day in an inclusive classroom (Bennett, 2009). Correspondingly, a similar trend can be observed in the United States of America where “[a]pproximately half of all students with disabilities … spen[d] 80 percent or more of their day in a general classroom” (U.S. Department of Education, 2007, p. 68). Changes to special education policies and practices have brought on changes to the roles and duties of classroom teachers. One of the most significant shifts is that the responsibility for students with special needs is no longer exclusive to special education teachers. In the current schooling structure, accountability for the teaching, learning, and social development of students with special needs lies with every teacher (Bunch, Lupart, & Brown, 1997; Bunch & Valeo, 2004).

Reforms to special education, albeit a positive step forward, present new obstacles for classroom teachers as they engage in the nuances of their practice: devise specialized programming, accommodate and/or modify curriculum, manage the classroom, assess pupils’ work, interact with students, parents, and colleagues, and gain access to necessary supports and
resources for their students. Particularly complex are ethical issues and dilemmas that force teachers to make choices in situations which challenge principles such as equity, fairness, justice, honesty, care, respect for others, and integrity as supported by the Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession (Ontario College of Teachers, 2006a) and the Ethical Principles for Special Education Professionals (Council for Exceptional Children, 2003). Such problems often contain no obvious, established, or correct resolutions. Instead, the majority of decisions are left to the discretion of the teacher (Campbell 1996, 2003; Carr 2006; Colnerud 1994, 1997; Jackson, Boostrom, & Hansen, 1993).

Ethically trying situations are not uncommon; rather, they occur regularly in all schools and classrooms (Berkeley & Ludlow, 2008; Bucholz, Keller, & Brady, 2007; Campbell, 2003; Colnerud, 1997; Jackson et al., 1993; Keim, Ryan, & Nolan, 1998; Paul, French, & Cranston-Gingras, 2001; Rude & Whetstone, 2008; Sileo, Sileo, & Pierce, 2008). Educators are consistently placed in positions where they are required to make difficult choices and manage ethical challenges, without sufficient time for deliberation. Consequently, they often rely on their professional knowledge and at times, personal convictions to reach a resolution. As professionals, they are obligated to make sound judgments that serve the best interests of the child and the class (Bergem, 1990; Beyer, 1991; Campbell, 1996, 2003; Carr, 2006; Colnerud, 1997; Fenstermacher, 2001; Goodlad, Soder, & Sirotnik, 1990; Jackson et al., 1993; Norberg, 2006; Strike & Soltis, 1992), often eliciting the question of whose needs are being met. In the area of special education, such decisions are critical, as problems can be more intense, the stakes may be higher, the students potentially more vulnerable, and the choices made by teachers can have life-long ramifications for the students involved (Berkeley & Ludlow, 2008; Bucholz et al.,
2007; Howe & Miramontes, 1992; Paul et al., 2001; Rude & Whetstone, 2008; Sileo et al., 2008).

**Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study is to examine the ethical challenges and dilemmas that teachers experience in their work with students who have special needs in inclusive classrooms. Furthermore it investigates the ways in which teachers working at the elementary and secondary level manage such ethical issues, the supports available to assist them, and their recommendations for future supports. A qualitative approach is used to gain the individualized perspectives and accounts of teachers. Given the nature and intentions of the study, the qualitative methodology allows for the collection of rich descriptive data consisting of personal statements, experiences, and beliefs of educators. Furthermore, it provides reports, from teacher participants, of events occurring authentically in their classrooms (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). The research questions I address are:

1) What are the ethical challenges and dilemmas that teachers experience in relation to their work with students who have special needs in the context of inclusion?

2) How do teachers cope with/ resolve such ethical challenges and dilemmas?

3) What supports or services exist to assist teachers in dealing with the ethical challenges that arise in their work with students who have special needs?

4) What supports do teachers recommend that would help them cope with or resolve such ethical challenges and dilemmas?
Rationale for and Significance of the Study

The ethical dimensions of schooling have been addressed at some length by scholars; however, much of the work has been theoretical in nature. Moreover, while the number of empirical investigations conducted has risen substantially over the past two decades, the study of ethical complexities and dilemmas in the field of special and inclusive education has not been a dominant focus. This gap in the literature has been noted in the field (Berkeley & Ludlow, 2008; Howe & Miramontes, 1992; Paul et al., 2001; Rude & Whetstone, 2008). Howe and Miramontes (1992) argue that special education has received minimal consideration as a field of ethical investigation or as a subject in teacher education. Paul et al., (2001) agree, finding it “…surprising that a field so replete with … complexities of interests has devoted so little attention to the study and development of applied ethics” (p.1). Despite the long acknowledged need for a greater understanding of professional ethics in special and inclusive education, very little is still known about the ethical challenges experienced by teachers working with students who have special needs in inclusive classrooms (Berkeley & Ludlow, 2008; Howe & Miramontes 1992; Keim et al., 1998; Paul et al., 2001; Rude & Whetstone, 2008; Sileo et al., 2008). It is my intention to contribute empirical data to the growing body of literature in the ethics of special and inclusive education by providing insights into the types of ethical problems and dilemmas teachers face, and the ways in which they cope and make decisions in response to such challenges.

The attrition of teachers is a chronic problem that is increasingly affecting education. Studies indicate that a significant number of teachers are leaving the profession, resulting in high turnover rates and shortages (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2005; Boe & Cook, 2006; Darling-Hammond, 2003; Fantilli & McDougall, 2009; Ingersoll, 2001; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003;
Joiner & Edwards, 2008; National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future, 2003, 2007; Shakrani, 2008). A study conducted in 2000 by the Canadian Teacher’s Federation revealed that more than 60% of school boards in the province of Ontario identified teacher attrition as a major challenge (Ontario College of Teachers, 2004, p.4). This is further supported by Ingersoll’s (2001) findings from the Schools and Staffing Survey and the Teacher Followup Survey conducted by the American National Center for Education Statistics which indicate that attrition rates have risen progressively over the past twenty years. Those identified as most at risk of leaving include teachers who are new to the profession (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Fantilli & McDougall, 2009; Ingersoll, 2001; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003) and those working in special education positions (Boe & Cook, 2006; Brownell, Sindelar, Bishop, Langley, & Seo, 2002; Ingersoll, 2001; McLeskey & Billingsley, 2008; Thornton, Peltier, & Medina, 2007; Westling, Herzog, Cooper-Duffy, Prohn, & Ray, 2006; Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997).

Reasons for leaving the profession have been reported in the literature – many of which are related to job dissatisfaction, job related challenges, and stress (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2005; Brownell et al., 2002; Edmonson & Thompson, 2001; Fantilli & McDougall, 2009; Ingersoll, 2001; McLeskey & Billingsley, 2008; Piotrowski & Plash, 2006; Thornton et al., 2007). Ingersoll’s (2001) findings link sources for job dissatisfaction to lack of support (38%), inadequate preparation (23%), student disciplinary problems (18%), large class sizes (13%), and the professional competence of colleagues (4%) to name a few. Moreover, drawing on survey responses from Canadian new teachers, Fantilli and McDougall (2009) postulate that most challenges stem from meeting special needs (52.1%), limited classroom resources (40.4%), Individualized Education Plans (36.9%), English as a Second Language (34.8%), and classroom management (31.2%). Others attribute the high attrition rates to stress and burn-out, specifically
in the field of special education (Burke, Greenglass, & Schwarzer, 1996; Davis & Palladino, 2011; Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997). Burke et al. (1996) conducted a longitudinal study to pinpoint the causes leading to teacher burnout. Their findings reveal that the stress induced by bureaucratic routines, disruptive students, self-doubts in dealing with difficult job demands, lack of supervisor support, and social integration lead to health and professional consequences.

In the act of fulfilling their professional obligations, teachers frequently experience ethical problems. Such problems can potentially be seen as contributing to the job dissatisfaction, job related challenges, and stress reported in the attrition literature. By extension, there may be an association between the reasons that compel teachers to resign from the profession and the ethical dilemmas they encounter in their practice. Ethical issues experienced by teachers, as identified in the empirical studies of Campbell (1996, 2003), Colnerud (1997), and Tirri and Husu (2002) encompass relational difficulties, practice based challenges such as assessment and discipline, and logistical matters. Comparably, attrition findings connect premature retirement from the profession to lack of support, disciplinary problems, and bureaucratic procedures, in addition to the other aforementioned issues (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2005; Brownell et al., 2002; Burke et al., 1996; Edmonson & Thompson, 2001; Fantilli & McDougall, 2009; Ingersoll, 2001; McLeskey & Billingsley, 2008; Piotrowski & Plash, 2006; Thornton et al., 2007).

Given that all aspects of teaching have a moral dimension (Carr, 2000; Fenstermacher, 1990; Goodlad, et al., 1990; Hansen, 2001a; Jackson et al., 1993; Sackett, 1993; Strike, 1990; Tom, 1984), one may speculate that the issues which lead to attrition are, to some degree, ethically related. This conclusion can be reinforced by Fullan’s (2001) argument, which purports that resignation from the profession is primarily morally driven. He contends that teachers enter
the profession with the intention to positively impact the lives of their students; however, the challenges associated with difficult working conditions and stressors impede their aims. In connection to teaching in inclusive classrooms, research suggests that educators experience various stressors in working with students who have special needs. Bunch et al. (1997) conducted a large scale national study in which they surveyed and interviewed classroom teachers, administrators, resource teachers, special education teachers, and university students about the inclusion of students with special needs into general education classrooms in Canada. They learned that, while participants were supportive of inclusion, they were concerned about the impact of inclusion on teachers, specifically in relation to workload, teacher preparation, and the availability of in-class supports. Additionally, Brackenreed (2011) studied the strategies teachers utilize to cope with the stress they face in the context of their work in inclusive classrooms. Her conclusions confirm that teachers experience stress in meeting the individual needs of their students, and the supports currently available are ineffective in assisting them to cope:

This study indicates that despite the history and legislation pertaining to inclusion in Ontario, many teachers continue to experience high levels of stress resulting from the inclusion of students with special needs into regular classrooms. Inadequate preparation in pre-service and in-service programs causing low perceptions of teacher self-competency, understanding and management of student behaviors, insufficient daily support in the classroom, and meeting the expectations of others such as parents, continue to be sources of concern for teachers, contributing to inadequate coping strategies. (p. 20) Brackenreed (2011) associates the significance of her findings with the high attrition levels, disability leaves, and depression rates in the profession.
Consequently, investigating the types of ethical challenges and dilemmas teachers experience, the ways in which they resolve such conflicts, and the supports available to them, could shed light on some of the potential contributors to stress that may lead to attrition. The consequences of high attrition rates in the teaching profession compound to create significant problems in schools and classrooms. Among those who leave the profession are skilled, capable, and experienced teachers, which many have argued, serves to negatively influence student performance and the school environment (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2003; Holloway, 2003; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Wilson, Floden, & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001). Studies on attrition suggest that teacher quality has the most significant impact on student learning and achievement (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2003; Wilson et al., 2001). Similar findings are reported by Jordan (2001), McLaughlin and Jordan (2005), and Stanovich and Jordan (2002, 2004) who, based on their research in inclusive classrooms, propose that student success, specifically for those with special needs, is contingent upon effective teaching practices. Despite such empirical findings, McLeskey and Billingsley (2008) found that while practices shown to benefit and enhance the academic achievements for individuals with special needs have been developed, they are rarely being used in classrooms. The researchers claim that lack of qualification, teacher attrition, and inadequate work conditions are instrumental in this “research-to-practice gap.” Given the established association between skilled and seasoned teaching professionals and student achievement (Sunderman & Kim, 2005), the response to attrition should focus on retaining the teachers already employed as opposed to simply hiring more teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003), especially since effectiveness has been shown to substantially increase with experience (Kain & Singleton, 1996; Shakrani, 2008).
Factors which contribute to work challenges, stress, and attrition should be addressed in both pre-service and in-service teacher education. Research suggests that the risk of attrition, elevated stress, and consequences resulting from insufficient training for classroom demands are increased for beginning teachers (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2005; Brownell et al., 2002; Darling-Hammond, 2003; Fantilli & McDougall, 2009; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). Data reveal that as many as 40-50% of teachers leave the profession within the first five years (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Maciejewski, 2007). Consistent with the literature, the findings of a study conducted by the Ontario College of Teachers (2003) underscores the relationship between higher attrition levels and beginning teachers who are frequently subject to anxiety because they are often placed in the most challenging positions without sufficient preparation or training. McGinnis (2002) examined the perspectives and teaching practices of pre-service teachers assigned to teach in special and general education classrooms. He found that pre-service teachers were hesitant to include pupils with special needs, and many did not have the skills to accommodate, modify, and individualize the curriculum. Moreover, he noted that a number of pre-service teachers maintained biases towards individuals with special needs. Upon training, the perspectives of some pre-service teachers were shown to change, with several participants becoming more willing to take responsibility for the learning and success of such students. Beginning teachers need the knowledge and skills to include effectively those with diverse needs in their classrooms. Equipping teachers with such knowledge could potentially decrease job dissatisfaction, job related challenges, and stress, which may in turn reduce the rate of attrition.

This current study is significant for its potential to provide insights and initiate a discussion about the ethical challenges and dilemmas that teachers face in their work with
students who have special needs, specifically in the context of inclusion. Empirical studies in professional ethics demonstrate that teachers frequently experience ethical tensions in their practice (Campbell, 1996, 2003; Colnerud, 1994, 1997; Gajewski, Lennie, & Campbell, 2008; Jackson et al., 1993; Lennie, Gajewski, & Campbell, 2009; Syed, Kieltyka, Lennie, & Campbell, 2007; Tirri & Husu, 2002). Given that schools and classrooms are becoming more inclusive (Bennett, 2009; Jordan, 2001, 2007; Lipsky & Gartner, 1998; McLaughlin & Jordan, 2005; Meyen et al., 1993; Ministry of Education, 2005; Norwich, 2005; Polat, 2011; Stainback & Stainback, 1992; Stanovich & Jordan, 2002, 2004; Statistics Canada, 2001; U.S. Department of Education, 2007), the role of the general educator is changing, with classroom teachers assuming greater responsibility for the teaching and learning of students with special needs (Bunch et al., 1997). Accordingly, one can anticipate that this shift will influence the ethical issues that teachers confront. Ethical challenges and dilemmas in special and inclusive education need to be explored on a deeper level, for a more specialized and profound understanding of the difficulties teachers undergo can provide valuable information for educators, administrators, teacher educators, and policy makers. Above all, such knowledge, when applied, has the potential to influence programming for students who have special needs, teacher supports, and teacher education programs, thus helping to meet the needs of teachers and in turn students with special needs.

**Limitations of the Study**

This study explores the ethical challenges and dilemmas experienced by teachers working with students who have special needs in inclusive classrooms. More specifically, it investigates the personal perspectives of classroom teachers to gain insights into the nature of the ethical
difficulties, coping strategies, as well as existing supports and recommendations. Given the small sample size of 12 participants, the ability to generalize the findings is limited to the cases of the participants in the study. It is not the intention of this study to arrive at ultimate or correct solutions to ethical issues, nor is the intention to offer guidance for resolving ethical problems that arise. Moreover, the aim of this study is not to identify problems associated with the implementation of special education policies, although such topics do arise in the scope of the participants’ discussions of the ethical challenges and dilemmas they experience in their practice.

The purpose of the study is to examine the ethical challenges and dilemmas experienced by teachers in their work with students who have special needs – the issues that arise in the scope of their daily work that tug at their conscience and leave them feeling unsettled with their choices or resolutions. Research addressing ethics in special and inclusive education has received little emphasis, and it is my intention that this study will lend itself to narrowing the existing gap in the literature. It will not however, close that gap or offer sufficient data to provide recommendations to resolve the attrition of teachers, improve teaching practice, or establish a program for teacher education. Rather, this empirical study will provide a stepping stone for further investigation in this field.

**Background of Researcher**

My work as a classroom teacher and researcher in the area of professional ethics has exposed me to and initiated my interests in ethical dilemmas in teaching. I have taught in both inclusive and segregated settings as an occasional teacher in the public school system at the elementary and secondary levels. During my master’s studies, I conducted an empirical investigation that focused on the potential benefits of professional development in the area of
applied professional ethics for teachers using a case study analysis and individual interviews. I discovered that teachers, regardless of their age or length of their professional career, regularly experience ethical tensions. These teacher participants expressed feelings of ambiguity, anxiety, and doubt in their attempts to resolve ethical conflicts. In fact, several participants stated that, at times, they regretted their actions (Kieltyka, 2006b). Furthermore, I had the opportunity to work on a large scale study investigating the cultivation of ethical knowledge in beginning teachers through an examination of professional ethics in teacher education programs and the preparation of teachers for the ethical dimensions of their work. While the main focus of the study was not on dilemmas in teaching practice, the findings revealed that teachers observed and/or experienced ethical challenges in their practice (Gajewski et al., 2008; Lennie et al., 2009; Syed et al., 2007). The sources of these tensions were variable; however a few of the teacher participants who identified and described ethical dilemmas did so in relation to their work with students who have special needs. They focused on issues such as the treatment of the student, care, behavioral management, and the implementation of accommodations and modifications; areas that continue to be underrepresented in the literature addressing ethics in special and inclusive education.

As a precursor to my doctoral thesis data collection, I conducted a pilot study (Kieltyka, 2009), with 32 teacher candidates at the completion of their two-year teacher education program to gain insights into the frequency and types of ethical dilemmas they observed or experienced in relation to working with students who have special needs during their practice teaching. I also probed for coping mechanisms they applied or observed being used to resolve the difficulties.

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2 “The Cultivation of Ethical Knowledge in Teaching” was a research project funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (2005-2009). Principal Investigator: Elizabeth Campbell.
The survey data collected revealed that the majority of the participants experienced or observed ethical dilemmas on an occasional to very frequent bases. Drawing on the perceptions of the teacher candidates, recurring causes of such dilemmas included the implementation of accommodations and modifications, issues dealing with inclusion, teachers’ beliefs about students with special needs, discipline, classroom management, assessment and evaluation, collaboration with colleagues, and the cooperation of colleagues and administrators. Other causes identified less often involved the lack of commitment from the classroom teacher and gossip about students with special needs in the staff room. When asked about coping strategies, the participants claimed that they applied different approaches to resolve the ethical challenges encountered such as discussions with family and friends or colleagues and engagement in professional development; however several admitted that they ignored the issue at hand entirely. Many were unaware of supports available to guide them through the dilemmas, and those who identified supports believed them to be relatively ineffective.

This study is an extension of the pilot and is intended to develop a deeper understanding of the ethical challenges and dilemmas experienced by classroom teachers in the context of inclusion.

**Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study is founded on two theoretical orientations. The first relates to a specific philosophical perspective on professional ethics that is non-relativist and compatible with much of the literature in the field of moral and ethical teaching. The second pertains to definitions of special education as entrenched in current policy within Ontario.
Every profession possesses unique knowledge, skills, and responsibilities which govern its members. In teaching, as in other professions, one aspect of such knowledge is ethical knowledge. Distinct from the technical elements of teaching, ethical knowledge is an experientially based awareness and understanding, on the part of the teacher, of moral principles such as fairness, honesty, kindness, empathy, respect, and integrity (Campbell, 2003, pg. 2) as they are applied in the context of their professional practice. Rooted in the literature addressing professional ethics and the moral dimensions of teaching, numerous scholars, including Campbell (2003), Carr (2000), Colnerud (1997), Fenstermacher (2001), Jackson et al. (1993), Sockett (1993), and Strike (1990) view ethics, as stated by Campbell (2003), “as central to the very essence of teaching, not as a by-product of the teaching process” (p. 20). In other words, the teaching profession relies on ethical knowledge to govern the conduct, reasoning, “manner” (Fenstermacher, 2001), “dispositions” (Sockett, 2006) and decision making of teachers. It is increasingly common to see the terms “moral” and “ethical” used, for the most part, interchangeably in the literature (Campbell, 2003; Colnerud, 2006) as will be the case in this thesis.

Adapted from the works of Campbell (2003), Carr (2000), Fenstermacher (2001), Jackson et al. (1993), and Sockett (1993), the conceptual framework that informs this study contextualizes professional ethics as a principle-based construct grounded in Aristotelian virtues such as justice, fairness, honesty, integrity, kindness, care, empathy, and respect for others. Ethical principles and virtues are distinct from social norms or customs and perceived to be relevant and applicable to a collective whole, as opposed to values which may be viewed as individualized and personally contrived (Ingram & Parks, 2002). Moreover, ethical principles may seem to have a relational quality, similar to Noddings’ theory of the ethic of care (1984)
which suggests that ethical principles should support the welfare of individuals with whom a relationship has been established, especially if such a relationship contains a position of power and trust, as would be in the case of teachers.

Aristotelian virtues have been adopted by professional organizations and certifying bodies in the formulation of teaching standards and codes. The guiding virtues for the proposed investigation are derived from the Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession as defined by the Ontario College of Teachers (2006a) and the Ethical Principles for Special Education Professionals (Council for Exceptional Children, 2003). The Ontario College of Teachers is a certifying body for professional teachers in the province of Ontario. Teachers working in publically funded schools in Ontario must be accredited and maintain membership with the College throughout their careers. The role of the Ontario College of Teachers is to protect public interests by regulating the profession and establishing standards for practice and professional conduct (Ontario College of Teachers, 2011a). Among these are the Ethical Standards, which are intended to govern the actions and behaviors of teacher professionals. These include the principles of care, respect, trust, and integrity (2006a). The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) is an international organization committed to enhancing teaching and learning experiences for individuals with special needs by advocating for such individuals, influencing the development of policies, establishing professional standards, and providing professional development (Council for Exceptional Children, 2011a). Like the Ontario College of Teachers, the CEC maintains a set of ethical standards consisting of 12 guidelines intended to uphold the rights of individuals with exceptionalities and their families (Council for Exceptional Children, 2003).
Principles of care, empathy, respect, trust, integrity, fairness, honesty, justice, and, equity are used to establish the guiding virtues for the proposed investigation, its themes, definitions, data collection, and analysis. These principles have been selected because they are identified in the literature as foundational principles (Nucci, 2001) that have been agreed upon in society, within the teaching profession (Clark, 1990), and by academics in educational ethics (Campbell, 2003; Carr, 2000; Fenstermacher, 2001; Sockett, 1993).

Although ethical virtues and principles provide the foundation of the conceptual framework, divergent positions and understandings of ethics will be acknowledged based on the notion of moral pluralism (Strike, 1999). Strike’s (1999) moral pluralism identifies morals as existing in varying orientations to be situated on a wide spectrum of the moral ideal. The individuality of teacher professionals will, in essence, result in differing interpretations and expressions of ethical principles in practice as described by Campbell (2003):

We must recognize and accept the moral layeredness of teaching, the complexities of classroom and school life, the occasional uncertainty of teachers striving to respond to conflicting demands in ways that are fair and caring to all, and the fact that people in teaching, as elsewhere, have varying and competing perspectives on what constitutes right and wrong, good and bad. Ethical knowledge encompasses divergent orientations, but is not so diffuse that it ignores its fundamental rootedness in core principles… However, disagreement over the interpretations of such principles and confusion as to their applicability to specific contextual situations are inevitable in teaching as they are in wider society. (p. 18)

Consequently, while the teaching profession maintains ethical codes and standards, the ways in which these professional ethical principles are displayed and embedded in practice varies
between teachers and schools as a result of moral pluralism (Strike 1999) and the divergent orientations and interpretations (Campbell, 2003) of ethics. Moreover, consideration must be given to the individual backgrounds, experiences, and orientations of classroom teachers as these factors influence the ways in which they understand professional ethics and perceive their responsibilities as moral agents.

At times, ethical principles may conflict, even for the most conscientious teachers (Buzzelli & Johnston, 2002; Campbell, 1996, 2003; Carr, 2006; Colnerud, 1994, 1997; Norberg, 2006). For instance, the virtues of care and honesty can be contradictory in situations of assessment and evaluation. Such conflicts, sometimes referred to as ethical dilemmas, have varying definitions as found in the literature. Nash (1996) describes ethical dilemmas as events “in which two or more courses of action (moral choices) are in conflict, and each action can be plausibly defended as the ‘good’ one to take” (p. 63). Others still interpret ethical dilemmas as situations in which “we must try to determine which is the lesser of two evils” (Kauffman, 1992, xiii). There are those who also construe ethical dilemmas as conditions which “force us to choose in a way that involves breaking some ethical norm or contradicting some ethical value” (Ingram & Parks, 2002, p. 14).

For the purpose of this study, an ethical dilemma is interpreted to be a trying situation in which the teacher must make a difficult choice between two or more alternatives. These alternatives may be conflicting, both positive, or both negative. However, dilemmas in this study are also conceptualized from the perspectives of the teacher participants and they may report accounts of challenges, predicaments, difficulties, and tensions that tug at their conscience, even though they do not compel a choice among alternatives. While these may not be interpreted as true dilemmas because there is no actual choice to be made, they are situations in which teachers
feel ethically tried. Given that the study examines ethical challenges and dilemmas as identified by the teacher participants, such situations are relevant and will be included in the data collection because they consist of issues that the teachers believe to be troublesome on ethical grounds. As teachers may maintain different understandings of the term ethics (Strike, 1999), they may also have varying interpretations of the term dilemma. Although the definition of a dilemma was provided for participants at each stage of the data collection, what teachers may discern to be a dilemma may deviate from this.

The ethical tensions inherent in the profession pose difficulties for teachers, and, at times, result in infringements on ethics, either consciously or unconsciously (Beyer, 1997; Campbell, 2003; Carr, 2006; Colnerud, 1997; Hansen, 1993; Hostetler, 1997; Jackson et al., 1993; Norberg, 2006; Strike & Soltis, 1992). In this study I intend to investigate practical examples of ethical challenges and dilemmas as they occur in teaching students who have special needs. The extant literature suggests that in the case of special and inclusive education, ethical dilemmas may be more prominent due to the potential vulnerability of the students and the competing interests involved (Howe & Miramontes, 1992).

According to the Ministry of Education in Ontario (2001), a student with an exceptionality is one, “whose behavioral, communicational, intellectual, physical, or multiple exceptionalities are such that he or she is considered to need placement in a special education program by a committee” (p. A3). Students are identified by a committee according to the “Categories and Definitions of Exceptionalities” as provided by the Ministry of Education in Ontario (2001, pp. A18-A20). Programming is determined through the assessment and evaluation of the student and may entail placement in an inclusive, partially segregated, or segregated setting, based on the best interests and needs of the individual as perceived by the
Identification, Placement, and Review Committee (IPRC) (p. D4). Placement options consist of: a regular classroom with indirect support for the general education teacher from specialized consultants; a regular classroom with assistance within the regular classroom from a qualified special education teacher; a regular classroom with additional instruction from a qualified special education teacher outside of the classroom; a special education classroom with partial integration into a general education classroom for at least one instructional period daily; or a special education classroom full time (Ministry of Education, 2001, pp. D10-D11).

Inclusion, an approach which deems individuals with disabilities as equally entitled to receive an education alongside their non-disabled peers with equitable access to opportunities and resources, is the preferred placement of students with special needs in the province of Ontario (Ministry of Education, 2001, p. D10, 2005); however segregation is still practiced in some schools and for some exceptionalities. Multiple interpretations of inclusion have been identified in the literature; for the purpose of this thesis, inclusion “relates not just to access but to active and productive involvement” of students with special needs in general education classrooms (Bennett, 2009, p. 2). In inclusive classrooms students with special needs represent less than half of the total number of students in the class and the general education teacher is primarily responsible for delivery and accommodation/ modification of content, assessment and evaluation, as well as classroom management (Bennett, 2009; Stough, & Palmer, 2003). Students with special needs participate in the learning within regular classrooms with appropriate supports and services as deemed by the Individual Education Plan (IEP) (Ministry of Education, 2001). In a special education classroom, on the other hand, students with special needs represent the majority of the total number of students in the class and the special education teacher is primarily responsible for delivery and accommodation/ modification of content, assessment and evaluation,
as well as classroom management. Given that the study was conducted in the province of Ontario with teachers who work in Ontario publically funded schools, professionals working in both inclusive and segregated settings were studied.

A component of the special education program also includes a plan containing specific learning objectives and goals (IEP) and may include services such as support personnel and or equipment (Ministry of Education, 2001, pp. E2-E5). Students may receive special education programming and accommodations as designated by an IEP without a formal identification by an IPRC.

A special education teacher is responsible for collaborating on the IEP process, administering assessments (if appropriate) to determine the student’s strengths and needs in order to provide recommendations for programming including accommodations and/or modifications as well as necessary support services and/or resources. Additionally, special education teachers provide support to classroom teachers and communicate with the student’s parents and other teachers about the student’s needs and progress (Ministry of Education, 2001, p. E14). In Ontario, special education teachers must hold specialized qualifications in special education that deem them eligible to teach students with special needs (Ministry of Education, 2001, p. A15). Special education teachers are assigned to classes or groups of students to whom they are responsible for the delivery of special education programs and services. They can work in the general education classroom alongside regular teachers or in separate classrooms (Jordan, 2007).

In this study, student with special needs will be used as a superordinate term that encompasses all the terms used in various jurisdictions to refer to those with disabilities, exceptionalities, and those who are gifted. Students with special needs will include those in Ontario who have been deemed as exceptional by an IPRC and those who have not been
formally identified as exceptional but who are receiving special education programming and accommodations through an IEP (Bennett, 2009; Jordan, 2007).

**Structure of the Dissertation**

This thesis is organized into seven chapters. Chapter one presents an overview of the research problem, outlines the research questions, identifies the significance and limitations of this study, explores the conceptual framework which shapes the research, and provides information on the background of the researcher.

In chapter two, prominent literature in the fields of professional ethics, the moral dimensions of teaching, and special and inclusive education are reviewed as they directly relate to the research questions addressed in the study. The focus of the discussion falls on philosophical and empirical works that investigate ethical challenges and dilemmas in both general and special education, in addition to current issues identified in the fields of special and inclusive education.

Chapter three explores, in detail, the research methodology and instruments utilized in this study. The rationale for the methodology, participant selection and sample, data collection, data analysis, and ethical considerations are also discussed.

Chapters four and five present the findings. Data collected and analyzed from the initial and follow-up interviews are reviewed offering a compendium of the types of ethical challenges and dilemmas teachers experience in their work with students who have special needs and the approaches used in their management. The range of available supports and recommendations for future supports are also analyzed.
Chapter six includes a discussion of the major findings as they relate to the research questions and literature in the field of professional ethics and special and inclusive education. Addressed are the ethical challenges and dilemmas participants confront in teaching in inclusive classrooms, tensions that occur as a result of colleagues, and the difficulties teachers face due to constraints brought about by the ways in which policies are implemented into practice in the current educational system.

Finally, in chapter seven, conclusions and implications are drawn and recommendations are made for further investigation.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Exercising judgment requires special educators to weigh alternatives and select the practice that promises to best meet the needs of the child or adult with exceptionalities. When alternatives represent competing interests (the young child’s needs or the families’ priorities) or conflicting values (inclusive classrooms versus community-based instruction), professionals may face ethical dilemmas that defy easy solutions. (Courtade & Ludlow, 2008, p. 37)

Introduction

This review examines prominent literature in teacher ethics and special and inclusive education, drawing on empirical and theoretical works in the fields. The intention is to establish a rationale and foundation for the study, to serve as a guide for the research methodology, interpretation of results, and discussion of findings.

The chapter is organized into three sections. Section one explores salient works in professional ethics and the ethical dimensions of teaching. A particular area of focus falls on the ethical obligations and complex roles of educators. Furthermore, it addresses the ethical tensions and dilemmas teachers experience in their practice. Section two specifically examines the literature on ethical challenges for practices in special and inclusive education. The brevity of this section is a direct reflection of the relatively limited literature in the area. It is intended that the findings of this thesis will contribute to the growing body of literature in this discipline. Finally, section three of the review discusses the controversies and challenges confronting the field of special and inclusive education. These issues are exemplified by current policies and practices such as inclusion, identification, placement, and access to resources and services. The
issues identified in the literature were used as possible sources or contexts in which ethical
dilemmas may occur. As such, survey and interview questions probed these areas to determine
their potential relevance in relation to the ethical tensions teachers experience in working with
students who have special needs.

**Professional Ethics and the Moral Dimensions of Teaching**

Teaching, as a profession, is founded on distinct standards, expectations, and
responsibilities which define a teacher’s role and occupation (Campbell, 2003; Colnerud, 1997,
2006; Courtade & Ludlow, 2008; Goodlad et al., 1990; Ontario College of Teachers, 2006a,
2006b). These principles and duties are not merely technical in nature. Rather, they are deeply
rooted in teacher professionalism and professional ethics (Bebeau, 1993; Beyer, 1991; Campbell,
2003; Fenstermacher, 2001; Goodlad et al., 1990; Jones, Ryan, & Bohlin, 1998; Rich, 1984;
Willemse, Lunenberg, & Korthagen, 2005). Professional ethics for teachers are founded on
ethical codes and standards established by organizations such as the Council for Exceptional
Children, certifying bodies for the profession including the Ontario College of Teachers,
government agencies, and school boards. Similar to other professional designations like
medicine and social work whose members interact with vulnerable persons, professional codes
for educators focus on the rights, safety, and the well-being of the client, which in the teaching
profession are the students and indirectly their parents. Courtade and Ludlow (2008) contend that
professionals have an obligation to act in the best interests of those whom they serve:

One of the hallmarks of any profession is that its members are required to act responsibly
toward the people whom they serve; doctors must treat their patients, lawyers their
clients, and educators their students in ways that promote individual welfare in accordance with current best practice. (p. 36)

However, unlike other professions, the designation of teacher is unique due to complexities in the roles and relations maintained by educators. Fenstermacher (1986) argues that three factors in particular distinguish teachers from other professionals; the absence of a knowledge gap between teacher and student, the impossibility of preserving a social distance from the pupil, and the need for reciprocity. He notes that such factors significantly impact ethical issues that arise and the choices that teachers make in their practice. Given the challenging position of the classroom teacher, numerous scholars suggest that codes alone are inadequate in guiding the actions and decisions of teachers (Campbell, 2003, 2008; Colnerud, 2006; Nash, 1996; Rogers & Webb, 1991; Sileo et al., 2008). Furthermore, codes fail to define or establish the ethical role of the teacher, as classroom realities extend beyond what can be captured in a fixed standard (Campbell, 2008). Rogers and Webb (1991) argue: “Although such professional codes are important, they are clearly not sufficient to promote a concern with the quality of the work teachers do, with the pursuit and application of knowledge about their work, and the manner in which they approach that work and their students” (p. 175). Codes and standards, though valuable because they establish common expectations and guidelines for the profession, are broad and rarely practice-specific. They provide general recommendations, but offer minimal direction to aid teachers in performing their professional responsibilities and more importantly in coping with various situations that arise in the context of teaching (Nash, 1996; Rogers & Webb, 1991).

Accordingly, the literature in professional ethics consistently identifies matters of professionalism to be intricately connected with the ethical and moral dimensions of teaching, as
educators are continuously required to draw on their judgment and knowledge to make sound and responsible decisions (Bebeau, 1993; Beyer, 1991; Buzzelli & Johnston, 2002; Campbell, 2003, 2004, 2006, 2008; Carr, 2006; Colnerud, 1994, 1997, 2006; Fenstermacher, 2001; Goodlad et al., 1990; Hansen, 2002; Hostetler, 1997; Jackson et al., 1993; Norberg, 2006; Strike & Soltis, 1992). Applied professional ethics are necessary to aid teachers in making such decisions. Campbell (2003) defines applied professional ethics as “general principles of ethics, such as honesty and fairness, as they apply to teachers’ work” (p.9). She argues that within the scope of applied professional ethics, teachers require “ethical knowledge” (Campbell, 2003, 2004), which has an influence on the reasoning, “manner” (Fenstermacher, 2001), “dispositions” (Sockett, 2006) and actions of educators (Campbell, 2003; Carr, 2000; Hostetler, 1997; Jackson et al., 1993; Lovat, 1998; Nash, 1996; Sockett, 1993; Strike & Soltis, 1992; Strike & Ternasky, 1993). Essentially being a “good person” with a sound sense of right and wrong is not enough to prepare teachers for the complexities for the classroom (Campbell, 2006). Hence, ethical knowledge is imperative as, according to Campbell (2006):

Ethical knowledge enables teachers to make conceptual and practical links between core moral and ethical values such as honesty, compassion, fairness, and respect for others and their own daily choices and actions. It moves teachers beyond viewing teaching solely in technical, pedagogical, curricular, disciplinary, and evaluative terms to appreciating the potentially moral and ethical impact their practice has, both formally and informally, on students. (p. 33)

Given that teachers maintain an elevated position of trust in society, they hold a significant degree of responsibility which cannot be carried out without moral agency and ethical knowledge. Teachers have an obligation to ensure that they not only conduct themselves
professionally but more importantly, to make choices that serve the best interests of each individual under their care.

Numerous conceptual orientations exist in the field of ethics in education, including those of virtue ethics (Carr, 2000; Fenstermacher, 1990, 2001; Sockett, 1990, 1993), principles (Strike, 1990, 1995, 1999), feminist ethics (Noddings, 1984, 2002, 2005), psychological stages of moral development (Oser, 1991, 1994), and social justice perspectives (Beyer, 1991, 1997). This review presents theoretical and research literature grounded in different orientations, as they apply to this study. The review will concentrate on literature relating to applied professional ethics (Campbell, 2003; Colnerud, 1997; Strike & Ternasky, 1993) since it is most relevant to discussions of ethical dilemmas as they occur in the daily lives of classroom teachers. Often, the terms ethical and moral are used interchangeably in the literature (Campbell, 2003, 2008; Colnerud, 2006), as is the case in this review.

Teachers are responsible for multiple facets of their students’ development: academic, social, emotional, and moral. As they engage in their practice, they consciously or unconsciously, draw on their professional ethics during the decision making process. From the curricular materials they employ to the way they arrange desks, the beliefs that professionals uphold and the approach they take towards their students, apply principles of fairness, honesty, kindness, empathy, respect, and care (Campbell, 2003). All actions of the teacher impact the landscape of the classroom, the ways in which they teach, the capacity for students to learn, and the way students view themselves as learners and individuals.

In essence, ethics and teaching are perceived to be inseparable by many in the field. Scholars and researchers, including Carr (2000), Fenstermacher (1990), Goodlad et al. (1990), Hansen (2001a), Hostetler (1997), Jackson et al. (1993), Sockett (1993), Strike (1990), and Tom
(1984), have focused on the moral and/or ethical dimensions of teaching in their work. While much of the literature in the field is theoretical, numerous noteworthy empirical studies have emerged since the early 1990’s (Campbell, 2008), which have proven to be instrumental in the shaping this study. In one of the first empirical studies, “The Moral Life of Schools Project,” Jackson et al. (1993) engage in a series of observations of eighteen classrooms over the course of two and a half years. Their findings reveal that schools have a profound moral influence on students and their moral development. These influences may be positive or negative, intentional or unintentional on the part of the teacher, but they are present and embedded in all aspects of schooling. The researchers state:

[Schools]… influence the way… students look upon themselves and others.

They affect the way learning is valued and sought after and lay the foundations of lifelong habits of thought and action. They shape opinion and develop taste … they contribute to the growth of character … they do much of it without the full awareness and thoughtful engagement of those in charge. (Jackson et al, 1993, p. vii)

Another prominent study, “The Manner in Teaching Project” (Richardson & Fenstermacher, 2000, 2001), originating from Fenstermacher’s (1990) earlier discussions of the teacher as a moral agent, seeks to gain deeper insights into the ways in which teachers affect the moral development of their students. The project resulted in a series of five papers (Chow-Hoy, 2001; Fenstermacher, 2001; Hansen, 2001b; Richardson & Fallona, 2001; Sanger, 2001) published in a special issue of the Journal of Curriculum Studies, which offer descriptive accounts of teaching practice and the moral dimensions of a teacher’s work.

Buzzelli and Johnston (2002) conducted an investigation where student-teacher-interactions were analyzed from a moral perspective, with a focus on the influences of language,
power, and culture within the classroom. Their findings suggest that in general, classroom interactions are morally significant; however, they note that teachers possess, “blind spots [which] can influence what it is [they] perceive and ultimately how [they] respond to individuals and situations” (p. 125). Based on their data, the researchers offer recommendations for teacher education programs in continued professional development for educators on the moral dimensions of classroom life. The empirical works of Campbell (1996, 2003) are especially relevant to my own research, as they offer an examination of professional knowledge, teacher agency, and the ethical challenges and dilemmas experienced by educators, through the perspectives of classroom teachers gathered using interviews. Campbell’s research has considerably shaped both the conceptual framework and the methodology of this thesis. Her work (1996, 1997a, 1997b, 2000, 2001, 2003, 2004, 2006, 2008) is grounded in the moral and ethical dimensions of teaching, focusing on the ethical role and awareness of the classroom teacher and the ethical challenges they confront.

While teaching, in and of itself, is inherently ethical, it is a relational profession (Noddings, 1984, 2002, 2005), and as such, the teacher is instrumental in the delivery and dissemination of its mandate. At the heart of schooling lies the classroom teacher. It is the teacher who sets up the physical environment of the classroom, establishes and enforces classroom rules, creates an environment for learning, selects resources, interprets the curriculum, and evaluates achievement. Existing within these professional activities are “moral messages,” as identified by Jackson et al. (1993), which serve to influence the morals and ethics of students. As a result of their position of power in the classroom (Colnerud, 1997), teachers sustain the complex role of model or guide for their students, often inadvertently (Bergem, 1990; Buzzelli & Johnston, 2002; Campbell, 2003, 2004; Fenstermacher, 2001; Korkmaz, 2007; Newberry &
Davis, 2008; Wilford, 2007). Literature in professional ethics often identifies teachers as “moral agents” (Campbell, 2003, 2004; Sockett, 1993) or moral exemplars, suggesting that students learn about ethics and morality through their experiences in school, more specifically from interacting with and observing their teachers (Buzzelli & Johnston, 2002). The actions, reactions, and decisions of teachers embody moral and ethical virtues that may then be internalized by the students (Buzzelli & Johnston, 2002; Campbell, 2003, 2004; Carr, 2006; Colnerud, 1997; Fenstermacher, 2001; Hansen, 2001a, 2002; Jackson et al., 1993; Norberg, 2006). Based on their interactions with teachers, the students formulate their own understandings of morals and ethics including, among other things, how one should treat others or how one should behave in various situations.

As teachers engage in their practice and confront day-to-day situations, they provide moral and ethical experiences for students (Bebeau, 1993; Beyer, 1997; Buzzelli & Johnston, 2002; Campbell, 2003, 2004; Carr, 2006; Colnerud, 1997; Hostetler, 1997; Jackson et al., 1993; Norberg, 2006; Richardson & Fenstermacher, 2001; Strike & Soltis, 1992). Based on his findings from “The Manner in Teaching” project, Fenstermacher (2001) describes the teacher’s “manner” as having a complex and elaborate role in directing the moral compass of students. He concludes that, “…virtue is acquired or ‘picked up’ by association with people who are themselves virtuous” (p. 640). Consequently, the literature maintains that teachers, through their professional practice and conduct, influence the students’ morals. Unfortunately, Jackson et al. (1993) propose that teachers are, for the most part, unconscious of the moral implications of their actions. They suggest that teachers indirectly influence the moral development of their students by virtue of being “good people” rather than by purposively acting as moral agents. Campbell (2003, 2004) disagrees, arguing that teachers differ in the degree of their moral awareness and
ethical knowledge. She maintains that even if the actions and behaviors are unintentional and perhaps unplanned, they can later be justified or explained, by some teachers, in relation to their ethical significance and their moral influences on the students. Campbell (2003) states:

With thoughtful intent, they [teachers] express a reflective acknowledgement of the virtues and principles that guide their practice. They are mindful of the good. So, while their daily acts of fairness, kindness, honesty and respect – as well as the complex subtleties of interacting with students – may still be largely spontaneous and habitual, some teachers nonetheless do seem able to perceive and explain them within a moral and ethical framework to an extent greater than that with which they have been previously credited. (p. 39)

While some teachers may, in fact, be oblivious to the degree of influence they possess over the moral development of their students, there are those who uphold a sense of moral agency which can be defined as “how teachers treat students generally and what they teach them of a moral and ethical nature” (Campbell, 2003, p.2). Moral agency therefore, consists of both the development of student morals and the behaviors of the teachers themselves, with the two inevitably overlapping as teachers perform their work (Campbell, 2004). Ethical knowledge, on the other hand, “relies on [the] teachers’ understanding and acceptance of the demands of moral agency as professional expectations implicit in all aspects of their day-to-day practice” (Campbell, 2003, p.3).

The empirical works of Bergem (1990), Korkmaz (2007), and Campbell (2004) establish that many teachers recognize the responsibilities they maintain as role models and more specifically as moral agents and that they possess ethical knowledge. Bergem (1990) studied teachers’ beliefs about their position as moral guides and found that half of the respondents saw
themselves as role models. Those teachers who regarded moral agency as a responsibility and priority, “insist[ed] that teachers should, at all times, in their everyday work, be aware of the fact that they are role models whose values, attitudes, and behaviors have an impact on their students” (pp. 92-3). In her study of teachers’ opinions about their professional roles and responsibilities, Korkmaz (2007) reported that of 148 participants, two thirds agreed that educators should be role models for their students. Moreover, all participants identified moral virtues as significant, with most indicating that teachers should exemplify understanding, care, respect, and sensitivity towards student needs. Similarly, Campbell (2004) conducted classroom observations and teacher interviews to examine the ethical knowledge maintained by teachers. She discovered that teachers not only demonstrate the principles of care, fairness, respect, and trust through their actions and behaviors, but are able to expound on the qualities they hope to instill in their students as they consider these ethical principles to be pertinent. Based on her findings, Campbell (2004) concludes that:

As moral agents, the teachers in this study are able to articulate a level of ethical knowledge pertaining both to what they want their students to learn about right and wrong and to how they aspire to govern their own conduct as morally and ethically responsible professionals and role models. (p. 415)

Accordingly, all three studies indicate that teachers understand their roles and responsibilities as moral agents and they reflect on the moral significance of their actions and behaviors in practice. Colnerud (2006) supports this assertion, maintaining that teachers strive to be ethical for two reasons: first, because it is their professional obligation and second, to motivate ethical behaviors in their students. Given the influential and critical role of the classroom teacher, it is not surprising that many researchers in the field of professional ethics focus on the teacher as a main

Despite the awareness and efforts of some teachers to be moral and ethical, Colnerud (2006) argues that it is very difficult to be a “good” teacher: a sentiment supported by this thesis. While Colnerud (2006) suggests that more research in this area is required to determine the reasons for this assertion, she contends that teachers “work in conditions that are at times morally very difficult” (p. 381). Such problems may, in part, be attributed to the ethical challenges and dilemmas that teachers face in the scope of their practice.

**Ethical Dilemmas in Teaching**

Teaching frequently presents educators with challenges and demands that complicate their work and often tests their sense of moral agency and ethical knowledge (Beyer, 1991; Campbell, 1996, 2003; Colnerud, 1994, 1997; Howe & Miramontes, 1992; Husu, 2001; Jackson et al., 1993; Lyons, 1990; Tirri, 1999; Tirri & Husu, 2002). Ethical dilemmas are inextricably tied to teaching because they impact all aspects of schooling and influence the academic, emotional, and social development of students. As described by Beyer (1991): “A number of authors have recently argued that ethical concerns should be central in considering approaches to teaching and schooling… because teachers daily confront a variety of ethical questions and subject matter choices and responsibilities to students, other teachers, and parents” (p. 205). Contradictions are common because, as noted by Colnerud (1997), the nature of teaching demands choice, and juggling between benefits and consequences for different stakeholders. For that reason, existing empirical studies in professional ethics consistently reveal that as teachers
perform their work, they regularly experience ethical dilemmas or tensions (Campbell, 1996, 2003; Carr, 2006; Colnerud, 1994, 1997; Hostetler, 1997; Husu, 2001; Jackson et al., 1993; Lyons, 1990; Tirri, 1999; Tirri & Husu, 2002; Strike & Soltis, 1992). The nature of classroom dilemmas is variable; however, ethical conflicts often involve questions of moral and ethical significance.

As established earlier in this review, teachers, in varying degrees, are aware of their roles and responsibilities as moral agents (Campbell, 2003). Many endeavor to be kind, caring, honest, fair, and equitable; however, the application of these principles in their practice can be compounded by the complexities of teaching. Such situations often involve conflicting ethical principles (Campbell, 1996, 2003; Colnerud, 1994, 1997, 2006) which account for ethical dilemmas where, as defined in the first chapter, an ethical dilemma is a situation in which the teacher must make a difficult choice between two or more alternatives. In an article that explores professional ethics in teaching, Colnerud (2006) discusses conflicting principles by using the case of care and justice. She argues that, dependent on the event, the two principles may or may not be in conflict. Instances of conflict, such as those which involve questions of the student’s welfare versus collective interests for example, leave teachers feeling ambivalent and anxious, unclear as to how they should react. The aim of this thesis is to investigate the contexts in which ethical dilemmas occur and the ways in which teachers cope with or resolve these issues, with an emphasis on the work of teachers with students who have special needs in inclusive classrooms.

The studies which specifically informed my research were those that focused on the ethical challenges and dilemmas that arise in teaching practice. Such issues can occur between teachers, among teachers and the administration, students, or parents, and within individual teachers who are internally conflicted as a result of a difficult situation (Campbell, 2008).
Jackson et al. (1993) maintain that morally significant events occur regularly in classrooms. This assertion is reinforced by Lyons’ (1990) study concerning the conflicts teachers face in their professional lives. The results reveal that 70% of the participants characterized their challenges as being either moral or ethical, and most perceived the dilemma to be connected to their sense of self (p. 167). Furthermore, 52% indicated that the dilemma was ongoing, and the majority believed that it was likely to recur. Likewise, using evidence collected from interviews with experienced teachers, Campbell (2003) proposes that ethical conflicts develop from routine everyday situations which place teachers in a position of uncertainty as to how they should be managed. Such uncertainty causes hesitation and indecision in their attempt to cope and resolve the ethical issues. Inevitably, some choices may lead to regret. Campbell’s (2003) observations are supported by others in the field (Carr, 2006; Hansen, 1993; Norberg, 2006), among whom Colnerud (1997) concludes that, “teachers’ vary [in their] awareness of ethical responsibilities and are molded into an uncertainty when faced with making ethical judgments” (p. 633). Lapses in professional knowledge, contradicting demands, along with a sense of accountability to the institution, profession, parents, and students make ethical tensions extremely difficult to resolve. In such situations, it is not uncommon for even the most ethically conscious and professional teachers to experience doubts and make errors in judgment (Buzzelli & Johnston, 2002; Campbell, 1993, 2003; Colnerud, 1994, 1997; Husu, 2001; Jackson et al., 1993, Tirri, 1999; Tirri & Husu, 2002).

Ethical challenges frequently identified in the empirical works of Campbell (1996, 2003), Colnerud (1994, 1997), and Tirri and Husu (2002) involve relational issues and conflicts related to the implementation of policies, procedures, and practices such as assessment, discipline, or school rules. Colnerud (1997) asked 189 teachers to write about the ethical difficulties they
experience in their work. Her results identified three areas of complexity as pertinent; the status of caring, collegiality, and ethical considerations versus institutional demands and norms. Colnerud (1997) suggests that teachers frequently compromise their ethical and professional responsibilities, hesitating when required to place the needs of the child before collegial loyalty, parental integrity, and institutional demands and norms. Likewise, Tirri and Husu (2002) researched the ethical conflicts and choices of classroom teachers. Their findings revealed that the majority of conflicts dealt with relationships between teachers and parents. Another significant category of ethical tensions involved conflicts between colleagues. The researchers conclude that all the dilemmas described by teachers involve human interactions and different interpretations of the best interest of the child, where the teacher must protect students from harm, with the exception of difficulties occurring in the context of collegial relations. Correspondingly, Campbell (1996, 2003) examined ethical tensions that occur in professional practice. Her findings suggest that while many struggle with job related challenges such as assessment and evaluation, the majority of the ethical problems experienced by teachers involve relations between colleagues.

Prevalent in all of the empirical studies investigating ethical dilemmas in teaching were the difficulties that stem from collegial relations. Such cases involved direct interactions with or observations of other teachers or administrators, where it was believed that the student was harmed or disadvantaged either emotionally, physically, or academically (Campbell, 1996, 2003, 2008; Colnerud, 1994, 1997; Husu, 2001; Tirri, 1999; Tirri & Husu, 2002). Tirri and Husu (2002) revealed that one third of all dilemmas described in their research consisted of “situations in which a colleague had behaved in a cruel way towards a child” (p. 72). In most of these ethically difficult circumstances, the teachers felt torn between their responsibility to the students
and their loyalty to colleagues. Unfortunately, all of the researchers revealed that in dilemmas involving colleagues, loyalty superseded any professional obligation to serve the best interests of the students (Campbell, 1996, 2003; Colnerud, 1994, 1997; Tirri & Husu, 2002). Colnerud (1994) indicates that teachers often compromise their own ethics and moral principles at the expense of loyalty stating, “teachers do not follow what they intuitively or consciously think is the right thing to do. They fail to act in a way that they themselves define as morally good” (p.3). She attributes this to the “social norm of loyalty” within the teaching profession, where teachers fear being perceived as “whistle blowers” (Colnerud, 1994, 1997).

The literature holds the social norm of loyalty responsible for the refusal of teachers to call into question the unethical behaviors or actions of their colleagues (Campbell, 1996, 2003; Colnerud, 1994, 1997; Tirri & Husu, 2002). Colnerud (1994) suggests that there is an “implicit norm” in the teaching profession which prevents teachers from intervening in a situation involving another teacher regardless of ethical considerations. This corresponds with Campbell’s (1996, 2003) argument which alleges that teachers are afraid to address such issues because they fear personal risk, professional consequences, or collegial ostracism. Teachers, in a sense, elect to protect their own interests instead of those of their students. An explanation for the strong sense of collegiality in the teaching profession is found in the Adverse Report outlined in the *Ontario Teaching Profession Act (Section 18 a, b)*. The Act requires that teachers, “on making an adverse report on another member furnish him (her) with a written statement of the report at the earliest possible time and not later than three days after making the report” (Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario, 2011). While the Act is intended to protect teachers from false accusations, it can serve an alternative purpose which may be unintentional, but nevertheless
functions to silence and discourage its members from reporting a colleague for fear of professional consequences or misconduct (Campbell, 1996).

Consequently, ethical dilemmas involving colleagues were identified as those which were most frequently ignored or left unresolved (Campbell, 1996; Colnerud, 1997; Husu, 2001; Tirri, 1999; Tirri & Husu, 2002). Fears of guilt and remorse are elicited in some teachers (Campbell, 1996, 2003, 2008; Colnerud, 1994, 1997; Tirri & Husu, 2002) causing some to consider themselves “cowards” (Colnerud, 1994, 1997). Such feelings are an outcome of their awareness that their refusal to respond to the issues is unethical, and hence, represents a failure in their professional responsibility to the students. Many rationalize their reluctance to address the unethical behaviors of their colleagues, blaming their neglect on the “necessities of their job,” or by removing all personal responsibility, stating that they “have no other choice,” thus “suspending their morality,” as proposed by Campbell (2003):

Suspended morality largely pertains to the compromising of individuals’ subjective beliefs about right and wrong… Compromise allows individuals to ‘suspend’ or abandon their sense of moral responsibility and explain their actions solely in role-based statements of false necessity…” (p. 92)

Some live with the guilt and continue to ignore collegial dilemmas, while others choose to transfer to an alternate institution as a solution (Tirri & Husu, 2002). The few who elect to confront the problems judge themselves to be “disloyal,” “snitches,” or “stool pigeons” (Campbell, 2003, p. 92). They place blame on themselves despite the knowledge that they responded according to their professional obligations by making the “right” decision for the students (Campbell, 2003, p. 92). Regardless of their response, research underscores the reality that many of the ethical tensions occur as a result of colleagues. Moreover, professional
obligations and personal ethics are replaced by conformity and loyalty in most situations (Campbell, 1996, 2003; Colnerud, 1994, 1997; Tirri, 1999; Tirri & Husu, 2002).

In spite of the frequency of ethical challenges occurring in practice, the literature suggests that teachers are often not prepared to cope with or resolve the issues that arise (Lyons, 1990; Tirri, 1999). Husu (2001) contends that ethical problems are difficult to resolve because there is no simple formula or set of guiding rules one can follow to make a decision. Instead, teachers are left to consider the alternatives and the corresponding results. Drawing on their empirical findings, Joseph and Efron (1993) claim that personal ethics drive decision making, “teachers’ individual moralities shape the choices they make and the conflicts that concern them” (p. 201). Tirri (1999), on the other hand, in investigating the strategies teachers apply in responding to ethical dilemmas found that teachers use the best interest of the student to justify their actions. Likewise, Husu (2001) suggests that professional obligations influence the choices of teachers. Some scholars argue that many ethical tensions and dilemmas are not solvable and as such, they can only be coped with (Campbell, 2003; Lyons, 1990). Regardless of the teachers’ motivations, they struggle, waver, and hesitate when coping with or resolving ethical dilemmas. All of Tirri’s (1999) participants, however, acknowledged that they require further preparation for the ethical challenges they encounter in their practice. Such situations which are difficult to manage, frequently lead to feeling of guilt, self-doubt, and anxiety for the teachers (Campbell, 2003).

Making ethical decisions is difficult because teaching is inherently complex (Colnerud, 1997). Currently, literature on ethical dilemmas in teaching is not as abundant as that of the moral dimensions of schooling in general (Campbell, 2008). Therefore, the area of ethical tensions must be studied in order to gain deeper insights into the situations which have been noted to elicit stress and anxiety for teachers. This is especially important given the potential for
dilemmas to contribute to the high levels of stress, burnout, and in turn attrition within the profession (Brackenreed, 2011; Bunch et al., 1997; Fantilli & McDougall, 2009; Hargreaves, 2003). Based on her research, Colnerud (1994) suggests that one source of ethical dilemmas in teaching involve conflicts between institutional demands and personal ethics. This primarily consists of issues involving assessment and evaluation. One of her findings that is relevant to the aims of this thesis is that in such situations the “scruples [of teachers] are – as could be expected – especially strong concerning children with some learning-disabilities” (Colnerud, 1994, p. 9). This observation suggests that teachers may differ in their experiences of ethical challenges when working with students who have special needs. As noted previously, one area that has not received much empirical attention to date in relation to the study of ethical dilemmas is that of special and inclusive education. The objective of this study is to investigate this area further to gain a better understanding of teachers’ ethical experiences in inclusive classrooms.

**Ethical Challenges in Special and Inclusive Education**

Schools and the people in them are caught up in a host of contradictions and the inevitable conflicts between individual and group interests and well-being. One would hope that teachers and administrators are well prepared to deal with these contradictions and conflicts in steadfastly fulfilling their educational mission. Unfortunately, they are not. (Goodlad, et al., 1990, p. xii)

Special education reform has been a topic of debate for decades, with many proponents of inclusion agreeing that access to an education in the general education classroom is essentially a human right (Norwich, 2005; Polat, 2011). In 1994 officials representing 92 governments and
25 international organizations convened in Spain for a discussion on the need for a global shift to promote an educational approach that would serve all children, particularly those with special needs. The “Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education” (UNESCO, 1994) was the result of the meeting which also strengthened the commitment to implement inclusive schooling practices. The declaration proposes that:

Those with special educational needs must have access to regular schools which should accommodate them within a child-centred pedagogy capable of meeting these needs.

Regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all; moreover, they provide an effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire educational system. (pp. viii–ix)

In order to fulfill this mission, an appeal was made to all governments and the international community to adopt laws and policies to promote inclusive education for all children regardless of individual differences.

Accordingly, education for children without discrimination on the basis of mental and physical disability, among other issues, is deemed to be a right as specified by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in Canada (Department of Justice, 1985). In 1998, Ontario’s Education Act legislated that students with exceptionalities be placed in general education classrooms with adequate supports in cases where the placement meets the needs of the students and the parents request the placement (Ontario Regulation 181/98). It was not until 2005 that the Ministry of Education in Ontario introduced “Education for All: The Report of the Expert Panel on Literacy and Numeracy Instruction for Students with Special Education Needs Kindergarten to Grade 6.”
The document provides recommendations for teachers on best practices for teaching students with special needs in inclusive settings. The laws and policies implemented in Ontario regard inclusion to be equitable as students are afforded access to educational opportunities and resources regardless of individual needs and abilities. Consequently, one could argue that inclusion and special education reform advance ethical principles of fairness and equity as they occur in the context of teaching practice and student learning. Rude and Whetstone (2008) concur. They claim that inclusion, in addition to issues of access to learning opportunities, resources, and specialized supports, contain an ethical basis:

From an ethical point of view, these mandates specify rights of students with disabilities that are inherent and unquestionable. The manner in which the mandates are implemented, however, leads to a variety of interpretations of concepts that are interrelated with ethics including: equity, responsibility, rights, duty, and justice. (p. 10)

Similarly, Leonardi (2001) conducted interviews with 11 elementary school teachers in four U.S. states to determine if teacher perceptions of inclusion were based on laws and rights or principles which were considered to be more relational. Findings indicate that teachers support inclusion based on relational principles such as care, respect, understanding, and empathy. This substantiates the argument that inclusive and special education can be explored from a moral and ethical standpoint.

Despite the significance of principles such as equity, fairness, and justice in the inception and development of special and inclusive education, ethics has received minimal attention in the fields. Discussions in the literature have primarily been theoretical, with a focus on laws, codes, and standards (Berkeley & Ludlow, 2008; Howe & Miramontes, 1991, 1992; Paul, et al., 2001). While the literature generally refers only to special education in its discussions of ethics,
inclusive education is often implicit in the discourse due to the reforms which have occurred in the field. This literature review, in its exploration of ethics in special education, will encompass inclusive schooling.

Professional standards in special education first appeared in the 1983 issue of *Exceptional Children* with the establishment of the CEC Code of Ethics. In Ontario, a code of standards specifically for special education does not exist; however, the Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession came into being in the year 2000 (Ontario College of Teachers, 2011b). Some scholars claim that codes can be helpful in making resolutions and defining responsibilities; therefore they refer to the CEC standards in their discourse of frameworks or guidelines for ethical decision making and the governance of professional behaviors in special education (Bucholz et al., 2007; Fiedler & Van Haren, 2009). However, empirical studies suggest that they are rarely utilized to resolve ethical tensions. Cobb and Horn (1989) surveyed 381 members of the CEC to determine their use of the CEC Standards for Professional Practice. They learned that 330 (87%) of the respondents did not use the standards in their decision making. Similar results were established by a more recent study conducted by Fiedler and Van Haren (2009). Of 571 participants, 262 (46%) maintained that they had little to no knowledge of the CEC Code of Ethics.

Others argue that codes are not specific and offer little benefit in managing ethical dilemmas in practice (Berkeley & Ludlow, 2008; Courtade & Ludlow, 2008). Berkeley and Ludlow (2008) raise concerns that the ethical dimensions within teaching will be lost when laws and codes take precedence. They state:

The education/special education discussion up to this point in time tends to be directed towards the mix of law and ethics ignoring, we believe, the more important conversation
of determining what is just, what is right, what ought to be done as issues of importance that... [other scholars] presented in their discussions of moral reasoning, ethical deliberations, caring, and justice. (p. 6)

In the early 1990’s when discussions of the moral and ethical dimensions of teaching in general education were unfolding and prominent empirical works were emerging (Campbell, 2008; Jackson et al., 1993), Howe and Miramontes (1992) published *The Ethics of Special Education* which offers a conceptual examination of ethical deliberation within special education, the role of the special educator, institutional constraints, and ethical issues that arise in the field, including those related to inclusive education. The authors contend that the reasons why ethics are particularly important in special education are twofold: firstly, there is its fundamental commitment to provide access to public education regardless of ability; and secondly, it places an overwhelming demand on the resources of schools and skills of teachers. Furthermore, they suggest that issues of safety, justice, equity, and best interest can easily be compromised. Subsequently, students are potentially more at risk as they may not be able to advocate for themselves. Consequently, the fundamental nature of a special educator’s practice requires continuous deliberation, negotiation, and decision making processes that are often fraught with complexity and bring ethics to the foreground. Since then, a few theoretical discussions emphasizing the importance of ethics in special and inclusive education and its relevance to the field have emerged (Berkeley & Ludlow, 2008; Bucholz et al., 2007; Courtade & Ludlow, 2008; Fiedler & Van Haren, 2009; Howe, 1996; Paul et al., 2001; Rude & Whetstone, 2008).

While empirical works in the ethics of special and inclusive education are limited, scholars concur that teachers who work with students who have special needs experience many ethical challenges and dilemmas in the scope of their practice (Berkeley & Ludlow, 2008;
Bucholz et al., 2007; Courtade & Ludlow, 2008; Fiedler & Van Haren, 2009; Howe, 1996; Howe & Miramontes, 1991, 1992; Paul et al., 2001; Rude & Whetstone, 2008). In fact, some scholars argue that in the area of special education, ethical dilemmas are more pressing because of the minority status and potential vulnerability of the students (Fiedler & Van Haren, 2009; Howe & Miramontes, 1992; Paul et al., 2001). Howe and Miramontes (1992) describe the teaching profession specifically for teachers working with students who have special needs as a balancing act requiring continuous consolidation of opposing goals. In such situations, teachers must weigh alternatives and make decisions that serve the best interests of the students (Courtade & Ludlow, 2008; Howe & Miramontes, 1991). Teachers of students with special needs, perhaps more so than teachers of students without special needs, are constantly pulled in many directions simultaneously and at times placed in positions of conflict with colleagues, administrators, and parents. They must cater to the needs of one individual while ensuring that they do not compromise the learning and safety of the entire class. They must balance the requests of the parents and their colleagues while remaining responsible for the well being of the student. They must adhere to school board policies and procedures, provincial and federal laws, as well as human rights codes for individual and often unique cases. To further compound these pressures, one could argue that teachers have an ethical obligation to act as advocates for their students. Given their position of power and trust in the classroom, the decisions teachers make directly impact the welfare and future of each individual under their care (Bergem, 1990; Berkeley & Ludlow, 2008; Bucholz et al., 2007; Fiedler & Van Haren, 2009; Heydon, 2005; Howe & Miramontes, 1991, 1992; Jordan, 2007; Paul et al., 2001; Rude & Whetstone, 2008).

As teachers engage in their practice with students who have special needs, they are regularly torn between the demands and politics of the institution, colleagues, parents, and the
needs of their students (Fiedler & Van Haren, 2009, Howe & Miramontes, 1992). Areas identified in the literature as specifically challenging and those in which ethical predicaments are believed to arise include: issues of confidentiality; labeling, placement, accommodations and modifications; curricular choices; design and implementation of assessments; pedagogical strategies and interventions; delivery of services; advocating for students; institutional unresponsiveness; and allocation of resources (Fiedler & Van Haren, 2009; Howe & Miramontes, 1991, 1992; Courtade & Ludlow, 2008; Paul et al., 2001; Rude & Whetstone, 2008; Sileo et al., 2008). Such tensions leave teachers with many questions and uncertainties, for which, as suggested by Courtade and Ludlow (2008), there is minimal guidance:

Educators are constantly facing tough choices and making significant decisions that could potentially affect the futures of many students. There are no solid answers to the many questions that have been raised. Educators must rely on thoughtful decision making practices and sound ethical principles to ensure outcomes that promote the best interest of each individual with severe disabilities. (pp. 38-9)

Ethical dilemmas are complicated and their resolution requires teachers to make complex decisions for which there are no clear or ready solutions (Bucholz et al., 2007; Courtade & Ludlow, 2008). Fiedler and Van Haren (2009) conducted a survey with 624 special education teachers and administrators to identify which ethical principles guide their decision making when confronted with ethical dilemmas. Principles of equal respect, integrity in professional relationships, beneficence or responsible caring, and benefit maximization were ranked as most important in the listed order of priority. In the area of special education, making ethical choices becomes especially difficult, as the unique and individual circumstances of each student must be taken into consideration (Howe & Miramontes, 1992). Special educators have an ethical
obligation to ensure students are treated equitably, as argued by Fiedler and Van Haren (2009), “Ethical issues in special education are particularly pressing given the fact that special educators are routinely called on to be advocates for children with disabilities and defenders of their rights” (p. 161).

To complicate matters further, “special educators find themselves assuming and undertaking numerous and varied roles in the delivery of special education and related services” (Berkeley & Ludlow, 2008, p. 3). Most of the theoretical discussions of ethics in special education in the literature are focused on the role of the special educator (Howe & Miramontes, 1991, 1992; Paul et al., 2001; Rude & Whetstone, 2008; Sileo et al., 2008). However, educational reforms have resulted in changes to the delivery of special education services. At present, inclusion is the preferred practice in many schools and classrooms throughout North America. As such, one must consider the general educator in the discourse of ethical challenges in special and inclusive education. Courtade and Ludlow (2008) propose that preparation and responsibility for providing special education services rest with every teacher, “The growing implementation of full inclusion in schools and districts across the country also has led some to suggest that ALL teachers need specialized training to serve students with severe disabilities in general education classrooms” (p. 39). By extension, if all teachers require specialized skills and training to work with students who have special needs, one can presume that all teachers would encounter similar ethical difficulties in carrying out that work.

The current challenge for teachers, researchers, teacher educators, and policy makers is the lack of supportive literature and empirical evidence in the ethics of special and inclusive education. While scholars in the field have raised issues of ethical significance for decades, minimal attention has been devoted to their study, specifically in the context of inclusion.
Currently, very little is known about the types of ethical dilemmas that teachers experience in their work with students who have special needs and the ways in which they are resolved (Berkeley & Ludlow, 2008; Bucholz et al., 2007; Heydon, 2005; Howe & Miramontes, 1992; Keim et al., 1998; Paul et al., 2001; Rude & Whetstone, 2008). Yet, scholars suggest ethical tensions within special education will continue to be a significant topic of debate and discussion (Berkeley & Ludlow, 2008; Courtade & Ludlow, 2008). Hence, there still remains a gap that needs to be filled in the literature. It is proposed that a deeper examination of the ethical challenges faced by teachers will be of benefit to those in education as such knowledge has the potential to improve the teaching and learning of students with special needs. Berkeley and Ludlow (2008) state, “We believe that it is impossible to provide individualized and meaningful special education programming unless these [ethical] issues are addressed and discussed on a continuing basis” (p. 6).

The following section of the literature review addresses salient issues which currently affect special and inclusive education. Given that ethical dilemmas in special and inclusive education have not been studied empirically, an overview of the literature covering various areas in the field, are explored. A spectrum of issues are examined, including some of the issues which have been alluded to in the theoretical discussions of ethics in special education, as it is presumed that the difficulties confronting the field may be aligned with the types of ethical challenges and dilemmas teachers experience in inclusive classrooms.
Salient Issues in Special and Inclusive Education

In a strange way I think the term inclusion is a big obstacle for inclusion. When teachers come up to me and say, ‘I don't have enough training to deal with kids with a disability.’ The way I usually answer that is by saying, ‘How would you know if you have enough training?’ After thinking about that for a while, they usually say, ‘When my fear goes away.’ When you first walk into that class, the disability is 9/10 of who that kid is. When you get to know that kid, that disability shrinks down. It’s not the defining attribute of that kid. And as the disability shrinks down, so does that fear. So I think training is important, but don't believe that training is going to take away that fear. (Kunc, 2009)

Reforms to special education have given rise to conflicting views and controversies in the field. Inclusion, the instruction of students with special needs alongside their general education peers, encompasses curriculum delivery, accommodation and modification, assessment and identification of needs, and teacher beliefs, as well as access to resources and support personnel. The value of inclusion has frequently been debated in the literature and has been identified by some scholars as a significant challenge confronted by teachers in their work in both inclusive and specialized classrooms (Byrnes, 2002; Hornby, Atkinson, & Howard, 1997; Howe & Miramontes, 1992; Jimenez & Graf, 2008; Marozas & May, 1988; Meyen et al., 1993; Stainback & Stainback, 1992). Embedded within these practices and policies are legal and ethical questions that must be considered by the classroom teacher (Howe & Miramontes, 1992; Marozas & May, 1988; McGinnis, 2002).

Since the aforementioned issues exist primarily at the school and classroom level, the teacher is the key agent responsible for dealing with and resolving the dilemmas they may
instigate – ultimately determining the course of action to be taken. It would be reasonable to assume that the controversies expressed in the literature would, in turn, translate to challenges experienced in practice. As such, the above issues in special and inclusive education merit attention as they may emerge as potential sources of ethical dilemmas in the existing study.

Inclusion is an educational model where all children, regardless of ability, have access to learning and meaningful participation in general education settings (Bennett, 2009; Jordan, 2007). In Canada, all provinces have policies which ensure that students who have exceptionalities receive access to educational services that meet their needs, with placement in regular classrooms where appropriate. While the policies support inclusion, they differ among provinces, specifically in the ways that eligibility of services are determined, services are delivered, and resources are allocated (Jordan, 2001; Kohen, Uppal, Guevremont, & Fernando, 2008; McLaughlin & Jordan, 2005). According to a study conducted by Kohen, et al. (2008) for Statistics Canada (PALS, 2001) 155,000 children between the ages of 5 and 14 have a disability (4% of all Canadian children), with 44% of all those reported living in the province of Ontario. Inclusion of these children in regular education classrooms varies among provinces, with Prince Edward Island maintaining the highest rate (73%), followed by New Brunswick (72%), and Nova Scotia (67%). The rate of inclusion in the province of Ontario falls at approximately 55%, with a national average of 59%.

While approximately half of all children with disabilities are learning in inclusive settings in Canada, those who are excluded from such regular classrooms are placed in special education classes, attending a school or facility designated for those with special needs (Kohen et al., 2008), or being tutored at home (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2009). Furthermore, some of the students in inclusive placements spend only parts of their day in a
general education classroom, with different service delivery models implemented throughout school boards across Canada (Burge, Ouellette-Kuntz, Hutchinson, & Box, 2008). The service delivery models are governed by the ways in which funding and resources are allocated, as well as by school leadership and staff (Jordan, 2007). Jordan (2007) describes the varying models which include: special education or segregated classes where students learn in an environment away from their non-exceptional peers; resource rooms where students who are included in regular classrooms for part of the day are withdrawn for specialized instruction, and full inclusion where students with special needs learn exclusively in a regular education classrooms with or without additional supports. She notes that variations of these three models also exist. For instance, students may spend part of the day in a special education class and be included for specific subjects such as physical education or visual art. All of these models have both advantages and disadvantages based on reports of literature (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994; Jordan, 2007; Marston, 1996; Vaughn, Moody, & Schumm, 1998).

Inclusion has become the preferred placement for students with special needs (Jordan, 2007; McLaughlin & Jordan, 2005). The question today is not whether to include students with special needs in regular classrooms, but rather, how to include such students and whose responsibility it is. The literature suggests that a number of factors are critical to the success of inclusion, the most significant of which are the school norm and “culture” which includes the role of the school principal (Jordan & Stanovich, 2004; Stanovich & Jordan, 1998, 2002; Riehl, 2000; Weiner, 2003), and the knowledge, skills, attitudes and beliefs, and sense of efficacy of the classroom teacher (Jordan & Stanovich, 2004; Stanovich & Jordan, 1998, 2002, 2004; Waldron, McLeskey, & Pacchiano, 1999). These factors are directly related, as schools with administrators
who support and promote inclusive practices generally contain teachers who maintain a sense of responsibility for the teaching and learning of students who have special needs.

The principal is assessed as having a significant influence over the school culture, which in turn has an effect on student learning (Hallinger, Bickman, & Davis, 1996; Jordan & Stanovich, 2003; Stanovich & Jordan, 1998). Stanovich and Jordan (1998) used questionnaires and interviews to measure, among other variables, principal beliefs and school norms about inclusion. They discovered that the strongest predictor of effective teaching behaviors were the school norm and the principals’ beliefs about inclusion and disability. The majority consensus establishes a school “culture” or “norm” which defines the overall attitudes and beliefs maintained by the staff regarding inclusion. The researchers claim that an interventionist school norm, one where staff perceive disabilities as resulting from barriers that reduce learning opportunities, produce practices that are more conducive to teaching in heterogeneous classrooms. In such schools, opportunities for professional development are encouraged and made available to teachers. Furthermore, collaboration within the school is supported and hence, positively influences teaching practices (Jordan & Stanovich, 2004).

Weiner (2003) describes three levels of school norms or culture around the topic of inclusion. Level one schools are not committed to inclusion, and as such they make minimal efforts to accommodate students with diverse learning needs. Teachers in such schools fail to assume responsibility for students with special needs, instead referring them to specialists. Instruction is targeted at the midpoint of abilities in the classroom, with little effort to make accommodations, modifications, or diversify instruction for individuals with differing abilities. In general, Weiner reports that students with disabilities in this environment often experience failure. Schools considered to be at level three on the other hand, are dedicated to inclusion and
they ensure that all learners receive equitable learning opportunities and achieve success. Teachers perceive different learning needs as a matter of adjusting programming and services rather than as a deficit of the student. Consequently, most teachers attempt to implement effective practices which serve a range of learners. These schools have heterogeneous classrooms in which all students are meaningful participants with teachers who feel supported and prepared as they receive adequate resources and opportunities for skill development. Level two schools fall somewhere in the middle, with no expectation for teachers in regard to the inclusion of students with special needs. Some teachers maintain level three practices, while others fall to level one.

These tiered distinctions have been employed by Weiner (2003) to classify schools in a large school district (District 24) of New York involved in an inclusive education program. He proposed that it was “far easier to learn to teach better in some schools than in others” (p. 12) as level three schools offered more opportunities for professional development and collaboration with colleagues. Moreover, teachers received positive feedback regularly which contributed to their sense of competency. Weiner (2003) describes a study, conducted by Metis Associates (2001, 2002) in District 24, which examined teachers’ perceptions of conditions necessary for successful inclusion. Teachers working in inclusive classrooms were asked to prioritize eight conditions which included factors such as in-class supports, professional development, collaboration, and availability of alternative placement for students with disabilities who were not successful in inclusive classrooms. The results of the surveys show that 74% of teachers believed that teacher attitudes towards students was the first or second most important condition for inclusion to be effective. Other significant conditions identified by the teachers were valuing the student and taking a personal interest in the student. Based on the findings of the surveys,
Weiner (2003) concludes that teachers working at level two and three schools involved in the District 24 inclusion program selected conditions which related to their ideologies which underscores the impact of school norms on teacher attitudes and beliefs.

Classroom teachers are instrumental to the success of inclusion because they are responsible for providing opportunities and removing barriers (Bennett, 2009; Stanovich & Jordan, 1998, 2002, 2004; Waldron et al., 1999). In a review of literature, Sindelar, Shearer, Yendol-Hoppey, and Liebert (2006) claim that inclusion is most successful and sustainable when it is in line with the classroom teacher’s beliefs. Empirical studies reinforce this assertion, demonstrating that effective inclusion lies with the attitude, belief, and capacity of the teacher (Jordan, 2007; Jordan, Lindsay, & Stanovich, 1997; Jordan & Stanovich, 2001, 2003, 2004; Hornby et al., 1997; Menzies & Favley, 2008; McGinnis, 2002; Stanovich & Jordan, 1998, 2002, 2004). Jordan and Stanovich (2001, 2003) and Stanovich and Jordan (2002) identify two sets of epistemological beliefs maintained by teachers about disability: those which are pathognomonic and those which are interventionist. Teachers who hold pathognomonic beliefs exempt themselves of all responsibility for the learning of students with special needs as they attribute the disability to the internal state of the student – one that cannot be changed. In contrast, interventionist teachers attribute disability to social conditions. As such, they see themselves as responsible for removing barriers to learning for students with special needs. Jordan, Glenn, and McGhie-Richmond (2010) claim that approximately 25% of the teachers they studied held pathognomonic beliefs and 20% maintained interventionist beliefs, with about 50% of the teachers interviewed oscillating between pathognomonic and interventionist beliefs depending on situation or context.
Through extensive investigations of classroom teachers’ attitudes and beliefs, Stanovich and Jordan (1998, 2002, 2004), Jordan and Stanovich (2001, 2003, 2004), and Jordan et al. (2010) found that teacher beliefs about ability and disability are inextricably linked to the types of instructional practices used and the teacher’s promotion of student learning. Jordan et al. (1997) and Jordan and Stanovich (2003, 2004) propose that teachers maintain variable perspectives of their roles and responsibilities for meeting the needs of their students. In analyzing student teacher interactions in inclusive classrooms, they conclude that the attitudes and beliefs of teachers influence both the quality and quantity of instructional interactions with students. Pathognomonic teachers demonstrated the least effective interaction patterns, with teacher-talk that was sparse and non-academic. They focused more on classroom and behavior management; thus, students with special needs received the least instructional assistance. In contrast, interventionist teachers spent almost twice as much time in dialogue with students who have special needs when compared with the typically achieving students. The quality of these interactions were also higher, with more academic talk and development of understanding especially when comprehension of content was low. Interestingly, the researchers found that despite the additional amount of time interventionist teachers spent in dialogue with students who have special needs, there was no consequence for the typically achieving students. In fact, interventionist teachers engaged with the typically achieving students as frequently as the pathognomonic teachers, with the academic quality of these interactions being higher for interventionist teachers. As a result, differences in teacher beliefs were correlated with distinctions in teaching practice – those with a greater tendency of interventionist beliefs demonstrated more effective teaching overall.
Similarly, Glenn (2007) and Glenn, Schwartz, and Jordan (2007) suggest that teachers who attributed a student’s learning difficulties as internal and fixed absolved themselves of responsibility for teaching that student, differing from those who believed that the student’s abilities were dependent on learning conditions and therefore alterable. Accordingly, Glenn (2007) noted that teachers who accept responsibility for students with special needs were more likely to accommodate and adapt instruction. Moreover, interventionist teachers employed student-centered strategies and encouraged intrinsic motivation for academic achievement. These results imply that preferences of teaching practices are correlated with beliefs about ability and disability (Jordan et al., 2010). The work of Schwartz (2008) further corroborates this finding. She determined that the decisions teachers make, the support they seek for their students, and the degree of accommodations they implement for students with disabilities relate to epistemological beliefs. These findings, while preliminary, propose that specific beliefs lead to effective teaching behaviors. Jordan et al. (2010) state:

The data… suggest a link between how teachers interact with their students both with and without disabilities and their beliefs about ability and disability and about their roles in fostering learning… Teacher’s epistemological beliefs, beliefs about disability, and about their responsibilities for students with disabilities, may be related to the quality of their overall teaching practices. (p. 264)

Stanovich and Jordan (2002, 2004) further argue that teachers who are effective at including students with special needs free up time to support the diversity of needs in their classrooms by way of grouping students and managing their instructional time without compromising the quality of their instruction. Those who are committed to inclusion are more likely to collaborate with others, including specialists, colleagues, and parents. In addition, they
seek additional supports and resources, thus, enhancing the effectiveness of their teaching practices. In fact, they propose that inclusion can serve as a vehicle for professional development because teachers who are willing to include learners with diverse needs are more likely to strive to improve their practice and by doing so, become better teachers in general.

Research supports the premise that effective inclusive classrooms foster enhanced teaching practices, which in turn promote student achievement. Rea, McLaughlin, and Walther-Thomas (2002) learned that students with special needs in inclusive settings showed higher levels of performance in a range of subject areas and improved attendance. Furthermore, the students received increased individualized attention, had more curriculum focused and goal oriented IEPs, and were more challenged in comparison to segregated programs. Likewise, Wallace, Anderson, Bartholomay, and Hupp (2002) observed teachers in inclusive classrooms spending 75% of their time interacting with and teaching students and only 1.37% of their time disciplining. The teachers were seen to be spending 44% of their time working with small groups, with elevated levels of student engagement when compared with their non-inclusive counterpart. Moreover, the works of Jordan and Stanovich (2001, 2003, 2004) and Stanovich and Jordan (2002, 2004), indicate that teachers who worked in schools dedicated to inclusion attained increased levels of engagement and academic achievement for students with and without disabilities. Implementation of instructional methods that serve an array of needs in the classroom requires teachers to utilize a diversity of skills and knowledge which demands the execution of best practices (Jordan, 2007). Inclusion can therefore, provide academic benefits for all students as suggested by Jordan et al. (2010):

It may therefore be not only possible but also desirable for teachers to align their system of epistemological beliefs with their inclusive practices and the requirement to raise
achievement standards by applying highly effective instructional methods to the benefit of all their students. (p. 265)

Despite the benefits of inclusion and the significance of teachers’ beliefs, attitude, and commitment to its success, many teachers remain hesitant to include students with special needs in their classrooms (Jordan-Wilson & Silverman, 1991; Jordan et al., 1997; Jordan & Stanovich, 2004; McGinnis, 2002; Menzies & Favley, 2008; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996). Scruggs and Mastropieri (1996) ascertained that 65% of teachers supported inclusion in principle, but only 53% were willing to teach students with disabilities. Similarly, Menzies and Favley (2008) claim that the majority of teachers studied favored the idea of inclusion but did not apply it in practice. Evidently, there appears to be a discrepancy between teachers’ expressed promotion of inclusion and their willingness to implement it in the classroom. Given the documented benefits of inclusion for student learning, the question of why this discrepancy exists remains. McLaughlin and Jordan (2005) suggest that hindrances to inclusion result from the challenges faced by teachers:

There is… substantial evidence that supports a set of basic instructional principles that work for all learners… These instructional principles are not placement specific, they describe how effective instruction occurs, not where instruction takes place… Application of such principles within fully inclusive and heterogeneous classes has been stymied by, among other things, inadequately prepared personnel, class sizes, lack of sufficient time, and lack of differentiation in the curriculum, all of which contribute to the research-practice gap. (p. 109)

Studies of general educators who teach students with special needs continuously identify insufficient teacher preparation and levels of support as constraints to inclusion (Buell, Hallam,
Gamel-McCormick, & Scheer, 1999; Jordan, 2001; Lipsky & Gartner, 1998; Leatherman, 2007; McGinnis, 2002; McLaughlin & Jordan, 2005; Menzies & Falvey, 2008; Meyen et al., 1993; Stanovich & Jordan, 2002, 2004; Waldron et al., 1999). Scruggs and Mastropieri (1996), in the aforementioned study, found that only 29% of participating teachers considered themselves to be qualified for the task of including students with disabilities in their classes. Similarly, Parsad, Lewis, and Farris (2001) in a study conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics determined that only 32% of teachers who taught students with disabilities felt very well prepared to meet their needs. Comparable conclusions were drawn by Schumm and Vaughn (1995) who examined the academic gains of students in inclusive classrooms over a period of five years. Their results reveal that teachers felt unprepared to implement accommodations and modifications for students with disabilities. Moreover, the empirical work of Leatherman (2007) demonstrates that while teachers expressed positive feelings about inclusion, they reported a need for more training, support, and collaboration. Likewise, Buell et al. (1999) suggests that teachers are not confident in teaching students with disabilities. General educators identified areas in which they required training including, program modifications, assessing academic progress, adapting curriculum, managing behavior, developing IEPs, and using assistive technologies. Stanovich & Jordan (2002) concur with these studies. They state: “Many teachers who are currently teaching in [inclusive] classrooms have not been prepared to meet the challenges they face on a daily basis” (p. 173).

Stanovich and Jordan (2004) propose that inclusion has changed the roles and responsibilities of general educators whose stress levels can potentially be exacerbated by the additional demands:
The reality of increased heterogeneity has put increasing pressure on those teachers [general educators] to meet externally-set standards while at the same time responding to the individual needs of students… It is no wonder that some teachers have perceived the inclusion of students with disabilities in their classrooms as an additional burden in their already overburdened lives. (pp. 178-9)

Classroom teachers are often alone in accommodating and modifying curriculum, selecting resources and delivery models, assessing and evaluating, and goal setting. Documents such as the IEP that describe the students’ strengths and needs, special education strategies, accommodations, and resources intended to meet those needs (Burge et al., 2008), and the Student Record, used across North America, are only helpful to a certain degree. Teachers must frequently devise and execute special and inclusive education programs with minimal or no support (Hess & Brigham, 2001). At the same time, they must abide by policies and weave their way through various obstacles to gain access and funding for resources, testing, and support personnel for their students (Howe & Miramontes, 1992; Meyen et al., 1993). Accordingly, a general consensus in the literature suggests that teachers require training, supports, and resources to effectively implement inclusive practices (Buell et al., 1999; Leatherman, 2007; Lipsky & Gartner, 1998; McGinnis, 2002; Menzies & Falvey, 2008; Meyen et al., 1993; Schumm & Vaughn, 1995; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996; Stanovich & Jordan, 2002; Waldron et al., 1999).

Challenges to inclusion leave many classroom teachers anxious and overwhelmed, and students with special needs disadvantaged (Brackenreed, 2011; Bunch et al., 1997; McGinnis, 2002). In a national study on inclusion, Bunch et al. (1997) concluded that while teachers support inclusion, they have significant concerns about work load, adequacy of professional development, and the support of administration. Moreover, in an examination of coping
strategies utilized by teachers to manage the strains which may arise in inclusive classrooms, Brackenreed (2011) found that teachers persistently experience high stress levels. Sources of the identified stressors include inadequate preparation, feelings of low-competency, lack of support, and lack of collaboration with others, including parents. Inevitably, the difficulties faced by teachers may affect their attitudes and beliefs about disability an outcome that relates to the correlation between beliefs and the teacher’s sense of efficacy. If teachers feel successful in including students with special needs in their general education classrooms, their willingness to include these students in the future increases (Stanovich & Jordan, 2004). If they do not experience success, they may become resistant. Furthermore, teacher efficacy has been associated with good teaching practices (Jordan, 2007).

Jordan et al. (1997) propose that pathognomonic teachers are less confident in their abilities to teach students with special needs. Such teachers did not feel that they possessed the specialized knowledge and skills to deal with the disability; therefore, they preferred withdrawal delivery services. Interventionist teachers, on the other hand, possessed higher levels of efficacy, demonstrating a greater willingness and commitment to meeting student needs in the general education classroom. Buell et al. (1999) agree, suggesting that a lack of efficacy poses concerns for teachers who do not feel capable of meeting the range of learning needs in their classrooms. However, research on teacher efficacy is not conclusive as some studies show no direct relationship between teacher efficacy and practice (Jordan & Stanovich, 2003, 2004; Stanovich & Jordan, 1998, 2000). Nevertheless, Stanovich and Jordan (2004) purport that if teachers receive adequate supports and resources and in turn experience success, their sense of efficacy about inclusion increases.
The effectiveness of inclusion rests with classroom teachers. In order to address the diversity of needs in a heterogeneous classroom, general educators need to develop the necessary instructional and assessment strategies to serve all learners (McLaughlin & Jordan, 2005). Moreover, they need to align their attitudes and beliefs with interventionist perspectives and accept responsibility for students with special needs. Yet, change also needs to occur at the systemic level as the current methods of identification, placement, and allocation of resources and services pose many obstacles for classroom teachers and students with special needs. Jordan (2007) argues that school systems require further reform before the inclusion mandate can be fulfilled, “Despite the international recognition that inclusive education is the standard for educational delivery for people with disabilities, legislators and school systems in Canada still have a way to go before they meet the inclusion mandate” (p. 8).

The following discussion addresses identification, placement, and the distribution of resources and services. While these practices are specific to special education, they directly impact inclusive classrooms and teachers.

The focus on placement as opposed to programming which consists of instruction and the availability of services and resources to meet the individual needs of students, presents difficulties for inclusion (Jordan, 2007; Jordan & Stanovich, 2004; Lupart, 2000; McLaughlin & Jordan, 2005). A focus on placement carries the assumption that if students are placed in a general education classroom, inclusion has been achieved. In spite of this belief, the degree of “inclusivity” within an inclusive classroom can actually vary depending on factors such as the accommodations and modifications the student receives, the degree of collaboration between the classroom teacher and school staff, and even the physical arrangement of desks (Jordan, 2007). Bennett (2009) elucidates that inclusion is contingent on “active and productive involvement” as
opposed to placement in a regular classroom (p. 2). However meaningful participation in a general education classroom is often dependent on access to the supports and resources necessary to meet the individualized learning needs of a student.

Access to supports, services, and resources continues to be a point of contention for students with special needs and the teachers and parents who support them. In schools, opportunities and benefits to be accessed by students with special needs include, but are not limited to: resources such as specialized equipment and support personnel; location of learning; individualized and adapted programming; professional services including teacher aides and therapists; parents’ access to information; parental involvement in identification, placement, and review meetings; learning, and parental advocacy (Cohen & Jimenez, 2008). The main challenge with access is that it is not accessible to everyone. Based on conclusions made by the Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children, a recent review of Canada’s progress in the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child, signed in 1989, has led the Canadian Council on Social Development to propose that:

Children with disabilities in Canada have varying opportunities to live full lives… while Canada has publicly funded health and education systems that are designed with “everyone” in mind, these systems do not necessarily meet the particular needs of children with disabilities… children with disabilities are vulnerable members of society. Early identification and intervention services – vitally important to their development – are not universally available. The supports and services necessary to ensure their Convention rights are commonly thought of as privileges, rather than the entitlements that they truly are for these children. The quality of care and support available varies according to what part of the country the child lives in, and programs are limited or
In education, access to services and supports critical for learning are often unevenly distributed and tangled in systemic or institutional politics, leaving students with special needs disadvantaged. Various “gatekeepers” intervene at different levels in the school system, maintaining the power to grant or deny access. Examples of such gatekeepers are school boards that can deny access by withholding funding for special education services or resources based on the identification practices, principals who do not fully support inclusion, teachers who fail to provide students with special needs with adequate accommodations and modifications to meet their needs, or students who socially marginalize and or stigmatize peers with special needs. Some scholars in the field of special education argue that learning disabilities are not innate but result from socially-constructed barriers that limit access to necessary resources, services, and supports. However, with adequate teaching methods and supports, it is suggested that many learning disabilities can be overcome, and students can make substantial progress (Adelman, 1992; Byrnes, 2002; Jordan, 2007; Lilly, 1992; Lipsky & Gartner, 1998). As such, access to supports, resources, and services are critical for individuals with special needs to achieve equity within the education system.

The consequences of denying access to learning are manifold for students with special needs and can be attributed to high drop-out rates, failure in secondary school, and decreased enrolment in post-secondary institutions (Jordan, 2007). Such outcomes have future ramifications that impact career choices and quality of life (Lupart, 2000). Individuals with special needs and their advocates are often required to break down barriers and negotiate access (Howe & Miramontes, 1992). One parent of a student with multiple disabilities who was denied access to support services states, “it should not be a fight for parents of children with disabilities
to get what other children receive naturally” (Cohen & Jimenez, 2008, p. 109). Similarly, teachers are placed in positions where they must act as advocates for their students with special needs in order to gain access, at times damaging their relationships with colleagues or even risking their jobs (Cohen & Jimenez, 2008). Howe and Miramontes (1992) refer to the special education teachers as “brokers” who must “often negotiate ‘deals’ to obtain the services they believe should be provided for the special needs students they represent” (p. 66).

In Ontario, access to supports and resources continues to be a persistent problem for many students with special needs because of the established criteria which designates the distribution of funding. Funding is dictated by the identification of a student based on specifically defined categories of disability (Jordan, 2001; McLaughlin & Jordan, 2005). Consequently, those who do not meet the defined criteria are not granted access, which leaves both students with special needs and their teachers disadvantaged. An IPRC determines the identification and placement of a student on behalf of the school board. Placement is entirely dependent on identification, and, while parents are able to appeal the definition of exceptionality assigned to their child, they have no influence over the program or services granted once in the placement (McLaughlin & Jordan, 2005).

Various perspectives concerning the identification of individuals with disabilities exist in the field of special education within North America. Some interpret identification as a social construct that labels and categorizes students (Adelman, 1992; Byrnes, 2002; Jordan, 2007; Lilly, 1992), while others perceive it as a necessary component of meeting their individual needs. Dating back to 1968, Reger, Schroeder, and Uschold questioned the validity of identification claiming that, “…grouping children on the basis of medically derived disability labels has no practical utility in schools” (In Stainback & Stainback, 1992, p. 86). Identification continues to
be criticized by some for stigmatizing, perpetuating stereotypes, encouraging discrimination, and establishing a hierarchy of “normal” versus “abnormal” (Adelman, 1992). Psychological and IQ tests used to confirm diagnosis are seen as tools which serve to validate the notion of biological deficits of an individual with disabilities and provide excuses for neglecting to adequately teach students who are presumed to be unteachable and unresponsive to change (Lilly, 1992; Zuriff, 1996).

There are those who approach the identification process as a starting point from which an instructional program aimed at facilitating learning and promoting success can be structured. According to this position, the label does not define the student, and disability is not fixed; rather, it is perceived as a condition influenced by environment that can be altered with support and remediation. Teachers with this mindset believe that they are responsible for helping students learn and strive to break down barriers to education (Adelman, 1992).

Some authors argue that the current procedures of identification and placement used by school boards across North America are unsuccessful at meeting the mandate that all children can and should have an equal opportunity to learn (Lilly, 1992; Lupart, 2000; McLaughlin & Jordan, 2005). Fortunately, reforms in the field of special education are being made to ensure the equity rights of all students, regardless of ability. Initiatives like universal design for learning, where teaching strategies and pedagogical materials intended for specific students but beneficial to all are being used with the whole class (Jordan, 2007), demonstrate that some schools are moving towards a model which values difference. However, reform takes time and, for the most part in the current special education system, without a professional assessment and a designated identification, individuals have no access to funding for resources and support personnel or specialized programming to promote learning (Byrnes, 2002; Howe & Miramontes,
These issues, as suggested by McLaughlin and Jordan (2005), work against inclusion:

There are major challenges to creating a truly inclusive and seamless educational system that is designed for the needs of all students. Among the challenges is the need to create a continuum of curriculum and instructional supports within schools that can be provided without concern for labels or location of delivery, but which protects basic equity rights for students with disabilities on an individual needs basis. (p. 99)

Lack of supports and resources for students with special needs, while disadvantageous to the students, also creates considerable problems for the teachers who are striving to meet their individual needs.

**Concluding Remarks**

Including students with special needs in the regular classroom may present a number of challenges and it is up to teachers to decide how they will be resolved and whether responsibility for the student will be assumed. According to the Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession in Ontario (Ontario College of Teachers, 2006), teachers are ethically responsible for treating students with care, respect, honesty, acceptance, and fairness regardless of ability. Furthermore, the Council for Exceptional Children’s mission, vision (2011b), and code of ethics (2003) support equitable treatment of all students and inclusive teaching practices. Consequently, teachers’ conceptualization of disability and the ways in which students with special needs are treated is a moral matter because it involves moral principles such as equity, justice, care, respect, and fairness, and it ultimately affects students and student learning (Menzies & Favley, 2008; Ontario College of Teachers, 2006a). As trusted professionals, educators have an
obligation to behave morally, make ethical decisions, and reflect on their practice (Ontario College of Teachers, 2006a, 2006b). Reflection entails thinking about moral and ethical dilemmas and how they may be handled. The process of such consideration promotes professional growth and exposes bias and lapses in judgment which can lead to practice that is more accepting and appreciative of diverse learners. The importance of identifying moral and ethical dilemmas in inclusive classrooms as a means of supporting and sustaining inclusive education is confirmed by McGinnis (2002) in his study of pre-service teachers. While he refers to students with developmental delays in particular, his statement can be applied to all students with special needs who are included into general education classrooms. He proposes that:

Although the law protects the educational rights (including the least restrictive placement) of students with developmental delays, the reality of schooling is that the role of the classroom teacher as someone who does or does not support inclusion of students with a mental disability is critical to take into consideration. Therefore, the identification of moral conflicts associated with the general and special educators’ teacher’s decision making is a critical step to accomplish. (p. 26)

Since current programming in special education is dependent on the involvement and commitment of teachers, their decision making and notions of disability impact the educational outcomes for students with special needs in regular classrooms (Byrnes, 2002; Jimenez & Graf, 2008; Jordan et al., 1997; Jordan & Stanovich, 2004; Stainback & Stainback, 1992).

This study aims to develop an understanding of the ethical dilemmas, challenges, and tensions that teachers experience in their context of their work with students who have special needs in inclusive classrooms. Inclusion is considered by many a human right (Norwich, 2005; Polat, 2011) and accordingly a moral matter (Leonardi, 2001; Rude & Whetstone, 2008). Given
that literature in the ethics of special and inclusive education is scarce, this work will contribute to the growing body of literature and contribute to the existing discussions in the field.
Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this study is to explore ethical dilemmas experienced by teachers, at the elementary and secondary level, in their work with students who have special needs. Moreover, the study seeks to investigate the ways in which these ethical dilemmas are handled, and the range of supports available to classroom teachers. To establish a thorough understanding of the methodology used in this study, this chapter will focus on the following aspects: the rationale for and limitations of the research design, participant selection and sample, data collection, data analysis, and ethical considerations.

Research Design and Rationale

A qualitative approach was employed in this study to gain insights into the individualized perspectives and experiences of classroom teachers working with students who have special needs. Denzin and Lincoln (2008) define qualitative research as:

An interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials… that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals’ lives. (p. 4)

To address the research questions in this study, it is necessary to seek an understanding of how the participants make sense of their teaching experiences as well as the meanings they impart to the dilemmas in their discussions. This type of an understanding is acquired most effectively
through eliciting rich detailed descriptions from the participant, that can be analyzed through an interpretive qualitative inquiry (Merriam & Associates, 2002, pp. 4-6).

Qualitative research has been rooted in a tradition (Creswell, 1998), orientation (Patton, 1990) or in strategies (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). For the purpose of this study, the “basic interpretive qualitative” approach was applied. The overarching objective and the required processes are delineated in the definition by Merriam and Associates (2002):

In conducting a basic qualitative study, you seek to discover and understand a phenomenon, a process, the perspectives and worldviews of the people involved, or a combination of these. Data are collected through interviews, observations, or document analysis. The data are inductively analyzed to identify the recurring patterns or common themes that cut across the data. (pp. 6-7)

The basic qualitative approach was selected for its consistency with the methods used by scholars whose empirical works on moral and ethical situations in general education have informed and framed this study (Campbell, 2003; Colnerud, 1997; Jackson et al., 1993; Richardson & Fenstermacher, 2001). These qualitative studies applied interview and/or observation data collection techniques with the intention of describing events occurring in classrooms that were explored through the described experiences of teachers.

The data collection for this study was conducted in three stages (Figure 1): Stage 1: online survey (Appendix A); Stage 2: individual interview (Appendix B); and Stage 3: follow-up individual interview (Appendix C). At the end of each of the first two stages, collected data were analyzed and used as a means of participant selection for the next stage. The data were also utilized to inform proceeding stages in terms of question development and focus for points of discussion.
The aim of the first stage of data collection was primarily to establish a pool of participants who could potentially be interviewed in successive stages. With this focus in mind, the survey was selected as a data collection instrument. A survey “gather[s] information by asking participants about their experiences, attitudes or knowledge” (Graziano & Raulin, 2010, p. 288). Despite their conventional use in quantitative research, surveys can be adapted to any type of study (Graziano & Raulin, 2010) including those with a qualitative design, as surveys can be “… exploratory in which no assumptions or models are postulated [and they] can be descriptive… simply describ[ing] data on variables of interest…” (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007, p. 207). Furthermore, “surveys may vary in their levels of complexity from those that provide simple frequency counts to those that present relational analysis” (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007, p. 205; Graziano & Raulin, 2010).

Since this is a qualitative study, a simple web-based cross-sectional descriptive survey (one which gathers detailed information about a specific population at a given point in time) was used to serve two purposes: first, for the purposive selection of potential interviewees, and second, as a means of collecting preliminary descriptive data to inform the interview stages – specifically in the formulation of interview questions. This survey type was ideal because it permitted the sampling of a large geographic area without the need for travel. It was efficient.
with a rapid distribution and collection turn-around, and hence, allowed for a relatively large number of participants to be sampled in a short period of time (Cohen et al., 2007; Creswell, 2009). Moreover, the survey provided basic information about the participants, their experience with students who have special needs, their understanding of ethical dilemmas in practice, and their ability to articulate their experiences.

A web-based format has been noted by researchers for its numerous benefits which include: cost effectiveness; rapid distribution and data collection; accessibility to a larger number of participants; efficiency of administration for participants, and convenience of location such as the participant’s home where the survey could be completed over a given time span (started, saved, then continued) (Bordens & Abbott; 2008; Cohen et al., 2007; Creswell, 2009; Fricker & Schonlau, 2002; Roztocki & Lahri, 2002). Proponents of web-based research contend that, “…proper recruitment techniques actually may lead to a broader range of participants geographically and demographically than do traditional subject pools” (Bordens & Abbott, 2008, p. 161). Furthermore, reliability may be increased in a web-based survey, as suggested by Cohen et al. (2007), “because of volunteer participation (i.e. an absence of coercion), greater authenticity of responses may be obtained” (p. 230).

Yet, despite the many advantages that have been enumerated, web-based surveys pose several challenges. The most common of these is participants may encounter technical difficulties with the hardware or software, the misinterpretation of the layout and presentation of the survey, inaccessibility to a computer, and a lack of proficiency with a computer and the Internet (Bordens & Abbott, 2008; Cohen et al., 2007). With the occasional exception of the first limitation, the remainder of the challenges are not considered to be a significant factor in this study as the target sample of participants are teachers – individuals who regularly use both
computers and the Internet within their professional practice. In fact, the use of a web-based survey could increase response rates. According to Fricker and Schonlau (2002), participant levels of response increased through the use of web-based surveys within specialized samples; there is the assumption that teachers would fit the criteria of a specialized sample.

The web-based survey was intended for the purposive selection of interview participants from different geographic locations within Ontario, with varied demographics, characteristics, and levels of education, as well as a range of teaching experiences. A pool of potential teacher participants was established and reflected a comparatively equal number of participants from the secondary and elementary panels and from general and special education. Despite the relatively extensive pool, the sample was not large enough to be generalizable (Cohen et al., 2007). Rather, the diversity between interview participants provided a broad spectrum of perspectives and experiences through which the research questions being investigated in the study could be addressed.

Limitations to the survey methodology present a number of challenges to data collection and analysis. Without the ability to ask for clarification, participants can mis-interpret the survey questions. Moreover, participants are constrained to a set of precategorized responses established by the researcher. Questions are also standardized whereby each participant is asked the same question in the same order without the opportunity for more descriptive and individualized responses (Bordens & Abbott, 2008; Cohen et al., 2007; Weiss, 1994). As a result, the survey data may not truly represent the experiences of the participants. The most critical problem with the survey methodology in a qualitative study is the survey fails to address the uniqueness of an event, capture nuances in meaning, and provide an explanation or contextual information pertinent to that event (Bordens & Abbott, 2008; Cohen et al., 2007; Weiss, 1994). In an attempt
to counteract the effects of these limitations on the collected data, both open-ended and closed-ended questions were used in the survey and a pilot was conducted to test the survey instrument. However, even the open-ended questions in a survey can be ineffective, as responses are generally brief due to the limited space allotted and time required to write a response (Weiss, 1994). To obtain the rich descriptive data required of a qualitative study, the survey was followed by two stages of individual interviews.

In the second and third stages of data collection, semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with purposively selected teacher participants. The interview format was employed because it allowed for in-depth descriptions of the perspectives, interpretations, and experiences of the participants (Cohen et al., 2007; Creswell, 2009; Seidman, 1998; Weiss, 1994). Weiss (1994) discusses the primary purpose of the interview:

Interviewing gives us access to the observations of others. Through interviewing we can learn about places we have not been and could not go and about settings in which we have not lived…We can learn also, through interviewing, about people’s interior experiences. We can learn what people perceived and how they interpreted their perceptions. We can learn how events affected their thoughts and feelings. We can learn the meanings to them of their relationships. We can learn about all the experiences… that together constitute the human condition. (p. 1)

The objective of this study demands an understanding of the experiences of teachers and the meanings that they draw from them. In pursuit of this aim, the individualized thoughts, feelings, and beliefs of the teacher participants must be captured, in the language of the participant – a task that would be difficult to achieve with any other research methodology.
A semi-structured format with open-ended questions was selected for the interview as it allowed for consistency in the themes and types of questions asked of the participants, while affording the flexibility to adjust the interview to each participant individually. Although the research objectives determine the subject for questioning, in a semi-structured interview, the interviewer has the ability to probe and request elaboration or clarification, alter the sequencing of questions, modify the wording, and even omitting or adding questions based on their relevance to the participant (Cohen et al., 2007; Kerlinger, 1970). As such, the participant is not limited in the scope of the response and hence, allows the interview to move in unforeseen directions, which the researcher may not have considered (Cohen et al., 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008).

Open-ended questions are frequently used to obtain non-standardized responses that are specific to the participants and their unique perspectives and experiences. This form of questioning allows the participants to provide a response “in their own words” without restricting them to a pre-established answer (Bordens & Abbott, 2008; Cohen et al., 2007; Kerlinger, 1970; Morrison, 1993; Weiss, 1994). A number of advantages to open-ended questioning have been identified by Cohen et al. (2007): they provide flexibility; they afford the interviewer the capacity to go in-depth; they enable the interviewer to gather rich descriptions, and they, “allow the interviewer to make a truer assessment of what the respondent really believes” (p. 357).

The final stage of the study consisted of a follow-up individual interview. Not all participants from the initial interview were invited for a follow-up interview, and only the most fruitful interviews – those that demonstrated greatest potential for additional data that would be of value to the development of the study – were considered. As suggested by Weiss (1994)
follow-up interviews are valuable; however, one must weigh the advantages and disadvantages of conducting a follow-up interview.

The intention of the follow-up interview was to gain deeper insights; to seek clarification on discussions from the initial interview; to revisit questions covered in the survey and the initial interview, and to obtain new experiences or perspectives. It is not always possible to cover all of the subjects desired within the limited time frame of one interview session, especially when the participant is providing deep detailed descriptions. A follow-up enables the continuation of the interview once the participant has had an opportunity to rest. A follow-up interview is particularly important in a study of this nature because participants are asked to describe ethical dilemmas in their teaching practice a subject that is somewhat sensitive in nature. The participant may be more inclined to share his or her experiences and perceptions in a follow-up interview because a professional relationship has already been established between the participant and researcher (Weiss, 1994). Moreover, identifying, understanding, and bringing meaning to ethical dilemmas within one’s teaching practice requires reflection. By providing the participant with an opportunity for a second interview, the additional time encourages this form of reflection where the participant may bring new insights, experiences, and observations to the discussion (Weiss, 1994).

Despite the multiple benefits, the interview does have its limitations, specifically because it is question-based and conducted by an interviewer. There is an assumption that data collected will be accurate and reliable. Yet, the validity and reliability of an interview can be called into question for a number of reasons (Cohen et al., 2007). First, it is difficult to determine if the interviewee is providing honest and accurate responses (Weiss, 1994). Second, there may be a difference in the understanding of research intentions or questions between the interviewer and
the interviewee. Third, the interviewer is not free from bias. Researcher bias can be present in the manner questions are phrased, the ways responses are interpreted, in the interviewer’s tone of voice, and even in the interviewer’s body language. Participants may respond to these verbal and non-verbal cues, in turn, influencing the ways in which they answer the questions. Finally, the interview is a constructed social encounter. Issues of interviewee trust, comfort level, and confidence could also impact data collected (Cohen et al., 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Building rapport, purposive sampling, exposure of researcher bias and position, experience interviewing, and adequate planning can eliminate or reduce some of the limitations of this method (Cohen et al., 2007). Moreover, as suggested by Silverman (1993) the use of open-ended questioning increases reliability as respondents have the ability to speak from their personal frame of reference.

**Participant Selection and Sample**

Non-probability or purposive sampling (Cohen et al., 2007) was used at all stages of this study. Participants were strategically selected from a target population of teachers who have experience working with students who have special needs, in either inclusive or segregated classrooms and at both the elementary and secondary level.

Faculties of education throughout Ontario were contacted and a request was made to distribute an invitation for participation in the study to all teacher professionals enrolled in graduate studies or additional qualification courses. Certified teachers enroll in additional qualification courses as a means of on-going professional development to improve their practice and enhance student learning (Ontario College of Teachers, 2011c). The potential teacher participants were sent an e-mail by the faculty of education with an invitation to participate in a
web-based survey. A link was embedded in the e-mail which directed them to the survey. The invitation indicated two criteria for participation: participants were required to be teaching in a classroom at the time of the survey, and they had to have experienced working with students who have special needs. Interested participants who satisfied the criteria voluntarily logged onto the web-based survey and completed a questionnaire.

A total of 49 classroom teachers in the province of Ontario responded to the web-based survey, with 29 qualified to teach at the elementary level, 17 qualified to teach at the secondary level, and three providing no response. Of these 49 teachers, 41 have taught in inclusive classrooms and seven have not taught in inclusive classrooms. One provided no response. Forty indicated that they had worked with students who have been identified for special education in their classroom, while six stated that they did not. Three provided no response.

Twenty-two of the teacher participants completed additional qualification courses, of whom seven, two, and four completed Special Education up to parts one, two, and three respectively. One participant who completed Special Education part three – a Special Education Specialist designation – conceded that the courses were “absolutely no help in this matter [dealing with ethical dilemmas].” Other additional qualification courses completed by the participants included, French, English as a Second Language, math, literacy, biology, religion, and guidance. Twenty-seven of the participants had not completed any additional qualification courses at the time of the study.

Eleven of the teacher participants hold or have held special education positions, at the elementary or secondary level, which include Special Education teacher (7), Resource teacher (1), Learning Support teacher (1), Behavior teacher (1), and Home School Program teacher (1). Twenty-four have never held special education positions and 14 did not respond. Of the 49
teacher participants, 16 indicated that they would be interested in working in a special education position in the future, while 20 stated that they would not be interested in pursuing a special education teaching position. Thirteen did not respond. Of the 11 teachers who, at the time of the study, held a special education teaching position, two indicated that they would not be interested in teaching in special education in the future.

The participants indicated the occurrence rate of ethical dilemmas they experienced in their practice on a scale ranging from rarely to very frequently (Table 1). Ethical dilemmas experienced by those who worked with students having special needs occurred rarely for 14, occasionally for 19, frequently for six, and very frequently for six of the participants. Four participants did not respond.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Ethical Dilemmas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occasionally</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequently</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very frequently</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Data collected from web-based survey, n = 49

From the sample of 49 teacher participants who completed the survey, 14 were selected for the first stage of interviews. Drawing on the survey data, participants were purposively selected based on a specific set of criteria: they must have worked with students who have special needs; experienced ethical dilemmas or difficulties in their work with them; demonstrated an understanding of professional ethics and ethical principles as outlined in the conceptual framework; specifically made reference to ethical principles when describing ethical conflicts, and finally provided evidence of the ability to articulate cogently in the written components of
the survey. Although the participants in this study are not representative of the wider population of teachers, an effort was made to select teachers of different genders; levels of education; years of teaching experience; teaching divisions; teaching positions, and geographic locations, with the intention of gaining diverse perspectives. Only participants who provided permission in the survey to be contacted for interviews were ultimately selected.

In the final stage, the follow-up interview, six participants were purposively selected from the individual interview sample of teachers. Selection was based on the participants’ ability to articulate deep descriptive examples and to discuss ethical dilemmas in practice. Moreover, participants who were able to elucidate the ways in which they cope with or resolve ethical dilemmas and elaborate on the supports they rely on, in addition to recommendations for supports, were sought. Ultimately, only participants who provided permission in the initial interview to be contacted for a follow-up interview were selected.

Data Collection

Stage one: The survey

A web application tool, *Survey Wizard 2* hosted by the University of Toronto, was used to produce and publish the survey. This application tool was selected because it is secure and it demands minimal web browser requirements. Moreover, installation of software or downloads were not necessary which minimized technical difficulties. The URL to the survey was distributed to participants through e-mail and once a participant accessed the survey, a session specific to the individual logging in was created. The survey information was bound to the session and only the individual who created the session had access to the data, with the ability to
return to the survey and alter information at a later date or time. Access to the survey was open to participants for a period of 4 months.

Upon accessing the survey, participants were provided with an overview of the study and definitions for “ethical dilemma” and “special education,” as described in the conceptual framework. If at that point they wished to continue with the survey, they were asked to press a ‘continue’ button, which initiated the survey. The first question in the survey consisted of the letter of informed consent. Participants were able to view the entire survey at once by scrolling down the screen. They had the option of omitting questions, without penalty, and simply continuing on with the survey. Responses to questions were provided in the form of drop down menus, push buttons, and text boxes. At the end of the survey, participants were asked if they would be interested in continuing their engagement in the study for two interview sessions. They were also given an opportunity to provide additional comments and/or feedback.

The web survey contained 23 closed-ended and open-ended questions (Bordens & Abbott, 2008). Closed-ended questions, based on a Likert scale (Abebe & Hailemariam, 2008; Bourque & Fielder, 1995), were used to gain an understanding of the frequency of ethical dilemmas experienced by the teachers in the classroom, the types of ethical dilemmas that were occurring, and the nature of the ethical dilemmas, whereas the open-ended questions allowed participants to offer brief descriptive accounts of their ethical dilemmas. Survey questions and options for responses in the closed-ended questions were developed based on literature in the fields of professional ethics (Campbell, 2003; Colnerud, 1997; Jackson et al., 1993; Richardson & Fenstermacher, 2001) and special education (Hornby et al., 1997; Howe & Miramontes, 1992; Jordan, 2007; Jimenez, & Graf, 2008; Keim et al., 1998; Meyen et al., 1993; Paul et al., 2001; Rude & Whetstone, 2008; Sileo et al., 2008; Stainback & Stainback, 1992) as well as from data
collected in my previous work on a study investigating the cultivation of ethical knowledge in novice teachers (Gajewski et al., 2008; Lennie et al., 2009; Syed et al., 2007). Information on the demographics of participants was also collected.

Two pilot studies were conducted to test the web-based instrument and the survey questions. In the first pilot, a convenience sample of 48 teacher candidates who just completed a two-year teacher education program were asked to complete a paper version of the survey and data were analyzed. This trial was performed to scrutinize the questions in the study and to ensure that they addressed the research questions. A paper format was used to allow participants to focus on the questions and to eliminate the potential negative influences of the web-based format. The second pilot was conducted with 5 experienced classroom teachers using the web-based version of the survey to evaluate the web instrument and to gain further feedback on the questions. Data collected in the second survey pilot were reviewed, but not analyzed.

Some of the survey data are reported in the succeeding interview sections of the methodology as these data were used as a means of participant selection for the interviews and as a tool for the development of the interview questions. Ethical challenges and dilemmas, which were repeatedly identified and/or described by participants in the web-survey, were selected and explored with the teachers.

**Stage two: The initial interview**

Individual interviews were conducted with 14 classroom teachers, each for a duration of approximately an hour and a half. The interviews collected descriptive accounts of the teacher participants’ experiences with and perspectives of ethical dilemmas in their work with students who have special needs. Issues addressed in the initial interviews included, but were not limited
to: classroom management and discipline; curricular content; the Individual Education Plan; identification and placement; pedagogical strategies and interventions; accommodations and modifications; assessment strategies; student socialization processes; work with colleagues and families; resource allocation; consent; release of information, and policy. These issues were selected because they were distinguished in the literature as challenges facing the field of special education (Hornby et al., 1997; Howe & Miramontes, 1992; Jordan, 2007; Jimenez, & Graf, 2008; Keim et al., 1998; Meyen et al., 1993; Paul et al., 2001; Rude & Whetstone, 2008; Sileo et al., 2008; Stainback & Stainback, 1992). Moreover, they were identified by participants in the web-based survey as relevant to the ethical problems and dilemmas they experienced in working with students who have special needs.

The information gathered in the survey guided the development of the interviews in the following details. In the web-based survey, participants had the opportunity to select, from a list of thirteen issues affecting special education, up to three issues they believed to be most relevant to their own experiences and perceptions, in that these categories identify what they believe either caused or contributed to their ethical difficulties. A category of ‘other’ was provided in the event that none of the issues presented were of relevance to the participants. Participants specified that the ethical challenges they experience in their teaching practice occurred in the following contexts: accommodations and modifications; assessment and evaluation; inclusion; classroom management; differentiated instruction; discipline; teacher attitude and beliefs towards students with special needs; cooperation of parents; the IEP; cooperation of administration; cooperation of colleagues, and collaboration with colleagues (Table 2). Nine participants selected the ‘other’ category in which causes of ethical dilemmas specified included: placement;
faith in the IPRC process; resources and supports; visibility of the extra attention for students with special needs; student self-esteem, and dislike of colleagues.

Table 2

*Context of Ethical Challenges or Dilemmas (Web-Survey)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Context of Ethical Challenge or Dilemma</th>
<th>No. of Participants Who Selected the Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accommodations and modifications</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment and evaluation</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusion</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom management</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differentiated instruction</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher attitude towards students with special needs</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher beliefs about students with special needs</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperation of parents</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IEP</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperation of administration</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperation of colleagues</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration with colleagues</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Maximum number of choices for categories were three per participant, with some participants selecting less than the maximum; data collected from web-based survey from 49 participants

Responding to an open-ended question on the web-survey, participants proceeded to describe in detail the types of ethical dilemmas they experienced or observed in their work with students who have special needs. A limit was not placed on the number of dilemmas that each respondent could describe. In total 196 dilemmas were described. The coding and categorizing of the described ethical dilemmas elicited eight major themes (Table 3): practices in special education; stigmatization of students with special needs; interactions with others; lack of supports and resources; identification and placement; assessment and evaluation; classroom management, and future of students with special needs. These themes, in addition to the issues
identified in the literature, played a critical role in the formulation of questions for the interview stages of data collection. Moreover, data from the web-based survey were used to develop probing questions for interviews with selected participants, where relevant, to gain deeper insights or clarification on the individual experiences previously described in the collected survey data (Weiss, 1994).

Table 3

*Types of Ethical Challenges or Dilemmas Experienced by Teacher Participants (Web-Survey)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Ethical Challenge or Dilemma</th>
<th>No. of Accounts Described</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Practices in special education</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodations and modifications</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusion</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differentiated instruction</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative issues</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stigmatization of students with special needs</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactions with others</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colleagues</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of supports and resources</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification and placement</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment and evaluation</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom management</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future of students with special needs</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion of these issues during the interviews concentrated around the ethical principles of equity, fairness, justice, honesty, care, respect for others, and integrity as supported by the Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession (Ontario College of Teachers, 2006a) and the Code of Ethics and Practice Standards of the Council for Exceptional Children (2003). In addition to the pre-determined questions for the interview, participants were encouraged to describe any ethical challenges they experienced which may not have been covered. The teachers
were then asked to discuss the knowledge, skills, and methods they employed to make decisions and resolve ethical dilemmas, identifying supports available to them. Those who were able to articulate the ethical difficulties they experience in their work with students who have special needs with authentic examples, coping strategies, and available supports, were invited to participate in a follow-up interview.

**Stage three: The follow-up interview**

The final stage of the study focused on the ways in which teachers cope with and resolve ethical dilemmas and the supports available to them in practice. Six teacher participants were selected from the initial interview sample and invited to participate in a one-hour follow-up interview. The follow-up interview was also an opportunity for the interviewer to gain clarification, elaboration, or to hone in on particular aspects of the participants’ experiences which the researcher deemed significant to the research questions of the study.

Teacher participants were asked to discuss new ethical dilemmas they experienced or observed in their work with students who have special needs since the initial interview or to share insights or reflections based on the previous meeting. They were then asked to describe, using examples, how they resolved ethical dilemmas arising within the context of their work, focusing on resolutions which they deemed to be both positive and negative from their perspective. Rationalizations of the outcome as well as the basis of the decision were also ascertained. Finally, teacher participants were asked to describe the supports they relied on to cope with the ethical dilemmas they experience in their work with students who have special needs and to provide recommendations for supports that they feel would be beneficial.
As in the first interview, guiding questions for this stage of the data collection were developed using information gathered from the web-survey. The data suggest that teacher participants coped with or resolved ethical dilemmas using a number of different strategies including: dealing with it independently, ignoring the dilemma, collaborating with or relying on others, and seeking professional development (Table 4).

Table 4

*Ways Teacher Participants Cope with or Resolve Ethical Challenges or Dilemmas (Web-Survey)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coping Strategy</th>
<th>No. of Times Identified</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Independently</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ignore</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration/ reliance on others</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional development</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: n=49

The supports currently in place to facilitate the resolution of ethical difficulties that participants identified in their practice include: colleagues such as administrators, teachers, special education teachers, and educational assistants; professional development; and parents of students who have special needs. Individuals have been identified as supports because participants felt that they were able to provide them with assistance in coping with or resolving dilemmas, including offering of advice, guidance, or mentorship. An indication of no available supports was reported on 17 occasions (Table 5). Teacher participants were also asked to provide recommendations for supports that they believed would be valuable in helping them to work through ethical issues. They identified professional development, resources, support/cooperation from administrators, in-class support, and communication (Table 6).
Table 5

Supports to Assist Teacher Participants in Managing Ethical Challenges or Dilemmas (Web-Survey)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support Type</th>
<th>No. of Times Identified</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Colleagues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education Teachers</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Assistants</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional development</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Note: n=49</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6

Recommendations for Supports (Web-Survey)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommended Support</th>
<th>No. of Times Identified</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional development</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support/ cooperation from administration</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In class support</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Note: n=49</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Two copies of the letter of informed consent were provided, for the initial interview and the follow-up interview respectively, to the participant prior to the commencement of the interviews. All components of the consent letters were discussed, and participants were asked to sign both copies. The interviewer retained one copy of the consent letter and the other copy was given to the participants for their records. All interviews were audio recorded for full transcription at a later date. Field notes were recorded following each interview to summarize the main points of the discussion, to document any perceptions or thoughts of the researcher in
relation to the objectives of the study, and to comment on the suitability of the participant for a follow-up interview.

**Analysis of Data**

Survey data were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively, while interview data were only analyzed qualitatively. Quantitative analyses were basic, consisting primarily of frequency counts. Both survey and interview qualitative analyses were done using a constant comparison method (Cohen et al., 2007) with data analysis occurring during and after data collection (Creswell, 2009; Weiss, 1994). Cohen, et al. (2007) define the constant comparison method as:

> The process of summarizing and reporting written data – the main contents of data and their messages. More strictly speaking, it defines a strict and systematic set of procedures for the rigorous analysis, examination, and verification of the contents of written data. (p. 475)

Content analysis is focused on coding, using both pre-existing and emergent themes, categorizing, and interpreting text to make meaning based on the perspectives of the participants, noting patterns and themes. This process of data analysis entails a series of steps that include: deciding on the research questions that will be addressed, defining the sample and units, determining the codes to be used, constructing categories, conducting the coding and categorizing of the data, and finally, conducting the data analysis (Cohen et al., 2007, pp. 476-83).

Analysis was issue focused, where the intention was to study the events or situations experienced and described by the participants (Weiss, 1994). Issues addressed were those reflected in the research questions, including the types of ethical dilemmas teachers experienced.
in their work with students who have special needs, the nature of these dilemmas, the ways in which the participants resolved these dilemmas, the supports available to aid them with resolutions, and recommendations for future supports. Analysis occurred after each stage of the data collection was completed as each stage was used to inform the next. Emergent categories and themes influenced subsequent interview questions as well as participant selection.

**Survey analysis**

Surveys were analyzed using both basic quantitative and qualitative methods. Closed ended questions were analyzed using frequency counts where data were organized based on survey questions (Bordens & Abbott, 2008; Cohen et al., 2007). The open-ended survey questions were analyzed using a constant comparison method as described below in the discussion of interview analysis.

**Interview analysis**

While 19 interviews, 14 from the first stage and 5 from the second stage, were fully transcribed, 12 interviews from the first stage and 5 interviews from the second stage were analyzed and therefore included in the study. A sixth interview from the second stage of data collection was included in the study although it was not transcribed because the audio data were lost and could not be retrieved. A subsequent interview was requested, however, the participant could not make the time commitment to engage in an additional interview. This participant was not excluded from the sample; in place of transcripts post-interview notes recorded by the researcher were used in the analysis. Interview data from two participants were excluded from the first stage of interviews as it was decided by the researcher that two of the participants
sampled were not consistent with the participant selection criteria defined in the methodology. Of the interviews excluded in the first stage of the study, one of the participants was a teaching assistant who supported a classroom teacher in her work with students who have special needs, and the other was a classroom teacher in a private school which did not, formally or informally, designate students for special education or apply IEPs for the students. These participants were selected for the first stage of interviews because they failed to adequately identify their teaching position and situation in the survey. Given that they were eliminated from the participant sample following the first interview, all previously collected data associated with these two participants were also excluded from the study.

The data were coded using words and phrases that emerged from the text (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Cohen et al., 2007; Creswell, 2009; Saldana, 2009; Weiss, 1994). Coding occurred in two stages: first all transcripts were reviewed, and repeating ideas or similar words and phrases were pulled from the text and recorded in the margins of the transcripts. Then the original transcripts were input into qualitative analysis computer software, NVivo, in the second stage of coding. With the assistance of the computer software, codes, emerging from the data, were assigned to text that was relevant to the research focus and the questions addressed in the study (Bazeley, 2007; Saldana, 2009).

Coded data were then grouped into categories framed by themes that occurred most frequently (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Bazeley, 2007; Cohen et al., 2007; Creswell, 2009; Saldana, 2009; Weiss, 1994). The main categories are as follows: ethical challenges and dilemmas that teachers experience in relation to their work with students who have special needs, which encompass personal, collegial, student, parent, and systemic tensions; the coping strategies, knowledge basis, and decision making processes that teachers apply to resolve ethical
conflicts in relation to their work with students who have special needs; the supports available to aid teachers in making decisions and coping with ethical dilemmas that arise in their practice, and suggested recommendations for supports. Within these main categories, themes and sub-themes were assigned to further organize the data.

Descriptive accounts of the findings and emergent themes were compared and contrasted to identify trends, patterns, and differences between the two teacher groups (general and special educators); the types of ethical dilemmas experienced by teachers in relation to their work with students who have special needs; contributing factors which lead to ethical dilemmas; the decision making processes of the teachers, as well as the supports in place to assist educators with these challenges. Where possible, correlations between themes and within themes were drawn to gain deeper insights into the sample of participants and collected data (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Cohen et al., 2007; Creswell, 2009; Saldana, 2009; Weiss, 1994).

Data analysis is interpretive, in that the researcher has an influence on the types of codes and categories selected as well as how the data are organized. Moreover, the researcher is decoding collected data in order to make meaning of the perspectives and experiences of teacher participants. With such interpretation, “… the data analysis is less a completely accurate representation but more of a reflexive, reactive interaction between the researcher and the decontextualized data that are already interpretations of a social encounter” (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 469). The researcher is influenced, in the data analysis, by her biases, background, experiences, and personal convictions (Cohen et al., 2007). Results are not generalizable; rather, they are descriptive accounts of the participants’ individual perspectives and experience, at a given point in time, based on the interpretation of the researcher. They do, however, illuminate
the lived experiences of the teachers studied in this project and contribute to the existing literature in the field of professional ethics and ethical dilemmas in education.

**Ethical Considerations**

This empirical study underwent an ethical review and received approval from the Social Sciences, Humanities, and Education Research Ethics Board at the University of Toronto (Protocol Reference # 24958) (Appendix D). Participation in the intended study was completely voluntary, and the participants were permitted to withdraw their involvement at any time. All contributions and participation, including the identity of the participants, was and will continue to be held in confidentiality in accordance with the University of Toronto ethical policies and procedures on anonymity. A coding system was used to ensure anonymity of survey participants, and all names of interview participants were replaced with pseudonyms. Names of students, colleagues, affiliated schools, school boards, or other institutions identified by the participants during the course of data collection will remain anonymous. The interviews did not involve any school or school board directly and were conducted outside of the teacher participants’ place of employment; as such school or school board consent was not required.

There were minimal anticipated risks to participants as volunteers were adults who were capable of providing informed consent. Potential risks and benefits of the study, along with a detailed explanation of its aims were reviewed with participants, and the teachers provided written informed consent for their involvement in the study. However, given that the information discussed had the potential to be sensitive in nature, an emotional response was displayed by one participant. Benefits of participation included an opportunity to contribute personal experience and knowledge to the growing body of literature in the area of ethical dilemmas in education.
Moreover, participation in the individual interviews may have provided insights to the teachers as they reflected upon their own practice, thus, allowing them to be better prepared to make informed choices when faced with future ethical dilemmas that could arise in their practice.

**Concluding Remarks**

This chapter summarizes the data collection methods used in the study. A qualitative methodology was primarily used in order to gain detailed and rich descriptions of the participants’ perspectives and experiences. However, a survey did require the use of quantitative collection and analysis to some degree, although both closed and open-ended questions were used. Data were collected in three stages consisting of a web-based survey, an initial interview, and a follow-up interview, with analysis occurring following each stage. The survey was employed as a means of participant selection and to guide the formulation of questions for the subsequent stages of interviews. Analysis was qualitative using a constant comparison method at all stages, with quantitative basic frequency counts conducted at the survey stage. The findings from the interviews are described in the following results chapters.
Chapter 4: Findings – Ethical Challenges and Dilemmas

Introduction

Chapters four and five report the research findings from the interviews conducted in this study. Reports of findings are organized according to major and sub-themes that emerged from the data. This chapter primarily focuses on the contexts in which teacher participants experienced and/or observed ethical challenges, tensions, conflicts, and dilemmas, while the subsequent chapter, five, reports data on the knowledge, skills, and methods the teachers use to resolve ethical issues arising in their practice, available supports to aid them with resolutions, and recommendations for supports.

A dilemma results from a trying circumstance in which a difficult choice must be made between two or more alternatives. The thesis did start as one investigating ethical dilemmas; however, it evolved to also include ethical challenges, difficulties, and tensions as experienced by teacher participants who felt unsettled by events and situations that tugged at their conscience even when there was no obvious choice of action to be made on their part. Consequently, though the interview questions asked of participants concerned ethical dilemmas, the teachers broadened the formal definition to include problems and predicaments. Teachers spoke of and referred to dilemmas in the interviews; however, some of the accounts described are actually more akin to difficulties, problems, or beliefs, as opposed to actual dilemmas because they do not involve a choice or decision. These situations, while not dilemmas in and of themselves, have been included in the findings as they are challenges experienced by teachers, which, in some instances, may lead to dilemmas. Clearly, these problems are ethical in nature because they challenge teachers to scrutinize and grapple with their understanding of such moral principles as
fairness, equity, honesty, care, loyalty, courage, and integrity, in relation to the teaching and learning of students who have special needs. They also connect to larger issues addressed by the fields of professional ethics and special education as identified in the literature.

All twelve of the teacher participants interviewed, regardless of their years of teaching experience, education level, teaching division, or teaching position, indicated that they experienced ethical tensions in their work with students who have special needs. The coding and categorization of interview data elicited three major categories, along with respective themes (Table 7), which describe the contexts in which teacher participants experienced ethical challenges. Although the categories and themes are separate and discernable, they also merge and intersect. Teachers and the many components of their practice do not exist in isolation within the classroom or the school. Aspects of the teaching and learning process are interconnected and therefore influence one another. As such, when participants provided accounts based on their perceptions and experiences, it was difficult for them to speak exclusively on one topic. Consequently, issues that arise during interviews frequently overlap and cross categories and themes. Given the significant degree of overlap in the interview data, I prioritized the placement of teacher accounts within categories and themes, based on the main focus or the overall emphasis of ideas presented. Furthermore, participants often referred to their interactions with colleagues when discussing ethical problems and dilemmas. Accordingly, in addition to personal accounts, discussions pertaining to relations with colleagues provide a thread throughout the chapter instead of a separate and discrete theme or category, as they were a source of tension consistently reported across thematic contexts by all individuals interviewed.
Table 7

**Context in which Teacher Participants Experienced Ethical Challenges or Dilemmas**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Major Themes</th>
<th>No. of teachers identifying challenges or dilemmas in relation to themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Practices in inclusive classrooms</td>
<td>Inclusion</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Classroom management</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assessment and evaluation</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supports and resources</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policies for students with special education needs</td>
<td>Accommodations and modifications</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identification and placement</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roles and responsibilities of teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: n=12 for each major theme reported

In addition to the introduction and concluding remarks, this chapter is divided into three sections based on the major themes that give rise to the categories. All data presented relate to the teachers' work with students who have special needs and are based on the individual perspectives and experiences of the participants. The sections include: practices in inclusive classrooms, policies for students with special needs, and roles and responsibilities of teachers.

Practices in inclusive classrooms focus on the integral components of teaching for general educators, such as the inclusion of students who have special needs into the general education classroom, classroom management, assessment and evaluation, and support and resources. These are practices that teachers perform as part of their daily work with all students.
generally; however they have been distinguished, by participants, as being especially ethically questionable and problematic when implemented with students who have special needs.

Policies for students with special education needs, in contrast, concern specialized practices that are designated for students who have been formally identified as having a special need, with the exception of accommodations, which can be provided without a formal identification. Both practices in inclusive classrooms and policies for students with special needs pertain specifically to the work of teaching, while the category of roles and responsibilities of teachers reports the issues that stem from the complexities of professional practice and the considerable demands placed on teachers. Similarities, differences, and connections among the participants’ statements are briefly addressed within each theme, however a more detailed interpretation of the findings will be addressed in the discussion, chapter six.

An overview of the twelve participants interviewed follows, in order to provide background information on the teachers and to establish a context for the data reported.

**Overview of interview participants**

Data reported and analyzed in this study consist of accounts from twelve participants purposively selected from the survey pool of teachers based on their experiences with and ability to describe ethical challenges and dilemmas in their work with students who have special needs. Six of the twelve teachers engaged in a second individual interview to describe the range of strategies they utilized for coping with or resolving ethical issues in their practice. Moreover, they discussed current supports in place and made proposals for future supports to aid them in managing ethical problems. Data from the second interview were lost for one of the participants.
and in their place field notes, recorded by the interviewer post-interview, were used. Table eight provides an overview of background information on the 12 teacher participants.

Table 8

**Background of the Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant (pseudonyms)</th>
<th>Special Education AQs</th>
<th>Teaching Level</th>
<th>General/ Special Educator</th>
<th>Years of Teaching Experience</th>
<th>No. of Interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hillary</td>
<td>Part 1</td>
<td>elementary</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>Part 1</td>
<td>secondary</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>7 2 yrs as department head (history)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>Part 1 enrolled in part 2</td>
<td>elementary</td>
<td>General One year LTO as a special education teacher</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patricia</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>elementary</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joana</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>secondary</td>
<td>General Teaches one class of gifted science each semester</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniella</td>
<td>Parts 1 and 2</td>
<td>elementary</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>secondary</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>secondary</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>19 6 yrs as department head (math)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donna</td>
<td>Parts 1, 2, and 3 (specialist)</td>
<td>elementary</td>
<td>Special</td>
<td>24 8 years in general and 16 years in special education</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel</td>
<td>Parts 1, 2, and 3 (specialist)</td>
<td>elementary</td>
<td>Special</td>
<td>7 1 year in general and 6 years in special education</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td>Parts 1, 2, and 3 (specialist)</td>
<td>secondary</td>
<td>Special</td>
<td>12 3 years in general and 9 years in special education</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily</td>
<td>Parts 1, 2, and 3 (specialist)</td>
<td>elementary</td>
<td>Special</td>
<td>12 1 year in general and 11 years in special education</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: AQs – additional qualification courses; * data lost from follow-up interview; LTO – long-term occasional teacher
Ten of the 12 teacher interviewees are female and two are male, seven teach at the elementary level and five in the secondary division with eight working in a general education classroom and four in a special education classroom and/or position. The years of teaching experience varied significantly between participants; four were novice teachers who had 1-5 years of experience, three teachers had 5-9 years of experience, and five were veteran teachers with 10 or more years of experience. Two of the novice teachers, Samantha and Anna, were recent teacher education graduates who completed long-term occasional placements, each for a duration of one school year; both were working as substitute teachers at the time of the interviews. A third novice teacher, Patricia, was working as a long-term occasional teacher for a second year. Although Samantha was in her first year of teaching, previously she worked as an educational assistant as well as an autism therapist for six years. Two of the secondary school teacher participants were department heads. Amy was a history department head and John was a math department head. At the time of the interview, John was completing his first year back to teaching after a secondment at a Teacher Education institution where he instructed a specialist course in mathematics to teacher candidates. Emily was a veteran teacher who was retired at the time of the interview; however, she was actively volunteering in an inclusive classroom at an elementary school.

Four of the teachers interviewed were designated as special education teachers. Donna and Emily were both special education resource teachers. Daniel was a behavioral class teacher, and Jessica was a teacher who worked specifically with students who have been identified with autism. All of the teachers who worked in special education positions had some or all of their students integrated into general education classrooms for part of the day. Eight of the teacher participants worked in general education classrooms that were inclusive; Hillary’s was the only
school where support from a special educator, either in or outside of the general education classroom, was not provided to students who were identified with a special need. The remainder of general education teachers either had those students formally identified with special needs removed for part of the day, or they had a special education teacher or educational assistant come into the classroom to offer them support for part of the day. Joana, a general education high school teacher, teaches science to one full class of gifted students each semester.

All of the teacher participants, with the exception of Patricia, Anna, John and Joana, completed additional qualifications in special education. Hillary, Amy, and Jessica were all working on Master of Education degrees; Daniel and Patricia had completed their Master of Education degrees, and both Emily and John had completed doctoral degrees in Education.

**Practices in Inclusive Classrooms**

Inclusive classrooms comprise students with diverse learning needs and abilities. To promote student learning, teachers must use practices that include implementing appropriate pedagogies, employing assessment and evaluation methods, managing the classroom, and selecting resources, that serve the individual and collective needs of students (Ontario College of Teachers, 2006a, 2006b). All twelve of the participants interviewed spoke of the ethical challenges and dilemmas they experience in the context of inclusion. Teachers questioned the fairness, honesty, integrity, care, and equity of teaching practices, specifically as they apply to students who have special needs in a general education classroom. Predicaments faced by participants were primarily related to classroom management, assessment and evaluation, and the lack of adequate resources and supports available.
Teaching and learning in an inclusive classroom

Inclusion, an educational approach in which students with diverse learning needs fully participate and learn in general education classrooms, was described as a source of ethical tension for participants who raised concerns about issues of fairness, care, and equity. While most of the teacher participants supported inclusion, they worried that the individual needs of students with and without special needs, academically, socially, and emotionally, were not being met in the general education classroom. They attributed shortfalls and inadequacies to the current structure of the schooling system and the training provided to teachers. Participants reported that the ethical problems that they experience relate to the disconnect between the theory and practice of inclusion in schools and classrooms, the willingness of teachers to be inclusive, and the responsibility they feel for balancing the needs and rights of all students in the classroom.

In providing accounts of their predicaments related to inclusion, many of the participants who work as special educators spoke primarily of their experiences with and observations of colleagues, as they themselves do not teach in inclusive classrooms. They are however, directly involved with and impacted by inclusion arising from their students being integrated into general education classrooms for specific subjects or for a part of the school day. Due to the nature of their position in the school, special education teachers offer valuable insights into the ethical challenges that occur in the context of inclusion, frequently substantiating the concerns and struggles of general educators. Likewise, general educators, while discussing their own difficulties, comment on and raise concerns about the practices of their colleagues regarding the inclusion of students with special needs. While most are not working in collaboration with the teachers they discuss, as is the case with special educators, they provide the perspective of an observer. Issues raised by general educators with respect to colleagues mainly pertain to
disagreements with their teaching style and the ways in which inclusive practices are implemented.

Both special and general educators perceive a significant discrepancy between the concept of inclusion and the realities of the classroom. Based on their accounts, it appears that while schools have embraced the practice of inclusion, many of the participants feel that the individual needs of students are not being met in general education classrooms. Inclusion, in many schools, continues to be viewed as an issue of placement as opposed to a program that takes into consideration the individual needs of students. Disparities between these two orientations are a source of tension for teachers who struggle, within the existing school system, to be caring, fair, honest, and equitable towards all the students in their classrooms. Patricia reflects on inclusion within her professional practice and the philosophy and structure of her school. She has a high ratio of students with IEPs in her intermediate classroom and she makes a conscious effort to be inclusive; however, she is troubled by the exclusion and insensitivity practiced in her school:

I would like to think that a lot of my colleagues do believe in the idea of inclusion, and I would like to think that I do also. But, every once in a while when I reflect on my practices, sometimes I have to stop myself and think, is this just superficial or do I really espouse these ideas of inclusion?... we have one group of kids that are, I guess, what you call high needs kids. And they have their own special class and these kids stay in that class for the duration of the time that they are in middle school, they never move anywhere else. And so, I am thinking to myself, inclusivity? Yeah, they are at the school with other kids, but they have their own class…. I don’t know if there are two messages being sent, or multiple messages being sent to the kids when we talk about inclusivity.
And then we have kids clustered in the regular classrooms. For example, I have the cluster of IEP kids. So, they all know that they are in that group. We have a cluster of gifted kids. We also cluster them in another class, all within regular classrooms. And then, we also cluster kids who are ESL, they are in another class. So, we have these clusters of specialized groups in regular classrooms. And each class has their own number. So, any classes ending with a 3, you know that those are classes with the IEP kids. Classes with a 1 are the gifted. Classes with an 8 or a 7, those are usually FI [French Immersion] kids who are gifted. The kids know. So all these different numbers and the ending tells you what the cluster is. And, I am pretty sure that by grade 7 the kids know, they have figured it all out, what those different numbers mean. ‘Cause, at the end of the year when they hand out all these awards, it’s usually the same classes who just clean up on the awards. And the kids understand that they are being slotted. I don’t think that we are doing a very good job of being inclusive.

Samantha and Hillary both agree, suggesting that a focus on placement rather than program disadvantages students who have special needs. Samantha states:

Sit in the corner and play with this for an hour while I teach the rest of the kids. Is that really meeting their needs? That’s not differentiated instruction. That’s not inclusion.

Physically inclusive doesn’t necessarily mean the kid is engaged. Putting kids with special needs in a general classroom, yay!... What we did was physically include all of these kids with special needs, but just because they are in the classroom, I have seen so many cases where the teachers were like, “Ok, as long as they are quiet in the corner and playing, I can continue with my class.” But, is that what that child needs? No!

Similarly, Hillary reports:
The thing is, the integration of students with special needs into the classroom, is blind, “We must integrate all children into this classroom,” and no support comes with it… And that is unethical in my opinion. Because, just because you plop them into my room does not mean anything. And so many [students with special needs] are suffering. So many of them are not reaching their potential.

Despite the challenges described by teachers, most participants felt that inclusion in and of itself was not an issue; rather the school structure and culture, attitudes of staff, and lack of support, resources, and training for classroom teachers is what causes inclusion-related tensions for them. Such problems make it difficult for teachers to ensure the well-being and fair treatment of their students, as their capacity to honor these ethically based imperatives are compromised. One aforementioned inconsistency in the practice of inclusion is the willingness of general educators to fully and meaningfully integrate students with special needs.

Teachers, specifically those working in special education positions, struggle with colleagues who are not willing to include students with special needs in their general education classrooms. Although the challenges and dilemmas reported by participants concern collegial relations, the essence of the predicament is inclusion and the unfair treatment of the students.

Daniel, who teaches a primary behavioral class, describes his experiences, “With some teachers it can be like, ‘I don't want this kid in my classroom! They can't be integrated. Integrate them into another class not here.’” Emily, a special education teacher, recounts similar oppositions from her general education colleagues:

You walk into the room and they are like, ‘Can you just take Mary and John and work with them somewhere else?’… The teacher just does not want anything to do with you. Some teachers are just harder to work with than others. Some just don’t believe that the
kids with special needs should be included in the regular classroom. They’ll say things
like, ‘I don’t know why they put Johnny in here. There’s no way! He is only at the grade
2 level and I am teaching grade 6. Why is he here?’ It’s very hard to convince them that
there are still things that Johnny can learn in their classroom... When other teachers make
disparaging remarks about your students, that’s hurtful! It is hurtful to you because you
have these students in your classroom. I once had a whole self-contained classroom and I
really felt ostracized from all the other teachers.... Other teachers don’t want your kids to
come in, even when it is music or it is art, you know, ‘Your kids were in again and they
made a noise, they did this, they did that.’ And ethically, you just want to say, ‘Can’t you
just handle my kids? Can’t you just rise to the occasion?’... There can be a lot of ethical
dilemmas.

Jessica has felt the resistance of some teachers towards inclusion since she began her position as
a teacher of students who have autism:

I introduced myself. They were like, ‘Oh okay. What are you going to be teaching?’ And
I said, ‘I am starting the Asperger program.’ They asked, ‘What does that mean? Are we
getting the really stupid kids?’ And I said, ‘No. I am teaching students who have been
diagnosed with high functioning autism.’ And he asked, ‘Are they being shipped in?’
And I said, ‘No. Believe it or not, but some of them are already in your school. You have
probably taught them. You will probably continue to teach them’.... So, I knew right
from the start then that I would have resistance from colleagues where I worked. Some of
that had manifested in colleagues flat-out refusing to accept my students in their
classrooms, where I have had to go to admin and say, ‘Look, this is what the student
wants to take, there is room in the class, how do I get the student in this program?’...The
most common phrase I hear when I ask about integrating my students is that my student is making the learning environment poisonous…. I have had parents come in complain that their child is not being granted access.

She goes on to describe a difficult situation she experienced with a colleague who was adamant, to the point of hostility, about not including Jessica’s student in her general education art classroom, “…she said, ‘I don’t want him!... I will fight tooth and nail to not have him in here. It’s not fair to the other students; it’s not conducive to anything other than me losing part of my class. I don’t want it. I will even go to administration and say no! I may lose, but I will still go and fight for that.’”

According to Jessica’s colleague, it is unfair for the general education students to have their learning disturbed by another student. What she fails to consider are the ways in which students with special needs are disadvantaged, socially, emotionally, and academically, as a result of exclusion, as well as the learning that general education students miss in a classroom which fails to appreciate and support the complexities and differences of all individuals. But, as Jessica points out, not all teachers have this mind-set, “Then there are other teachers who have a little bit of resistance at first and the teachers come back to me later and say, ‘That was the best thing I ever did.’ So, there are two sides to it, and it is unfortunate that the ones you remember more are the battles.”

The reluctance of teachers to integrate students with special needs was a significant tension for special educators whose responsibility is to act as a resource and support for classroom teachers, as well as an advocate for the students. For special educators, challenges associated with collaboration are especially problematic since working with general educators is a part of their professional role. Emily explains the difficulties she endures in working with some
classroom teachers, “I saw things that my colleagues did that I hated. They were mean to the kids, they said horrible things, they thought that the child was being lazy, they would say, ‘You are not trying hard enough, you didn’t get your homework done.’ Those are things that were problematic for me. I think just dealing with other teachers is probably sometimes one of the hardest things.” Jessica can attest as she feels similar strains and pressures due to the behaviors and practices of her colleagues:

I go in and all the students who are identified are clustered, usually in the back corner, their teacher says [when Jessica enters the general education classroom as the resource teacher], ‘This is what we are working on, go help them,’ and then teaches the rest of the class. Sometimes they [the general educators] look at you and say, ‘Oh good, I have someone who can tell them [the students with special needs] to be quiet.’ So, a lot of teachers don’t know how to collaborate with the special educators and the EAs. They don’t know how to work with each other in order to benefit all of the students. Some teachers are still very much, ‘I’m going to teach all the kids who can learn, and the kids who can’t learn, I’m just going to send them to the SERT [Special Education Resource Teacher], or kick them out to the resource room, or put them in the hall, or get them away so that the kids who can learn will learn…’

While special educators, like Emily and Jessica, attempt to treat students with care and they strive to secure equitable learning opportunities for them, the resistance of colleagues to be inclusive burdens them. In such situations, integrating students with special needs into a general education classroom does not guarantee a positive and engaging learning experience as illustrated by Donna:

I have a student who has a learning disability, but he is also gifted. A lot of times in his
regular class… the teacher doesn’t really capitalize on that [his giftedness]. He is just
kind of left on his own, where he could be a fountain of knowledge… And I am sure if
his regular class teacher took that into consideration, he [this student] could be the leader
in science, and probably social studies too. But, because he is not paid attention to, he just
lies around on the couch in the classroom and does not really do a whole lot… he is not
really being included and allowed to show how much he knows.

Daniel became so frustrated with the poor programming and negative integration experiences of
his students that he decided to sacrifice his preparation time and withdraw the students from the
general education classroom:

Gym got so bad that I just yanked them out. It was so stupid. She [the gym teacher] was
so patronizing to my students. I was like, ‘It's okay. We can just go outside.’ We would
all be happier then, and it wasn't a very good gym class. So, I de-integrated them because
it was a bad integration experience. She was just nasty… So I just decided to miss my
prep, which sucks for me but what can you do?... I would have loved to be able to send
them off to gym. But dealing with the fallout later was worse. One got in trouble, one just
sat out the entire gym because he was moving around or misbehaving the entire time that
the teacher was talking. So I decided, let's not go to gym. The gym was done very very
very poorly. It was, ‘You will listen to what I have to say then you will do what I tell you
to do and it is the same thing we already did five million times before.’ And if you are a
young child with control issues and behavior problems, you are going to be off the wall.

It was just killing me watching this awful class that my kids were integrated into.

The accounts, which focus on the attitudes towards and willingness of teachers to be inclusive, as
described by participants raise very important questions pertaining to equity, justice, and care. Is
it right for teachers to select who they teach? If so, is it just for students with special needs to be excluded from learning opportunities with their general education peers? If exclusion is tolerated, what values are promoted and how does this translate into professional responsibility, equity, and care for all students? Such questions of principle place the special educators, who are striving to integrate their students into general education classrooms, in difficult predicaments. If teachers elect not to advocate for students with special needs to avoid conflicts with their general education colleagues, they neglect their obligations to the students, and more so, they set a precedent that it is acceptable to refuse to teach students who differ from the mainstream.

Moreover, it is a student’s right to be included in a general education classroom, but, if the general educator is resistant or aversive, the learning environment may not serve the needs and best interests of the student, thus it may be unfair to place him or her in such a classroom. While the reluctance of colleagues towards inclusion troubled special educators in particular, all the participants raised concerns pertaining to the attitudes and beliefs of teachers about students with special needs.

Attitudes and beliefs of classroom teachers about disability are directly related to teaching practice. Teachers who maintain negative perceptions about disability are less likely to provide engaging and inclusive learning opportunities to students with special needs, which in turn affects achievement (Jordan et al., 1997; Jordan, 2007). Participants spoke at length about the biased notions of colleagues, as well as their own prejudices, and the ways in which these serve to disadvantage students. Negative attitudes and beliefs frequently cause participants to experience ethical tensions, as they believe that issues of care, fairness, and equity are compromised. Colleagues who judge students based on stereotypes before they meet them are troublesome for Joana:
Usually when teachers get a student that has got an LD [learning disability] the first thing that pops into their mind is that the student is going to be difficult, that they are probably not going to do well in the class, that they are not going to want to be there in the class, that they will not do the work. If they see behavior they think that they’ll be disruptive in the class. Generally, if all you saw was the name with an LD attached to the end of it, that is probably what crosses teachers’ minds first. That is the kid teachers talk about.

Jessica reiterates Joana’s concerns. Based on her personal experiences as a student with a disability in the school system and now a special educator, the negative connotations associated with “the label” and how this translates to the ways in which such students are treated was a lived reality for her:

Especially when the label says behavior. When that label says behavior, the teacher is going to stand there and say, ‘I don’t want anything disruptive in my classroom.’ At the first outburst, my student with the behavior label is out of the room. It is not understood that a behavior label means they have trouble communicating…. So yes, there is a lot of negative connotation to that label. When I was in kindergarten my teacher figured out that I was deaf…. I had to fight tooth and nail to get teachers to stop looking at me as the kid who can’t hear. It is a conundrum of, are they just going to look at the label and not at me?... It’s hard to get the mainstream teachers to look past a label and to get them to work with the students.

Anna’s account of her colleague substantiates Jessica’s experience to further demonstrate how limited perceptions about disability serve to influence behaviors and teaching practices. She questions the ethical principles and professionalism of a special educator who maintains the belief that students with special needs are unable to learn. Anna is frustrated, as she considers the
teacher’s conduct to be unfair and harmful to students:

I saw the resource teacher teaching the student incorrectly. I went over and I tried to help her. I told her that I could explain it if she wanted and she said, ‘Oh, it doesn’t matter for these kids. They’ll never get it anyways. It doesn’t matter how you teach it, right or wrong, they will never get it anyways.’ So that kind of attitude is troublesome. The teachers don’t care, it seems, whether the students learn. I have also seen that same teacher gives students the answers because, as she explained it to me, ‘These students will never learn it, so we might as well get it done for them so that they can go back to their regular classroom.’ I would sit there and try to explain the work to the students and she would laugh at me and tell me that I was wasting my time.

While Anna is at odds with her colleague, she, like most of the participants, chooses not to confront the teacher as she does not want to engage in a conflict with a co-worker. The refusal of teachers to approach colleagues about ethical issues is a consistent problem which serves to perpetuate the inequalities experienced by students and causes the teachers themselves to be troubled by guilt, feeling as though they failed to meet their professional responsibilities by avoiding the issue. Participants recognized the unethical behaviors of their colleagues, and they communicated their frustrations and worries about such situations; however, many acknowledged that they too were culpable as they pre-judged students with special needs.

Some of the teachers admitted that, although they believed that maintaining prejudices about students with special needs is unethical, they struggle with similar personal biases at times. Anna expresses her shame for “buying into” the negative perceptions of a fellow teacher about a particular student’s dispositions:

There was a teacher next door and when she saw that she had a particular student in her
class… she called the principal and she was like, ‘I have this kid in my class… what should I do? Should I just let him run around and hope that he hangs himself?’ She actually said that. I swear!... And I heard the principal over the phone saying, ‘Each year we give the students a fair chance.’ And the teacher was like, ‘Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.’... Just those pre-judgments, it’s really unfair for the student. There is a bias… everyone warned me about this kid. They told me that it would be hell, but personally, I was there for a few months and I never had an issue with the kid… He was one kid that I was really worried about because the teachers really scared me…. When I was calling attendance on the first day [as the rotary English teacher], when I heard his name I made sure to remember it and to memorize his face because I expected that I would have problems with him. I was already pre-judging him for sure!

Similarly, Joana is troubled about the pre-judgment of students. She describes a routine that occurs at the start of each semester, in which she participates, where the teachers sit together in her department and “slot kids:”

There are students that a teacher may have never met but he or she already has an opinion of them. At the start of every semester, the teachers passed their lists around to each other so that they can all say, ‘Oh yeah, I have had this person, watch out for them!’ ‘Oh yeah, this person is good,’ ‘This person has this problem,’ ‘This person is bad.’ That is just something that all the teachers pretty much do…. So before you even have that student, you are getting an idea put into your head of what that student will be like, an expectation of how they are going to be. When really, you should be going in open-minded and just having a blank slate.

Both Anna and Joana are aware of their professional and ethical responsibilities; yet they engage
in activities, which serve to disadvantage and exclude students, later experiencing shame and remorse as a result. Other participants revealed that they either participated in or were bystanders to situations where students with special needs were negatively perceived, similarly creating tensions for these teachers.

Judging and stereotyping students on the basis of disability is biased and unfair. It serves to establish inequitable learning opportunities and it compromises the commitment and care that teachers are professionally accountable to demonstrate towards all students. Such prejudices fail to promote safe and supportive learning environments and they have the potential to be detrimental to the students’ academic, social, and emotional development. In addition to the guilt participants experienced as a result of their own biases, most were troubled by their choice to avoid confrontations with colleagues whom they believe behaved unethically. Rather than address the issues they observed, teachers elected to evade the problems, allowing them to continue, thus undermining their integrity and honesty as professionals and perpetuating the injustice experienced by the students. Teacher attitudes towards and beliefs about students with special needs were not the only concern for participants; general educators who strove to be inclusive also struggled to meet the needs of all the learners in their classroom.

General educators teaching in inclusive classrooms were torn between meeting individual and collective needs. Many spoke about serving the best interests of all students, something that they felt was difficult when they perceived students’ interests to be conflicting, as suggested by Daniella:

You want what is good for them [student with disabilities] and what will benefit them, but as a whole class, it may not benefit the whole group…. And some students do need that one-on-one support, and unfortunately, I have 20 kids. You can’t always be fair and
be equitable to every kid. It’s really hard to balance that. So, teachers get frustrated. They feel, torn. … So, it’s hard.

Similarly, Samantha thinks that “one of the biggest dilemmas is meeting the needs of the other kids while having to meet the needs of the kids with special needs.” As a teacher, she believes that it is her responsibility to provide all students with equal opportunities and learning experiences, and when this does not occur she feels guilty and overwhelmed. Samantha recounts such a situation:

She [a student] was very high needs…. I just felt like I was neglecting meeting the needs of the other kids in my class, challenging them academically, challenging them with their social skills. I’m just not available if I am working with the other student…. When I was teaching the class, it often became a matter of just having the student with special needs, having her be compliant and just sit there, which isn’t a waste, she does have to learn that behavior, but often times it was more of having her be compliant while I taught the rest of the class. I could have been doing more with her…. And it’s just too hard to juggle. I found it very difficult to juggle both. But you could be doing so much more for both parties… So sometimes you just feel stuck. You are sacrificing one group for the sake of the other, and vice versa.

Daniel, who currently works as a special educator, empathizes with the difficulties faced by Samantha, when recalling his teaching experiences in general education, he suggests that even when he attempted to assign valuable tasks to the class while he worked with individual students, the “balancing act” was a challenge:

If I am going to work with this kid [student with special needs], then these other kids need to do busy work. Oh well, instead of doing busy work I am going to let them have
unstructured time to do really cool activities. And now the kid you are working with is like, ‘I don’t want to spend that time working with you on word families, I want to do that [what the rest of the class is doing] because that is cool!’ And even if you tell the student that they get to do it later when you are done, this student is still looking over at the kids and that is not a productive learning experience. It is an issue, it’s not one of those things that you can just say, ‘Teachers need to get better at doing this.’ A lot of sensitive teachers would like to do that. They want to teach and help all kids. But it’s tough.

Establishing engaging and stimulating experiences for all students was an issue many of the general education teachers faced. Often, they described situations where, despite their best efforts, they felt that they were unable to adequately meet all the students’ needs in the classroom, forcing them to make difficult choices which they believed compromised the learning of some students and their ethical responsibilities as teachers.

In addition to meeting academic needs, managing the social and emotional well-being of students in inclusive classrooms posed ethical issues for some of the participants. A few of the teachers expressed concerns about the welfare of students who may feel singled out as a result of the specialized instruction or resources they require. As Hillary explains:

I’m hoping that they are feeling confident and feeling valued and not feeling put down because they are doing something different. I worry about that with the teenagers especially. Like, knowing that they are getting a handout that is different than everybody else’s really bothers them. And that bothers me.

Similarly, Joana is troubled by a situation in which a student who needs accommodations refuses them because he deems them to be socially stigmatizing. Without the accommodations the
student’s ability to learn is compromised; but, with the accommodations, his social and emotional state may be adversely affected. The sensitive nature of the dilemma overwhelms Joana:

One of my students has atrocious handwriting; you just cannot read his handwriting he cannot get the notes down. So for him, as a part of his IEP, he needs to get board notes given to him in advance. He has access to a laptop computer, [that the] special ed department has given him. But, the problem with that is because… he has been in classes with the same group of kids for a long time, he sort of doesn’t want to be seen as having a learning disability because he’s around all these really smart kids. And doesn’t want to use his laptop, and he doesn’t want you [the teacher] to give him the notes. He wants to appear as if he is like everyone else… Only without the accommodations, he does very poorly.

Both Hillary and Joana understand and appreciate their responsibility to provide accommodations for students with special needs; however, this sense of duty and what they consider to be best for the students academically conflict with their commitment and sensitivity to the students’ emotional and social wellness. Teachers reported having to choose between what the student needed academically or socially, decisions that were often complex and difficult.

Teachers indicated that they did their best to minimize situations where students with special needs felt differentiated from the rest of the class, nevertheless in some cases, despite their honest efforts, they claimed that this was not possible. Donna provides an example of a student who does not want to be withdrawn from his inclusive classroom to participate in a special education program as his peers are taunting him for requiring academic assistance. The special educator empathizes with the student’s difficult situation and she has tried to resolve the
problem, but her attempts have been unsuccessful. Donna is concerned about the social and emotional welfare of her student, yet she recognizes that he needs the additional support:

Some of the boys in his class are teasing him about coming to my program, having that withdrawal. But, he really needs it, and he knows that he really needs it. So, we have… with his parents, himself, and the classroom teacher we have tried to work on it. But, it’s very difficult because students will just say things, even if you speak to them. It’s bullying basically…. I try to make it a very safe place for him.

Similarly, Anna has a student who is teased as a result of his differences. The high school teacher believes that it is unfair for her to force students to work together on group assignments; however, she worries about those who are excluded by their peers:

Even though his classmates are not overly mean to him, the comments are always there. As a teacher, you always have to stop and say, ‘I don’t want to hear that,’ or you deal with it in whatever way. But, each time they have to do a major assignment, he is always the kid who no one wants to work with. The kids are like, ‘I need to do well on this assignment and he is not going to do the work,’ or ‘he is not going to do it well enough.’ And I understand that he does hear it and it must make him feel bad. What I did was, I put him in a group and I told the group that I would help them out with the assignment because I felt so bad for the student that I just wanted to take care of his feelings rather than worry about whether it was fair for me to be working with a group. Honestly, my heart went out for him. But, I also understand the position of his classmates, they want to do well and is it fair for me to force them to work with him? So, it’s a huge problem because there is no solution. And this is an example, but I have had this happen many times when I am teaching and we have to do group work. I don’t know how to resolve the
problem, but it always makes me feel awful. And I know that I don’t deal with it in the best way. But I just try to save the kid with special needs.

Anna chooses to work with the group who is willing to include the student with special needs in order to spare his feelings, though she is aware that she is treating the groups differently and in this respect unequally. She feels uneasy about her decision; however, she does not know how else to handle the problem. Anna questions her motivation for joining the group, considering whether the implicit message she is sending to the class is ethical. On the other hand, she is concerned about the emotional state of her student. Challenges pertaining to the social and emotional welfare of students who have special needs, as described by participants, involve the principle of care. Teachers, like Anna, care about the well-being of their students; as such, in situations where academic needs conflict with social and emotional safety, participants expressed feeling torn and anxious.

All of the participants supported inclusion; however, many had reservations about whether students with special needs had equal opportunities to learn and excel in the inclusive classroom, given the ways in which inclusive practices were implemented. Special educators were primarily concerned about poor programming and the reluctance of some general education colleagues to make appropriate accommodations and modifications. General education teachers, on the other hand, worried whether the academic, social, and emotional needs of all the learners were being met in the classroom. Management of student behavior, assessment and evaluation, and lack of supports and resources were also a challenge for several participants.
Managing the classroom: Challenges with discipline

Teachers are responsible for ensuring that the classroom is a positive and safe learning environment. Although classroom management encompasses various practices, from the arrangement of desks to the management of student conduct, teacher participants primarily identified discipline as a source of ethical tension in the classroom, specifically in relation to the supervision of students with special needs.

Teachers raised concerns about the differential treatment of students with special needs in discipline practices. They struggled with this as a fundamental issue of fairness, questioning whether it is appropriate to discriminate between students, and if so, in which circumstances could unequal treatment be justified. The teachers reflected on their own discipline methods and the level of impartiality they maintained with their students. Anna, a high school teacher, discusses her struggles with discipline:

I have a hard time trying to figure out how to discipline the students with special needs. I always wondered if I should give them extra chances when they did something wrong or when they didn’t do their work, only because they had a special need. This was a dilemma for me because it was never something I was sure about. I would sometimes give them additional chances and then realize that I should not have, or vice versa where I wished I had given them second chances. I’m thinking, if I let this kid get away with it, what about the rest of the class? At the same time, sometimes the kids with special needs deserve more chances.

Anna believes that rules and expectations should be consistent for all students; however, she acknowledges that students with special needs require accommodations. In trying to be equitable when making discipline decisions, Anna is uncertain about where the line should be drawn to
ensure that the differential treatment, in a given circumstance, is fair. Similarly, Amy questions her motivations behind the discipline choices she makes, “If there are kids in your classroom that … have IEPs you debate with yourself how you should treat them, especially when it comes to discipline… I struggle with those issues… Do I let them get away with more because they are special ed? I think about that a lot…” Teacher participants communicated the difficulties they experience in remaining sensitive to the individual needs of their students while striving to be fair and objective. While they recognize that students are diverse and should therefore be treated according to their unique needs, they worry about issues of consistency, fairness and integrity when disciplining and enforcing expectations.

Participants who discussed the fairness of discipline practices were especially concerned about the safety of the class. Anna described a dilemma she experienced while substitute teaching physical education:

The kids were playing basketball and the student with special needs wanted to stay on all the time… And I didn’t know how to discipline him or how to get him to come off the court… But, at the same time, it wasn’t fair for the rest of the students. When I asked him to come off he was getting aggressive. He would start shouting back at me and I didn’t know how to respond. I was getting scared and I decided to just let him stay on. In the larger scheme of things, I didn’t want to risk the safety of the class for a basketball game. So, I just let him stay on even though I knew it wasn’t fair to the other kids. I don’t have training. I really don’t know what to do in situations like this.

Anna acknowledges that her choice to permit the student with special needs to continue playing basketball is unfair, but she makes this decision to prevent a potential outburst. She defuses the situation by avoiding conflict, despite the responsibility she feels to the other students. Like
Anna, Hillary is aware that her discipline practices do not apply equally to all her students, but she believes that such discriminations are justifiable and necessary to protect the safety of the class. She recounts a volatile situation that occurred in her grade eight classroom:

I had a student with Aspergers Syndrome, … he was prone to violent outbursts, which I found worrisome. That year I also had another student who was not properly diagnosed, who likely had similar tendencies behavior wise…. So the two of these kids would just play off of each other. And I had no support at all to the point where it got very dangerous to the point of violence. He would flip his desk, he would threaten to kick the crap out of this other kid. So, dealing with that every day, coming in to the room not knowing who was going to get hurt and asking for help and not getting it was a huge ethical dilemma because how do I manage that so that the other kids are safe? Did I treat those two students the same as the rest of the class? Maybe not, but I had to keep the kids safe. One incident did occur, where this student picked up, it was in the science closet, the flask stand, he picked one of those up and was threatening to hurt people. So, I had to evacuate the room. Meanwhile, this other student who has no coping strategies was just going crazy. And the principal had to come down and put him in a restraint. So, I guess that demonstrates the ethical dilemma, how do you create a positive learning environment when you personally are frightened. First and foremost on your own and also about the safety of the other kids. Cause the thought of him just whipping that thing and hitting someone was just horrible!

In potentially threatening situations, like those described by Anna and Hillary, professional ethics became less of a priority and participants did what was necessary to protect the students. The teachers felt that they had to jeopardize fairness to ensure the safety of the learning
environment as explained by Daniella who described an experience where a student ran around the classroom with scissors: “There is a bit more of the special treatment, but I was worried for the safety of the class. I had to maintain that order in the class for all the kids to be safe, to learn, and to be successful.” Those who recognized that they treated students with special needs differently from others expressed feelings of guilt and anxiety because they believed that their actions were unethical, despite their understanding that they acted based on what they believed was most advantageous for the majority.

Teacher participants described situations in which they were faced with ethical uncertainties when managing the behaviors of students who have special needs. Many stated that they did not know how to accommodate discipline practices in a manner that would be fair and consistent. Others recognized the importance of fairness but were constrained to make choices that protected the safety of the class. The teachers believed that, as professionals, they had an ethical responsibility to ensure that all the students felt equally valued and cared for, yet, many expressed apprehension because they believed that they were not always meeting those obligations when it came to discipline. Similar challenges were experienced by participants when assessing and evaluating students with special needs.

**Assessing and evaluating students with diverse learning needs**

Assessment is an essential component of teaching and learning. Instruction, assessment, evaluation, and the academic advancement of students are all interconnected, as one directly influences the other. In teaching, assessment and evaluation serves two purposes: to drive instruction and to measure student learning (Johnson & Johnson, 2002). The dilemmas described by participants relate specifically to the second purpose of assessment and evaluation, to
determine the degree of learning that has taken place. Teachers questioned the legitimacy and integrity of assessments and evaluations, they were troubled by the inadequacy of the IEP in providing guidelines and support for assessments, and they were concerned about inconsistencies in evaluation practices.

General education participants expressed their struggles with the assessment and evaluation of students who have disabilities in inclusive classrooms. Many spoke of the bias present in their own assessments and evaluations. As Amy, a secondary school teacher, discussed the dilemmas she faces in assessing and evaluating students’ work, she deliberated on her prejudices and felt uneasy about the fact that often she may not recognize them:

I think so much of what we do everyday as a teacher, even the smallest thing can become this ethical issue. When it comes down to marking papers, you think, did I see that name on the front? Am I playing favorites? Am I biased in my marking because I know that this is from so and so and this is from someone else. I just make these quick decisions all the time, and I am not really conscious of these decisions. Which kind of worries me, now that I think about it.

Unlike Amy, Patricia, an eighth grade teacher, acknowledges that she is subjective in the assessment and evaluation of her students with special needs and she identifies reasons for her actions as being emotional attachment, sympathy, and fear of discouragement. Patricia contemplates her choices:

How do I actually grade them? Are they where they are supposed to be? Are they below where they are supposed to be? It’s really tough. And you have to use your own professional judgment… I have to do a little bit of the, is this person where they are supposed to be according to their IEP? And if they are, I automatically go for the level 3.
And then I have to think about, in terms of their actual effort. Is this really an AMAZING piece of work for this student or is it just so-so? And that is not scientific. I can’t punch a whole bunch of numbers into a calculator and then come up with a number [grade]. So, it’s very subjective. And I don’t know how fair that is. How fair is that to me? How fair is that to the kid? How fair is that to everyone else? But, that’s what I generally do. I think about what is the best interest of the child? What would be the damage that I am causing this child if I do give them an inflated mark for example? What’s the damage to this child if I low-ball it? So, it’s hard!

Similarly, Samantha questions the validity of assessments and describes the difficulties experienced by herself and her colleagues:

I had some grade eight teachers tell me they change the marks before the student was identified. And you just run into a problem there because say some of the kids who were receiving Bs, if they were to go onto another school now and they would be getting Ds. And she [the teacher] was saying, ‘I don’t know what to do about this, if I mark them according to the grade eight curriculum they’d be getting Ds.’… I have worked with teachers who say they feel like they have to do that, like there’s no other way…. the teachers grade as if the student is on an IEP, but really they are not.

Hillary, like Samantha and Patricia, believes that while inflating grades and modifying assessments for students who are not officially identified is unethical in terms of professional conduct, she argues that it may be justifiable based on the principles of fairness and care, “…grading students without taking into consideration their individual needs [is] like setting them up for failure and as a teacher I just don’t have the conscience to do that.” These are ethically conscious teachers who want to be honest in their assessments, yet, when it comes to students
with special needs, they believe that being honest is not always fair and does not, in all situations, serve the best interest of the student. They must chose, on some accounts, between academic integrity and honesty, or their care and concern for the emotional welfare of the students. Making such assessment and evaluation decisions in inclusive classrooms is problematic for participants because they are aware of their accountability as professionals, they appreciate the significance of their choices, and they understand the consequences of all available alternatives.

Teachers stated that they frequently use their professional judgment and perceptions of the student to assess and evaluate due to the lack of direction and support they receive from the IEP, special education teachers, administrators, the school board, and the Ministry of Education. This lack of guidance leads to inconsistencies in grading practices and contributes to the assessment bias which concerns many of the participants, as exemplified by Hillary:

Meshing learning to the report card, that’s just a joke. How do you write the report card to reflect what you have put on the IEP when you realize that ok, for example, they haven’t achieved it. So, do you mark it? The whole marking of it is a dilemma. There is no guidance in that department. Let’s say that they were supposed to do coordinate graphing in grade 7, so for my IEP kids, what I am focusing on is something that doesn’t really fit with what the expectations are… So, how do I assess that? I assess based on what I was envisioning that they can do. How do I give him a grade for that on the report card for geometry? I usually, just to tell you the truth, they end up getting a level 2 or maybe a level 3 because they do it ok, but they need so much support for it. But, no one can answer that question for me. Nobody gives me the guidance. I use my professional judgment based on the achievement charts to come up with their grade. So, it’s
inconsistency, the board’s interpretation, plus the board personnel’s interpretation, my interpretation. And it’s honestly, that’s what makes it a joke.

Patricia further substantiates Hillary’s claim by discussing the discrepancies that she has observed in the assigned grades of students who are on IEPs, “…what are the other teachers doing? How come he has an 80 in your class and he happens to get a 60 in all the other classes? Are you doing something wrong? Are you giving him inflated marks? Or vice versa. It’s a really hard thing and the IEP doesn’t really give you much to go on.” Without adequate guidelines for assessing students who have special needs, general educators are forced to use their own interpretations to evaluate, otherwise, in adhering to the grade and curriculum expectations, they would be required to fail some students. For instance, Donna describes the struggles of her spouse, who is a high school teacher, as he attempts to accurately and honestly grade a student, but ultimately evaluates using his own perceptions of what he feels the student can or can not achieve:

He has a student in his guitar class who is MID [Mild Intellectual Disability]… He went to the Spec ed [special education] department at the high school to find out about the student’s IEP and they said, ‘You know what, we're just too busy right now. We can’t deal with it.’ So he technically has to grade this student the same as everybody else if there is no IEP…. It’s not fair to the student… I think what he ended up doing was still marking the student as if he was on a modified program, so he wouldn’t fail the student, I mean he’s [the student] trying his hardest, there’s only so much he could learn because of his disability.

The dilemma experienced by Donna’s spouse is consistent with that of the other teachers interviewed, should one follow the “rules” or should one do what is fair? But, as demonstrated
by Amy who recalled a colleague who was upset about the level of accommodation provided to one of his students on a test, what is fair, when left open to interpretation, is not the same for all teachers:

A geography department head… had a student that required accommodations to write a test…. [the student] asked whether or not she could write the test with the special ed department and she was given permission. When she came back with the test and he marked it [her teacher] he realized that, especially the mapping, which was an extensive part of the test, she got perfect. Based on her previous work he was surprised by this, so he approached special ed and asked what kind of accommodations she was given for the test and he was told that she was given an Atlas…. this situation really bothered him [the geography teacher], he didn’t think it was fair… It said [the IEP] that she was allowed a study sheet for her tests. The Special Ed Department interpreted the Atlas as a type of study note for the test. And he [the geography teacher] did not agree with this. It is an issue because she’ll still get an A, but on her report card it will say that this student has an IEP, but it wouldn’t say what the accommodations or modifications are.

The absence or ambiguity of assessment and evaluation guidelines for students who have special needs make them open to interpretation and personal bias. Teachers are able to accommodate and modify assessments as they see fit, which ultimately may not provide an accurate measure of student learning and ability. While teacher bias and inconsistencies in assessments can also lead to inaccurate grading for general education students, the margin of error is greater for students with special needs because of the potential to provide inadequate accommodations and modifications.
Participants questioned the fairness, honesty, and integrity of assessment and evaluation practices for students who have special needs. They expressed concern and often felt torn between conflicting ethical principles; honesty and fairness were not always in agreement due to the ambiguity of assessment and evaluation guidelines on the IEP. Many of the teachers had to choose between their accountability to Ministry standards or their personal sense of what was fair and in the best interest of the student. Such decisions led to the assessment bias and inconsistencies in the evaluation described by participants. Issues of fairness were also a concern for participants who struggled to access resources and supports for students who have special needs.

**When supports and resources are lacking**

Teachers and students depend on resources and supports to facilitate learning. When those resources and supports are lacking, participants reported feeling stressed and anxious because they recognized that the students who required them were being disadvantaged. Without adequate assistance in the inclusive classroom, teachers strive to provide students with special needs opportunities to develop and reach their potential academically, but, as illustrated by Samantha, the needs of the students are not always met:

There was one LST [Learning Support Teacher], a handful of EAs [Education Assistants], and we can only put them in so many classrooms working with so many children. And the fact is that the need exceeded what we had…. I would feel quite often that, ‘Oh my gosh! This is not fair!’ There is always something happening that is not fair to these kids. You feel terrible…. There are significant disadvantages for students with special needs…. I just think that right now, not a lot of the students’ needs can be met. If
there were more supports in place, there could be more done…. And I just see these kids slip through the cracks. They just keep being pushed along.

Some teachers who feel accountable for their students’ learning but are limited in what they can do share Samantha’s concerns, “Teachers want to have children be successful, whether they have special needs or they don’t. But, I am only one person. I am not super human. I can only do what my limits are,” states Daniella. Emily agrees, “Teachers struggle… because there is not enough in-class support and in the end the students suffer.” Jessica adds, “We do the best we can, and quite often it gets very frustrating and you do piecemeal. You try to get what you can and give it to the students. It’s not easy.” Hillary seeks support so that she can better serve one of her students, but, like the others, her requests do not get her very far:

I asked the principal, ‘Listen, I really hope that someone can show us. We would soak it up!’ I was so eager!... ‘Seriously, you just need to show me.’ I don’t think that’s so much to ask… I kept saying, ‘I don’t know how to meet her needs.’ And the principal kept saying, ‘Oh you’re fine. She loves you. She works hard.’ And she did, she worked really hard, whatever I gave her. But I wanted more for her and I wanted help. I was reaching out for help. And all I got was a pat on the back and I was told that, ‘Don’t worry, it’s fine.’

Donna, a special educator who works in a segregated classroom, attests to the difficulties and strains the participants describe through her observations of teachers’ experiences:

Teachers get very frustrated. That’s the only out. It’s to give the student something to keep them busy. Busy work. They have come to me and asked what they should do, and I have tried to make suggestions, but unfortunately I cannot be there so hopefully, if my role can change, then I can go in there [into their classrooms] and support them…. it’s
frustrating to them because they want to reach out to the students but they don’t know how, they don’t have the resources in the classroom, or even in the school…. they feel they don’t have the time to really address the needs of the students because they are being pulled in a billion directions… There are no people to support them when they need it, so some of them just end up saying, they drop their hands and say, ‘This is how it is.’ And others keep trying.

Without adequate supports, teachers are on their own, and many feel that there is not enough time in a day to complete all tasks required to fulfill their professional responsibilities. Samantha “juggle[s] different things at the same time…” always having to “pick and deal with the most urgent issue.” She worries about the students whom she believes are neglected due to the constraints placed on her, “The kids with special needs, the quiet ones, those are the ones that are totally overlooked. In the classroom if you are quiet, if you are not a behavior student and academically you struggle, you are totally overlooked. There are kids in the class that demand the teacher’s time and energy and then there is no more time left because we are dealing with immediate issues.” She continues by discussing what she would like to do for her students, but the realities of teaching hold her back from achieving this ideal:

It’s not like I don’t know where the teaching resources are, I just can’t do it. I am just one person, I can’t do all these things. It would be easier if you were given time to get to know your classroom and then a month to set up everything you need for the kids with special needs. But you don’t have that time! During the workday you need to deal with the school day…. Whatever isn’t being done, it’s not because the teachers don’t want to do it. There is always the effort there by most teachers, I just think that again it becomes a time thing. You try to do as much as you can, even when I observe my own practice, I
know I can do this or I can do that. I know that other teachers feel the same way… The
effort is there, I think everyone would like to feel that they do their best, but of course
there is always more that could be done. There just is not enough time.

Teachers, like Samantha, who are committed to the profession and dedicated to students and
their learning describe feeling helpless, guilty, and torn because they believe that all of the
students’ needs are not adequately met in their classrooms. While they are constrained by time
and unable to access supports and resources, as the classroom teacher, they hold themselves
partially responsible for the inequalities faced by the students with special needs.

Gaining access to supports and resources, for use by the students, also raised ethical
challenges for some participants, as attempts to obtain specialized personnel, programming, or
devices were often ignored. This was especially troublesome when the unavailable supports or
resources were indicated on the IEP, which is a legal document. Absence of necessary supports
and resources place the students who require them at a significant disadvantage, which defies
basic principles of fairness and justice. Teachers are left to resolve or manage often-impossible
situations. Hillary is frustrated as her continuous appeals and attempts to secure support for a
student who faces a very difficult situation outside of school are disregarded. She feels obligated,
professionally, to address the problem; moreover, she worries about the emotional and academic
well-being of the student:

I have an intermediate student, he is in trouble with the law, he is facing troubles at home.

I got CAS [Children’s Aid Society] involved. He is a non-attendee, he’ll come maybe
once per week…. I report to the Child and Youth Worker who is at my school, she is
wonderful but nothing is done about it. There is no support for him. And he will go onto
grade 8 next year, even though he has done probably 3 hours of work since September, I
am not sure if failing is the right solution, but, there is nothing in place for him. There is nothing in place. Despite Hillary’s pleas, the needs of her student are disregarded, and, as a result, he is at risk of failing or significantly falling behind academically. John has a similar experience when he tries to obtain specialized computer equipment and programs for students who have them specified on their IEPs:

I have trouble with assistive technologies. Not having a laptop in the class, that is not a problem. But, not having the programs that read to the students or not having the programs that takes the text off a page and converts it for the student, or even the one that writes what the student is saying, I don’t have ready access to them. I had one student this semester and I think one student last semester that had it written on their IEP statement that that would be one of their accommodations. I found it so challenging to get it [the programs and equipment for the students].

Both Hillary and John are concerned about creating fair and just learning opportunities for their students, but they are hindered because the necessary supports and resources are not made available. Despite their countless efforts to secure the supports and resources, they are not provided, and those who are adversely affected are the students who need them.

Merely making resources and supports available however, does not guarantee that the individual needs of students will be met. According to some participants, if resources are not implemented properly, if they do not serve their intended purpose, or if they are counterproductive, they may be ineffective in promoting learning. Hillary, an intermediate teacher, describes the struggles she faces in teaching early reading skills and phonics to a few of her students. Not having been trained to teach primary literacy, she reaches out to her colleagues
for resources and supports. Although she is provided with resources, she feels overwhelmed because she is unsure how to apply them in her classroom for her students who have special needs:

I know that there are many resources out there, but it’s not just a matter of the resources, it’s how to use those resources in my given situation. Because for example, the lit coach will come in and she’ll say, ‘You should do guided reading groups.’… How am I going to do that? … For three years I had a lit coach who kept saying, ‘Guided reading, guided reading, guided reading, guided reading.’ Guided reading groups, whatever that means! So, I said, ‘You come in. I am welcoming you! Come in and you can model it for me … instead of handing me a piece of paper.’ And she ignored it. On pamphlets we got from the board about literature circles, again there was no mention about what to do with them [the students on IEPs]. Its kind of like the non-issue, special education is the non-talked about issue. Here is a great strategy. Okay. And we are left to implement it and figure out how it will work for our kids with special needs.

Similarly, Anna expresses her frustrations with supports that she believes are inadequate. She describes events she observes while supply teaching in a resource classroom at a secondary school where, according to her, the needs of students are not served:

The students come in with worksheets or things to do and the resource teachers don’t know how to help them [the students]. They don’t know how to do the work… I have seen … resource teachers saying, ‘You’ll have to ask your regular teacher, I don’t know how to do that.’ And worse still, I have seen resource teachers teaching things incorrectly. And the student is just getting shuffled between the resource room and the regular classroom. And really, there is no one there helping these students.
John agrees with Anna and he provides a reason for Anna’s observations. He argues that teachers, who are intended to be a support for students with special needs, “don’t know how to help students” because they are not specialists:

There is no real structured approach to making sure that the teachers are teaching things that they are comfortable with and that they are knowledgeable in and the area where they have expertise. It’s very much the same thing with our resource. Same thing with special education, they do not put specialists in to teach special education and the kids suffer. I am very disappointed in how our secondary school teachers continue to teach and practice a pedagogical approach that doesn’t meet our students’ needs. It’s dumbfounding to me.

According to John, schools and school boards are poor at hiring qualified individuals to teach in special education. Donna supports John’s claim with an account of a special education teacher that colleagues often complain about:

One junior [general education] teacher has come to me and said, ‘I don’t know what to do about this teacher [special educator].’ She walks in the class. She clonks herself at the back table and does paperwork. She sort of takes a walk though to see what the kids are doing and then leaves. The classroom teacher told me, ‘She [the special educator] stands in the classroom and talks about the students who are on IEPs to me, with the students in the classroom.’ I finally had to say, ‘No you can’t! Stop. You can’t do this.’ I told her [the classroom teacher], ‘Really, in a situation like this, you need to speak to admin because it’s not fair to the students.’

Although Donna advised her general education colleague to speak with school administrators about the issues, the general education teachers chose to leave the problem unresolved. The
situations described by Anna, John, and Donna demonstrate that availability of supports and resources does not guarantee that they will be effective and conducive to student learning.

Conversely, Emily, a retired elementary resource teacher, believes that the current resource support is beneficial and effective in promoting student learning; however, she argues that it disadvantages students because it is inappropriately structured within the school:

It’s sometimes difficult because the students may need to be taken out of their classroom for something and they miss what is happening in the regular classroom. It’s not really fair to the student. We are supporting them in one way and then disadvantaging them in another way all at the same time. We should have programming for all the students at the same time so all the students are getting the same type of learning opportunities.

The current “pull-out” resource method, as discussed by Emily, is counterproductive as it allows for specialized support from a resource teacher in an area where the student is struggling, but it removes the student from valuable learning opportunities that are occurring in the general education classroom. Upon returning to the general education classroom, the student must work to catch up to his or her peers, which creates an inequitable situation for the student with special needs. An accumulation of hours missed from the general education classroom on a weekly basis puts the student in an impossible position. Thus, this “pull-out method” of resource support replaces one learning opportunity with another rather than providing both to help the student advance academically.

Lack of support and resources creates obstacles for classroom teachers and unfair learning opportunities for students. Participants expressed frustration because it was difficult for them to support students with special needs when they themselves were not supported and resources were not available.
Teachers reported experiencing various ethical difficulties in the context of inclusive classrooms; although they had the best of intentions, situations arose where they felt split between two or more alternatives or they simply did not know what to do to resolve the problem. Issues of care, fairness, and equity troubled teachers engaged in inclusive teaching practices, particularly with regards to managing student behavior, assessing and evaluating students, and securing resources and supports. While these practices are key components of teaching in general, they were identified as a source of ethical tension for participants when carried out with students who have special needs. As is discussed in the subsequent section, practices in special education, which are specific to students who have IEPs, pose different concerns, also related to principles of fairness, for teachers.

Policies for Students with Special Education Needs

Policies for students with special education needs include procedures and practices intended specifically for those who have been or are in the process of being formally identified as having a disability, with the exception of IEPs that include accommodations (but not modifications – in some boards) which can be provided without an official identification. Such practices address the students’ individual needs and abilities to support and promote learning. All twelve teacher participants described ethical challenges and dilemmas related to policies for students with special needs, with many providing accounts of more than one predicament. Issues reported occur in the context of accommodations and modifications, the IEP, and identification and placement. Many of the challenges described by teachers involve the practices of colleagues and/or apprehensions experienced as a result of the actions of others. Such circumstances apply directly to the participants’ concerns associated with policies currently in place for students with
special needs and often pertain to the inappropriate implementation of the policies or practices, which many believe establish inequitable learning opportunities that disadvantage students. The dilemma, in situations that involve colleagues, is whether or not to address the problem by confronting fellow teachers or reporting it to the school administrators. While this is a true dilemma because there is a choice to be made, for many, confrontation is not perceived as an option, and as discussed previously, most avoid the issue, allowing the behavior which they consider to be unethical to continue, resulting in their own feelings of anxiety and guilt.

**Making accommodations and modifications: Ethical challenges and apprehensions**

Accommodations – teaching and assessment strategies, services, or supports which enable students to access the curriculum without altering expectations – and modifications – changes to the curriculum, expectations, or learning outcomes (Ministry of Education, 2004b) – are intended to enable all students, regardless of ability, to have equal opportunities to learn and achieve success. The majority of teachers who described tensions and dilemmas relating to accommodations and modifications were concerned that students with special needs were not receiving the individualized instructions and assessments required or prescribed on their IEPs. Many of the reported challenges concentrate on the instructional approaches and assessments implemented by colleagues; however some participants admit that they themselves do not know how to make accommodations and modifications. Additionally, teachers spoke about problems they experience with the IEP and its inadequacies as a teaching tool.

Consistent worries among participants are that prescribed accommodations and modifications are, in reality, not being made for students who have special needs. Reasons for these lapses, as perceived by the teachers, relate to the willingness and capacities of general
education colleagues. Jessica states, “I know for a fact that there are people who do not make the accommodations or modifications. I don’t know why, I don’t know if it’s a laziness thing or [if] they just don’t think that those kids need that.” Donna empathizes with Jessica’s frustration, “I know that in the classroom, it’s [accommodations and modifications] not happening. I find that very difficult because my students need that. I mean, it’s their legal right, if it’s in their IEP… ‘I don’t want to do anything extra’…I have heard teachers actually say that, you just kind of go ‘What do you mean? It’s your job, it’s part of your job.’” Patricia, despite her short experience as a classroom teacher, has also noticed that accommodations and modifications are not implemented, and her more experienced colleagues are not overly concerned about it. This mindset upsets Patricia and leads her to question her practice and the professional responsibilities of teachers:

The longer I’ve been teaching I realize that rarely are those things [accommodations and modifications] actually followed through in class, and as a teacher you feel horrible because you’re not fulfilling those needs. And then other teachers who have been around the block a couple times will say, ‘Oh don’t worry about it, it’s not even a big deal. You know everybody’s in the same boat, so don’t make a big deal out it?’ And then, it’s kind of like you’re stuck, you’re thinking, why am I making such a big deal about this? It must be because I’m new to the profession I’m still green, or wet behind the ears, but then what’s the point in having that stupid IEP if no one’s following it? I became a teacher to help students, isn’t that the same for everyone? Where is the ethics in all of this?

Unfortunately, Patricia is not the only one troubled by colleagues who are reluctant to individualize instruction. Anna is worried about the behavior of a teacher she met while supply teaching at an elementary school:
Any kid that needs extra help, she complains about them and calls them names. She doesn’t want to put in the extra time. She likes the girls and the kids who don’t ask anything extra of her. If she has to re-explain something, she gets really frustrated. So, the kids with special needs, they get most of it from her because they are the kids that are usually going to go up and ask for the extra help and she verbally abuses them….The other kids hear her calling their classmates names.

Participants are concerned about colleagues who fail to provide appropriate accommodations and modifications because they recognize that such actions compromise fairness, disadvantage the students, and undermine the integrity of teaching professionals. Amy considers equitable learning opportunities to be a “human right” and refers to the actions of some of her colleagues as “inhumane” because they fail to adequately serve the needs of students:

I always struggle with teachers that are… I don’t really know what the word is… sometimes it’s just about being human. And sometimes I look at teachers and I think, ‘That’s a little inhumane.’… I don’t know any child that does not want to succeed if given the opportunity. I don’t think that anyone is going to say, ‘I really want to fail.’ Why shouldn’t they be given a chance?

Those who discussed the willingness of their colleagues to make accommodations and modifications felt that there was a choice to be made, and their co-workers consciously decided not to individualize instruction, possibly without considering the consequences to the students. Many attributed the reluctance of teachers to their disinterest in “doing anything extra” as there was a general perception that accommodations and modifications required “quite a bit of work for the teacher.”

Others believed that the hesitance of teachers to make accommodations and
modifications was due to a lack of understanding of student needs or their notion that individualized instruction was, in itself, unfair or inequitable. Daniel argues that the area of accommodations and modifications is the source of special education related dilemmas primarily because “…even some of the strongest teachers… I don’t know if they understand… that this is who the kid is and you need to change the program. This is a round peg and you have a square hole, and the hole has to change before the peg can change. Not the other way around.”

Samantha supports Daniel’s assertion, providing two examples in which teachers failed to acknowledge the individual needs and abilities of the “round peg:”

It’s a 6/7 split and a couple of the kids are supposed to be doing grade 4 math. In discussion with the teacher, the teacher said, ‘No, they can do it, it’s not that they cannot do it, they are just lazy.’ So, the teacher was not modifying their program because his belief was that they did not have a special need, there is nothing wrong with them, there is nothing distinct about their learning…. So, he was choosing not to modify their program even though he is supposed to technically, according to the IEP. So, that caused a big problem because it’s a legal document.

In another situation, Samantha describes, with concern, a colleague who withholds accommodations, thereby negatively affecting the student’s learning and overall well-being, because she feels that accommodations are a form of “special treatment” which, if provided, is unfair to the other students:

The teacher hated, and she called it giving special treatment, so she hated giving special treatment to this one kid. For example early entry. He was a child with autism, he was high functioning, but he had autism. We would allow him the early entry so he could avoid the crowd, other things like in the classroom we had a board for him, and she hated
the special treatment that he got. But he was not a bad kid and he was scolded all the
time. He has certain needs and he would function well when we did all those things, but
she would hate doing them. So sometimes she wouldn’t do them, she would say, ‘Why
did he get to come in early? The rest of the kids don’t. Just let him stay out there.’ Just
kind of dismissive of the fact that, oh no somebody can be a little different.

However, unlike Samantha, Amy does not agree with Daniel. She considers a teacher’s choice
not to individualize instruction as being more of an issue of fairness as opposed to a lack of
understanding on his or her part:

I think this always causes ethical dilemmas because a lot of teachers wonder
whether the accommodations are justified and they wonder how accommodations given
to one student, how that would impact the class and other students. So, looking at issues
of fairness and treating all students the same. There are those who choose not to
accommodate and modify. I don’t really understand some teachers, they are really set
against following through with accommodations, not completely because they don’t
understand, but because they think they have to treat everyone the same or else they think
it’s unfair… I think some teachers still struggle with the idea that an IEP is a legal
document…. Like, they think it is suggested. Where, they just think, if I don’t think it’s
appropriate then I’m not going to do it. And they use their professionalism to justify not
accommodating…. and the student suffers because of it. I think that’s a huge ethical
issue. It’s not good.

Amy’s perception is teachers understand that students are different, but they choose to disregard
those differences, making a conscious decision to treat everyone equally because they believe
this to be fair. These teachers fail to recognize that their actions are, in fact, unfair as they

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disadvantage the students who, without accommodations or modifications, struggle to learn and reach their potential. Amy is aggravated, not just because her colleagues withhold accommodations and modifications, but more so because they demand that she do the same:

What I don’t understand is that, if some teachers do not want to accommodate that’s their choice. Why is it that when I am accommodating other teachers have a problem with that? They come to me and they say, ‘Well, you really shouldn’t be doing that or you shouldn’t be doing this because it makes me look bad since I am not doing it. You accommodating means I have to accommodate and I won’t.’ I can’t understand that because we are adults and professionals making choices and if you don’t want to accommodate that’s a choice you are making and I shouldn’t have to cater what I do in the classroom to what you do in the classroom.

Amy’s situation and similar incidents described by other participants involving relations with colleagues place the teachers in difficult positions. They believe that denying students with special needs the necessary accommodations and modifications is unfair as it establishes unequal learning opportunities, but they feel obligated to remain loyal to and cordial with their co-workers. In all of the situations regarding the willingness of teachers to individualize instruction, participants faced the dilemma of whether or not to confront colleagues whom they believed acted irresponsibly or unethically. While a choice is present, many did not feel that they are able to do what they considered to be ethical. Constrained by a larger system of self-policing and the pressure to remain loyal to colleagues at all costs, participants who feared jeopardizing their careers, and those who believed that taking a stand would only cause difficulties for them without actually resolving the problem, did nothing. The teachers’ responses to the difficulties left them with feelings of guilt and anxiety as many maintained that they failed in their duty to
advocate for students and ensure their best interests. In addition to collegial tensions, teachers expressed disappointment with their own abilities to make accommodations and modifications for students with special needs.

Based on their personal teaching experiences and their observations of others, participants reported that when accommodations and modifications are implemented, they are often carried out incorrectly and in a manner that is not conducive to learning, as noticed by Patricia:

I do see, for example, some students that are being given modifications. But, in truth, they are not really modifications, what they are doing is dumbing down things for them. So, if they get a quiz, they will get the answer key along with that. So really, the student is not working on any skills except for reading one piece of paper and transferring it onto another piece of paper. They are not doing any analysis, they are not synthesizing, they are not comprehending even. At the end of the day, I don’t think that student has learned anything new. So, those are the kinds of things I see.

Anna agrees, describing the “standard type of accommodation” that she sees most teachers administering:

Normally what I see a lot of is extended time. There is nothing else. I was just in a classroom with IEP kids doing the literacy test and they just got more time. I don’t know if that helps them. I think they need more. There should be something else in place for them in terms of accommodations and modifications. I feel like extra time has become the standard, despite whether it is right for them.

While Anna recognizes that generic accommodations and modifications are ineffective and unfair because they do not meet the individual needs of the students, she regretfully admits that,
like most teachers, they are the practices she uses in her classroom:

I could do the thing that all teachers do, more time, take away some of the work so that there is less. Those standard types of things. But, I don’t feel that this was enough. I would be able to do something, but no, I would not be able to do it right. I think the students deserve more than that. With just the IEP, I don’t think that I would be able to give the students what they need. If I watched them and worked with them one-on-one, I could figure it out more, but I still do not think that it would be enough.

Like Anna, several of the general education participants revealed that, although they wanted to accommodate and modify for their students, they individualized instruction inadequately because they “did not know how.” Daniella discusses a situation where all of her ideas and those of her colleagues were exhausted, and still she did not know what to do for her student, “…it was kind of like bumping my head against the wall, like what more could we do for this child? It was like, you try all of these resources, but where do you go from there?” Hillary also struggles to make accommodations and modifications, faulting her inabilities on the shortcomings of professional development, which she believes does not equip teachers with practical tools and strategies that can be used in the classroom:

It’s not a cop-out in any means, because I am trying to, I work really hard and I try really hard to help every kid that I have, but I think it’s about time that people stand up and start to say, ‘We honestly do not know what we are doing.’ Teachers college does not prepare us for this. I mean I have my Special Ed part 1, but I mean, it was so much of a joke. It was like, what’s an IEP? What does the legislation say? And I was like, ‘Well, it doesn’t say very much about what you are going to do to help me do what I am supposed to do [in the classroom].’ So, you walk away disillusioned again.
Participants who acknowledged their difficulties with individualizing instruction worried about their inexperience and the well-being of the students. They described feeling troubled because they knew that the needs of students were not being served in the classroom and, as teachers, they believed that they were responsible for ensuring equitable opportunities.

Apart from the lack of training in special education described by some participants, teachers claimed that the IEP was not useful in supporting them to make accommodations and modifications for students. Amy questions the practicality of the IEP as a teaching tool:

Sometimes the IEPs are just so generic you don’t know if you are really accommodating and modifying to a specific need. Almost 99% of IEP students have extra time as an accommodation for writing tests and doing assignments. And maybe at least 75% get special seating closer to the front. So, you wonder how unique those IEPs are and how specific they are to each student.

John agrees, suggesting that insufficient information forces him to “make things up” for students identified with a disability:

This is a failing in the IEP forms, at least the ones I am receiving now. The information just is not clear enough…. So, I am left just making things up…. I’m personally and professionally struggling with what I perceive is a lack of information coming to me about student needs.

Besides missing information, Joana, who teaches one section of senior level gifted science each semester, reports that, based on her experiences, the Individual Education Plan may also be inaccurate or outdated:

It [the IEP] isn’t usually a very true reflection of the student themselves. Especially with a whole lot of those gifted ones, they are made up when they are in grade three and they
don’t really change a whole lot. By the time they are 16 and sitting in my grade 11 biology class, it doesn’t mean that they are gifted in biology. That’s one big problem. And even the head of special education will tell you that it doesn’t really change very much over time. The kids even that are LD [learning disabled], theirs stays very much the same….I just think that if there was more personalization put into the IEP then it would be a more effective tool. But, I just find that it is a lot of education jargon on there and that it is not really reflective of the student. It doesn’t really give you a good idea of what their actual strengths and needs are.

Hillary, like many others, is outraged by what she considers to be inadequacies in the Individual Education Plan and the methods used to make updates, which she feels results in the lack of reliability Joana speaks of. At Hillary’s school, only the classroom teacher, using check boxes and drop-down comments, writes Individual Education Plans:

Who even helps us to pick what grade level the student is working at? You just go from the previous year, so last year they were working at grade 4, so naturally, what my special ed teacher would say, ‘So this year, pick grade 5.’ And you’re thinking, ‘What!’ What is that?! That is so random. Its like you are trying to tell me that this kid, I mean, this kid is so much more than just a random grade 5 thing and you are telling me that this year it’s grade 5 because last year was grade 4?! What if they didn’t progress? What is they still need grade 4? It’s so extremely frustrating!!!

Teachers were concerned about the lack of guidance that they received from the IEP as a teaching tool and they questioned the validity of the legal document. Many were required to make assumptions and generate their own accommodations and modifications based on what they deemed the students needed, which some participants believed compromised their integrity
as professionals.

There was a general consensus among teachers that accommodations and modifications were either not being made, or they were made incorrectly and not specific to the needs and abilities of the students. Participants perceived this to be a fundamental issue of fairness because students with special needs were not given an equal opportunity to reach their potential. All of the participants spoke at length about the unwillingness of colleagues to individualize instruction, however, none addressed the issues with these colleagues. Even those who communicated genuine concern and were troubled by the treatment of students with special needs, like Anna who witnessed a teacher verbally abusing students or Amy who considers the behaviors of some teachers as “inhumane,” elected to ignore the problems. Participants were also dissatisfied with their own abilities to implement the required supports to promote student learning, suggesting that they did not know how to make adequate accommodations and modifications due to insufficiencies in their training and the inadequacy of the IEP as a teaching tool. Most were afflicted with guilt, faulting themselves for their failure to confront colleagues, or their lack of knowledge and experience in special education, which they felt contributed to the inequalities experienced by students. In addition to ethical challenges that occur in the context of accommodations and modifications, participants expressed concerns about the identification and placement of students with special needs as many deem the process to be unfair, dishonest, and governed by policy and funding as opposed to student needs.

Problems in identifying and placing students with special needs

Identification is a formal process whereby the student undergoes a series of assessments to determine if he or she could be deemed eligible for special education services. Frequently,
identification is accompanied by a designation of a specific disability, such as learning disability or autism. Once identification is finalized, the placement of the student is determined. In the province of Ontario, the preferred placement of students with special needs is in a general education classroom (Ministry of Education, 2007). A number of participants discussed experiencing ethical challenges as a result of lengthy wait times for identification, funding shortages, and the inappropriate placement of students.

While most of the participants believe that the identification process serves to reinforce negative stereotypes about disability, they agree that, due to the funding structure in our educational system, it is essential. Significant challenges arise, as reported by teachers, in the time between the initiation of the assessment to the formal identification. Without a formal identification, which can take a year or more, teachers cannot make modifications to the curriculum or access additional supports and specialized resources, leaving students, whose learning depends on the assistance, at a disadvantage. Participants, like Patricia, expressed concern about missed learning opportunities and students falling further behind during the lengthy course of the formal identification:

There is this HUGE list of kids who have yet to be tested, and these are kids who have been identified for several years now, just by teachers, have been identified as having some kind of issue… And it just becomes like a meat grinder situation where you just crank them out and hope that maybe next year someone will take care of it. Yeah, it’s not fair, they just slip through the cracks.

Extended wait times force teachers to navigate their way around policies and limited funding. At times, this means doing things that participants consider to be unethical or problematic in an attempt to serve the needs of the students. For instance, Samantha describes her experience in the
role of a special education teacher during a long-term occasional placement. She worries about
general educators who make curriculum modifications for students who have yet to be formally
identified as this contradicts education policies and can be harmful to student learning if
inaccurate. However, Samantha does not condemn the teachers’ actions because she understands
their position:

There is such a hold-up on testing, because there are so many kids and the psychologist is
busy and cannot get them in. I know for a fact there is a several month wait to get tested,
let alone get everything formalized and get on a modified program. In most cases, the
teachers would just modify the program…. If they felt that there were kids who are really
struggling they would modify the program to help them be successful because the formal
way takes a while. If you were to wait to get everybody identified, the year would be
over. I understand why they are doing it, but it is not allowed. What if they are wrong?

While awaiting identification, teachers continue to be responsible for the student’s learning and
they must ensure that his or her needs are being met in the classroom, causing some, as described
by Samantha, to make choices that may lead to other difficulties. Jessica is bothered by the
inequalities that exist in the ranking of students for assessment and identification, “I’m talking
about the list. That is my beef. The list of people to be identified and I have witnessed names
bumping around in the hierarchy of who should be tested first... There are no rules, there are no
guidelines, there is just somebody making a list. And I don’t know if that is fair.” Despite her
belief that it is unethical for students to be moved ahead of others, Jessica advises the parents
awaiting identification for their child to confront and pressure administrators and school board
officials to speed up the process:

I have actually said to parents, ‘If you really want to help me, pick up the phone [and]
call the superintendent, call this person at the board…. Don’t mention me because then I
will not be able to help you anymore. But I know that getting a computer will benefit
your child because your child needs it…. It has taken us a year to get to this point, I have
submitted all the forms and seriously call this person, start barking.’ I have found that
parents who barked the loudest, [those] who are more willing to stand up and put their
foot on top of the table and say, ‘My child needs this because my child is not meeting
their potential,’ those parents get heard first.

Jessica makes the difficult choice to endorse a behavior, which she believes is unfair, because the
alternative, to patiently await one’s turn, is not in the best interest of her students and therefore
equally unjust. Like Jessica, Patricia faces a troublesome situation in which she is instructed by
the administrator and the special education team to fail her student in order to speed up the wait
time for identification. She feels torn because she wants the student to have access to supports
and resources, but she believes that illegitimately failing a student is unethical:

At the beginning of this year, the goal was just to get him tested. Get him tested, get him
tested, get him tested, because he has a learning disability. And the sooner he gets labeled
the sooner we can get him the help he needs. ‘You have to fail him [so that] he can get
moved towards the front of the cue and get tested,’ [she was told]…. And I was like,
‘He’s not really failing my class either!’ He needs a lot of support and a lot of structure,
but his ideas are his own. I am not feeding him these ideas, he is just having a hard time
articulating them and writing them down…. And I said, ‘Well, I don’t know.’ The
message was very clear, ‘Fail him!’ But, I couldn’t. I couldn’t…. [I] just continued giving
him the marks that he earned…. I am thinking of what’s in his best interest? Is it best for
him to get the diagnosis he needs so that he can get the help that he needs so that he can
move on? Or, do I just keep him where he is as a D+/C- student, keep telling him to work on those learning skills and the academic stuff will follow? Really, what is in his best interest? But, if he is trying and then I fail him, he’s going to walk always with the idea of ‘What’s the point? Why bother trying? I am still going to end up failing.’ Is that in his best interest? I don’t think so. So, it was really tough!

The dilemma, for Patricia, is whether to comply with the administrator and special education teacher or resist the pressure and grade the student honestly. Several participants struggled with comparable predicaments that arose as a result of the assessment and identification procedures which, at times, placed them in uncomfortable situations where they were forced to choose between doing something they disagree with on ethical grounds or disobey individuals in positions of authority. Unlike Patricia, most selected the first course of action and suffered feelings of guilt as a result.

Teachers are troubled by the extensive delays in the identification of students who have special needs, as many perceive this to be unfair and obstructive to student learning. With good intentions, in striving to serve the best interests of the students, teachers reported engaging in behaviors, which they consider to be unethical, including making modifications without an IEP or acting dishonestly in an attempt to speed up the process. In such situations, the participants were torn between their own ethical beliefs and the urgency for identification so that appropriate resources, supports, and placements could be made available for their students. However, difficulties with the identification process do not end once the student is identified and an IEP is in place, as participants reported experiencing ethical tensions as a result of placement decisions.

Once the identification process is finalized, teachers continue to grapple with placements that they deem to be “arbitrary,” occurring either because there was no space available in a more
suitable program or because it was believed that an appropriate program, which would serve the students’ needs, did not exist. Participants considered such placements not to have been made in the best interest of the students as they felt that adequate opportunities for growth and development were not obtainable in the setting. Placement was primarily raised as an ethical issue by teachers who held special education positions, however, Hillary, a general education teacher, expressed concern about the suitability of the learning environment for one of her students. She advocated very strongly for the student, whom she believed was significantly hindered due to an incorrect placement decision, despite the resistance she faced from the principal and the special education department:

For two years I had a student who was at the 2nd percentile and we have an LLS [Learning and Life Skills] class in our school for 1st percentile or below. But, she didn’t meet the cut off because she was in the 2nd percentile. So, she was in my room…. She had no positive peer relationships in my room at all! She is working at grade 1 or 2 level… I am not familiar with specialized techniques to help her. Finally, I was like, the LLS class that has 6 students, they have 2 EAs. I have seen what they do in that class to help the kids. Some of those kids are stronger than her and I think it’s because of the support that they receive…. I mean, the speed that I am going at with the grade 7s and 8s is pretty quick. And finally the principal agreed to let her go in there for the mornings. And what a difference it made! But that was in the last half of her grade 8 year, and I had her for grade 7 and 8. And that to me was unethical on all of our parts, to deny her what she deserved. And the change in her, I mean, she made friends in that group, I saw her writing after because the teacher was like, ‘Look how great she is doing.’… I am all for inclusion but I believe that she has a human right to deserve the education that is proper
for her. As soon as she was in there she was a whole other kid, like she was finally able to blossom.

While Hillary is a proponent for inclusion, without adequate supports and resources, she felt that the inclusive classroom was not serving the academic or social needs of her student. Donna has also seen inappropriate placements where students are not learning. She is frustrated by the “wasted time” and “loss of learning” that occurs in such situations:

Placement is an issue. For example, the boy that I spoke about… you could see that [my class] was not the place for him very soon after he started my program. So, of course it was a matter of him just sort of sitting there and doing the time until he could get into the queue for the testing… I don’t think that’s fair. The system takes a long time for the students to be tested because there are so many of them to be tested… So, that’s hard to see. I couldn’t fully meet his needs through my program because there was a lot more that he needed.

For students with special needs who “tend to fall behind way more quickly than other kids…,” as noted by Samantha, an incorrect placement only serves to further disadvantage them.

Dilemmas described by teachers relating to policies for students with special needs are those that involve missed learning opportunities and the inability to thrive. Participants are concerned about students who are not fully engaged and participating in inclusive classrooms, those who do not receive accommodations and modifications specific to their unique needs and abilities, and finally those who are not identified and placed in a manner that is timely and conducive to learning. Such situations challenge teachers and often require them to make difficult choices where imperatives may be conflicting and in which principles of fairness, equity, honesty, and care may be compromised. Participants often communicated their
apprehension about the actions of other teachers, suggesting that such situations contributed to the ethical difficulties that they experienced in the context of policies for students with special needs. Some were bothered by individuals in positions of authority who requested that they act in ways which contradict with their ethical convictions, specifically in identification and placement processes. While many did not agree with the behaviors of colleagues, all elected not to address problems involving other teachers, and most, with the exception of two participants, complied with the demands of administrators or specialists. In addition to teaching-related difficulties and dilemmas, many reported experiencing tensions pertaining to their roles and responsibilities.

**Roles and Responsibilities of Teachers**

Teaching, as a designated profession, necessitates specific duties and obligations that are common to all members as outlined by the Standards of Practice and the Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession (Ontario College of Teachers, 2006a, 2006b). Participants spoke about dilemmas related to their professional role and their responsibility for students, suggesting that the complexity and multidimensionality of the profession forces them to fulfill many positions, not just that of the classroom teacher. Many perceived their professional role as synonymous with their ethical obligations in that they felt accountable for ensuring that the students are treated fairly, with care and dignity, and they believed it was their responsibility to provide equitable opportunities for students with special needs to learn and reach their potential. Nevertheless, the challenges of teaching left participants overwhelmed because they did not believe that they fulfilled their duties, resulting in feelings of guilt and for some, thoughts of leaving the profession.

In describing their professional role, participants often referred to ethics in teaching,
suggesting that educators should embody ethical principles such as care, fairness, equity, and integrity. Most considered the “ideal” teacher as one who is ethical, as suggested by Hillary, “put[ting] the needs and rights of the student first,” academically, socially, and emotionally. Samantha believes that, “students with special needs have a right to an education… [which] put[s] them at a level playing field so that they can have opportunities just like everybody else.” John agrees; he feels that “the ethic of care is essential for a teacher to be an ethical practitioner… An ethical teacher is one who appreciates the complexity of the classroom.” Donna speaks about fairness and care, “Making sure that students are being treated fairly… ethically you have to stand up for students. It’s about being there for the kids and… not just say, ‘Well, they are here and I just have to get them through.’” Participants aspired to emulate such qualities in their own teaching practice. But, this ideal of the “ethical professional” is not what teachers experienced. They were constrained by problems and dilemmas which, at times, forced them to make choices or comply with demands that made them uncomfortable and contradicted their sense of ethics.

The most challenging roles are those which participants believed surpassed the responsibilities of a classroom teacher, “I feel like a parent, or a psychologist, or a counselor or something, so I definitely felt a lot of stress because the job, the profession of a teacher, I just think it’s so complicated now,” states Patricia. Such situations often caused ethical tensions for teachers; while they were aware that professional boundaries were being crossed in that their actions exceeded the professional duties of a teacher, they believed that their role required them to secure the well-being of the student, even outside of the school setting. In some instances teachers found themselves taking on the obligations of parents, a position that made them feel uneasy. Emily, for example, questions her role and her ethical responsibilities, describing a
conflict she faced with a parent when she provided articles of winter clothing for a student:

I might have made a mistake, I don’t know. She was in my class and she was having difficulties so I helped her. She was coming to school with inappropriate clothing for the season. So, I gave her a hat and I gave her mittens, and I brought her all these things to keep her warm. And she [the student’s mother] told the school that I was interfering with her life because I gave her daughter the hat and mittens and that this was not the teacher’s job. Ethically I should not have done that. So, that was the very big sore spot. And the biggest sore spot for the mother was that I was getting close to her daughter and I wanted to help her. So, that was an ethical issue for me. Wondering, how close do you get to a child? How much do you help the parents and the child?

Teachers like Emily who care about their students are often unable to ignore an issue, despite their understanding that taking action is beyond their professional mandate. Similarly, Hillary, attempted to assist her at-risk student by contacting and advising the guardian, involving the Child and Youth Worker at the school, and even alerting Children’s Aid. When she recognized that there was no change in the student’s condition, Hillary contacted his pediatrician because she believed that it would have been unethical for her to disregard the matter:

I contacted the pediatrician. I did. Because he was a foster child with a mother who really couldn’t cope and she had other issues. I anonymously, well not anonymously, but I didn’t let the foster mother know that I was doing this. I wrote a note saying, these are the behaviors I am seeing… Like I called this woman [the foster mother] daily on my prep. It was like a 40 minute a day conversation for two years of my life, which is a whole other dilemma because that’s not what I am supposed to be doing on my prep time…. [After contacting the pediatrician] they went through with a huge meeting with the
superintendent and the principal, I had to go physically to the doctor’s office and sit in
the office with the parent and the superintendent, just to be able to say to the doctor the
truth, or my version of the truth because the doctor was not getting that information. I
don’t think that it was my job to do this, and maybe I could have been in big trouble for
doing it, but someone had to help the student.

Exceeding what participants believed to be their professional responsibilities, also occurred with
parents. By virtue of working with students, teachers are required to interact with parents on a
regular basis. A few of the participants discussed the fine line that exists in the parent-teacher
relationship and the degree of pressure and apprehension they experience when their roles and
duties to support parents surpass what they believe to be professionally justifiable. Patricia feels
overwhelmed with having to serve as an advocate for the parents:

> We are not just in the business of educating kids, but sometimes we have to educate
parents too. There is so much madness with all these school boards. You have to be
knowledgeable about all the policies, what rights does your child have? It’s so much
stuff! I don’t even know! I work for this board and I don’t even know these rules. How
could I even expect a parent to know this stuff? But, there is nobody there to guide them.
And it’s horrible. It’s unfair. And it’s left to the teacher. We are the ones they [parents]
turn to.

Similarly, Emily, questions the extent to which she should become personally involved in
assisting the parents of her students:

> Some parents would call me and say things like, ‘What did I do wrong in my pregnancy
that made my child not be smart.’ I would have to say, ‘You didn’t do anything wrong.’ I
had to be a counselor to the parents as well. And you never know how far you should go
psychologically with the parents either. I tried to stay close, guidance, motherly, caring, but not make it so that they would want to phone me all the time. It’s just really hard to build the parents up. I got goosebumps just sitting here and thinking about it…. So, that is the thing that you don’t know if you are getting too close to the parents because you want to help them.

While such responsibilities are not part of the teacher role, the complexity of the position causes teachers to feel accountable for the welfare of the students and in turn their parents, regardless of potential consequences, prompting them to act based on the ethic of care.

Despite the associated challenges and dilemmas, teachers considered advocating for students with special needs an important part of their professional role. Participants believed that they “… ha[d] to advocate for [their students] because they [the students] need that voice.” They viewed advocating for students as synonymous with the caring for them, with many teachers stating that they almost always consider the best interests of the student when making decisions, even if those decisions are difficult. Samantha admits that being an advocate causes her anxiety, however, she is convinced that it is essential to serve the needs of her student:

There is this kid who has gone from grade to grade where he is not being successful at all and there is so much of an information gap at this point and he just continues to fall behind. I wanted to get him help so I had to advocate for him. I think all teachers do that. But facing other teachers, administration, or the parents themselves, I don’t know, it’s just very hard. It puts you in a difficult position…. you feel like a parent sometimes because a lot of these kids don’t have parents who advocate for them on their behalf. So, you just feel like they are not getting the support... If you let it get to you, it kind of becomes overwhelming and you feel that you cannot do anything.
Likewise, Hillary advocates for an eighth grade student who requires a laptop computer to assist him with his writing. She is troubled by the years it took to obtain accommodations for him and the irresponsibility of others:

I had to be persistent and push for the OT [occupational therapy] assessment. They finally came in, waiting list, I think I put him on the list last year, and low and behold, he deserves a computer of his own. Which is great, but here he is in grade 8! And it’s May. And thank goodness I did it,… But, he has had that printing since grade 1, I am sure. It’s not like his printing was beautiful and then it regressed! So, my question is, what’s happening along the way to the point where they get to grade 8… Why should I have to push for that? I guess it’s just, where were his parents, where was the specialist teacher, where were the other teachers? They just passed it off, ‘Oh, he’s lazy.’ I don’t even know what they would have said. And he didn’t even have an IEP! I was like, he needs an IEP for things like note taking. He shouldn’t have to take notes, end of discussion. I’m not sure why that is just emerging now.

Even in situations where teachers, like Amy, disagreed with the decision of the parents, they felt obligated to advocate for the students and their best interests. Amy recalls parents who, against her counsel, refused accommodations and modifications for their son, leading to a potentially life threatening situation which forced Amy to disregard the parents’ requests and seek help for her student:

It’s a struggle. Especially when you are working in a community with a lot of immigrants. That’s the kind of school I work in. Most of those parents, they don’t understand what special ed means. It doesn’t necessarily exist where they come from, or it has a very negative connotation. And they associate special ed with severe disability,
with physical disability or with mental disease. So, they are very upset when teachers approach them about having their kids tested…. Then the student kind of slips through the cracks because the parents refuse to have them tested and they insist it’s a language issue when it might be more. I am thinking about a particular student I had a couple of years ago in my grade 10 applied history class…. We tried to explain to his parents…. They wanted him to go to university….. We couldn’t even get him to write a sentence for us….. He was failing miserably in all his applied classes and they just pushed him to work harder and harder. And eventually he became severely depressed and I had to bring in the school psychologist, who was very worried because he assessed him as being suicidal.

Similarly, Samantha, while working as a long-term occasional teacher, had to deal with parents who denied the provision of any form of support for their daughter who has special needs. Professionally, she felt accountable to the student, but both the principal and the parents ordered her to do nothing. The main dilemma for Samantha was whether to obey the demands of the administrator and the parents, or to do what she believed was necessary for the student to learn in her classroom:

I had a student who was very high needs whose parents didn’t want her to get identified formally, so basically it was this whole charade and the principal kept telling me, ‘You know, just do what the parents want. Keep her in the classroom, don’t give her any special attention because the parents didn’t want her to get any special attention from an EA or from you.’ And the principal was just like, ‘Okay, just do that….’ And basically what I was doing was ignoring her…. So me and the EA would try to obviously support her in some ways, even though we were not supposed to. And then the kid would go
home and she would mention something to mom or dad, and then mom or dad would come in and say, ‘Hey she’s not supposed to be getting that, this isn’t supposed to be happening.’… You feel like you’re supposed to listen to what you’re told, but at the same time, you feel bad because you’re the one in the classroom and it’s essentially ignoring what the kid’s needs. So, I remember that was a really bad situation. I hated it. I couldn’t wait for the other teacher to get back, but I have been with those kids for like the whole year, so I felt so bad.

While generally participants chose to ignore ethical dilemmas that involved colleagues or those in authority positions, Samantha became so overwhelmed that she did what she believed was required to serve her student. Teacher participants highly regarded the ethical dimensions of their professional roles, believing that their responsibilities included ensuring that students were cared for and that they received fair opportunities and equitable learning outcomes. Nevertheless, few, with the exception of Samantha and Patricia, elected to do what they believed was “right” on ethical grounds and ignore the demands of their administrators. Situations which required teachers to choose between compliance with a colleague or authority figure and the well-being of the student posed serious challenges for the teachers. Such problems were commonly not addressed, which left the teachers with feelings of guilt and caused some to question their satisfaction with the profession.

Teachers feel a strong sense of accountability for the welfare and academic development of their students. In relation to students who have special needs, participants believe that they are primarily responsible for meeting the students’ needs, and in many situations, when this was not possible due to constraints outside of their control, teachers experienced a great deal of tension and anxiety which, in some instances, was internalized leading to self-doubt. Samantha discusses
some of the obstacles she comes up against in making decisions for her students:

A lot of those situations you learn from, you think maybe you shouldn’t do that? And a lot of them make you question yourself, you know, if they think this is what’s best and I think this is what’s best, then maybe I don’t know what I’m talking about. And in the end you make a decision of what’s best for every situation, but oh, for sure, you get into situations where it’s not only your own ethics, it’s your neighbors, or another teacher, or the principal, or the parents. You go through challenges with your colleagues. So all those things attribute to the fact, despite you wanting to have the same things for every child, it’s not likely to take, so you help, but there are always going to be the kids that you failed in the end.

Hillary describes the sense of guilt she feels when consulting with parents while knowing that she is limited in her ability to help:

And the ethical dilemmas of, you’re sitting there with a parent saying, ‘You know I am going to try my best.’ And they are interpreting that as, my child is going to get this, this, and this. And what you really want to say is, ‘I am trying my best and that’s not really even close to what your kid needs. Your kid needs someone who knows exactly what they are doing.’ In my school we don’t do any withdrawal at all. At all. So, the kids don’t even go to the special ed teacher to get assistance…. I panic about it. And that really bugs me. I mean, I have taught for 10 years. This isn’t new, this has been on-going, I’m always feeling that I could be doing so much more for them if only I was given more direction and time to focus on it.

Patricia is also distraught as she discusses, what she believes, are inadequacies in her teaching practice:
You know, the biggest challenges I have with that whole thing, is not necessarily with them, but with me. With my teaching practices. How can I be better? How can I? When I read through those IEPs I actually have to shake my head and think, ‘Am I really doing this?’ And a lot of the times, I know that I could be doing so much more. And here is the thing, and I think back to my teaching program, is there any way that someone could have taught me this stuff back there? Or is this just one of those things that you learn on the job and with time? … I really wish that I had more one-on-one time with them. And I don’t know how to do that, and I don’t know how to get better at that. I don’t even know if that is something that I can get better at. I don’t think that I am meeting their needs…. And it’s really hard… And I know that its not necessarily just the teacher, it’s the way that the system is structured. But, are there things that I could be doing? Could I do more? Absolutely. I know that [crying]… There are just so many issues. And that’s why I think to myself, I don’t think that I can do this because I know that I am not super woman. But, I think that if I can’t help them, then what am I doing there? We’ll see what happens. It’s so tough. I think I can’t do justice to these kids. And I think to myself, maybe this career is just not meant to be. As much as I like it and as much as I love the kids, maybe someone more qualified should be there [crying].

Patricia believes that she is not fulfilling her professional obligations as a classroom teacher because she feels her ethical responsibilities to ensure that students with special needs are treated with care, fairness, and equity are compromised in her practice.

A number of participants contemplated leaving the profession due to the difficulties and conflicts they faced in their work with students who have special needs. It is not the students themselves that teachers perceived as a challenge; rather, it was the dilemmas they experienced
and the sense of failure they felt as a result of different constraints such as lack of training, lack of support, lack of resources, and lack of time, to name a few. Hillary states:

I mean, I love teaching, I take it very seriously and I also enjoy it, I think I am suited to it. But, I can see why people are leaving. I have ten years of experience and I am not going to lie, I have thought about it [leaving the profession] and part of the reason why I am getting my Master’s is so I can have other options. Because it’s getting to the point where you would have to be a super human to cope with the demands that are placed on you to be able to achieve the ideal, and I think that so many of us can see, we can see it and we want it [to be the ideal teacher]. We want a classroom where this, and this, and this is happening, and everyone’s needs are being met, and everyone is safe, but the lack of support around that is just ridiculous.

Patricia, like Hillary, would like to meet every students’ needs, but she feels a sense of failure in relation to her professional role and responsibilities. She discusses the influence of the classroom teacher, whom she deems as powerless in his or her capacity to make a difference, due to the inhibitions of the school system:

There are days when I just think, I don’t want to do this anymore! It’s too hard. You go into this [teaching] with the best of intentions and you don’t really fulfill them [crying]… There is a certain level of disenchantment that I’ve experienced this year with the public school system and I think to myself, the teacher is only one component of the whole thing. And I don’t know how much power or authority they really do have. And I think the fact that you see certain issues come up, or certain cases come up, I think that wears you down. Like slowly it starts to erode any good feelings you might have as an autonomous person in your classroom because you realize, “I don’t think I can do
Jessica refers to the challenges described by many of the participants as a “pressure cooker” where teachers are experiencing constant stress and anxiety in the scope of their professional role:

Before I went off on surgery I was contemplating stress leave because I was so frazzled. My head was full of all these different conundrums and not being able to move in any different direction. And not feeling like I was supported…. I mean a lot of it comes down to the fact that we live in a pressure cooker, and there is only so much pressure you can put on a person before they say, ‘No, I cannot do this anymore.’ I mean, I know lots of special ed teachers who have gone on stress leave, I know lots who have just plain old stopped teaching and they go into a completely different profession to get them out of the pressure cooker that is special ed.

Those who considered leaving teaching suggested that, while they thoroughly admire the profession, they could not cope with the on-going challenges they faced in the scope of their practice and their inability to make adequate resolutions. Many, specifically in their work with students who have special needs, did not believe that they were meeting their ethical obligations as classroom teachers because they felt that students in their care continued to be done a disservice and disadvantaged. Given that most of the participants entered the profession with intentions to facilitate and promote the growth and development of their students, holding principles of care, fairness, equity, and honesty as fundamental to the roles and responsibilities of a “good teacher” or the “ideal teacher,” failing to meet such expectations led to self-doubt, guilt, and in turn, considerations of alternative career options.

Participants agreed that their roles and responsibilities are complex and often fraught with
challenges and dilemmas. Teachers are required to fulfill numerous duties including those of a parent, an advocate, or a counselor to name a few. While participants believed that such tasks exceeded, and at times conflicted with, their professional designations, they felt obligated and ethically bound to undertake them because they care about the students and their well-being. Ethical principles were perceived to be central to the roles and responsibilities of a teacher as many described “the ideal teacher” synonymously with “the ethical teacher.” Participants strove to emulate such qualities; however, many felt this was not a reality in their teaching practice due to various restrictions, which caused them to consider leaving the profession.

**Concluding Remarks**

The results reported in chapter four provide accounts of ethical conflicts, tensions, and dilemmas that teacher participants described experiencing in their professional practice. Recurring themes of ethical issues addressed by teachers pertain to practices in inclusive classrooms, policies for students with special needs, and the roles and responsibilities of teachers. Overall, participants reported that ethical challenges occur relatively frequently in their work, specifically with students who have special needs. For Samantha, “the little ones, they happen all the time, daily. I think that they occur more frequently then they are addressed.” Patricia, “can think of an example for everything in [her] teaching practice that is ethically problematic.” Hillary agrees, “I would say that we are dealing with dilemmas on a daily basis, whether they fit into the OCT ethical framework, it depends on how you define ethical, but overall, it’s a daily thing for sure!” Emily recalls her experiences as a classroom teacher and compares these with her position as a special educator, “For me, ethical dilemmas occurred frequently right from the beginning. And as a special educator, I mean, there are a lot of
dilemmas.” In response to these difficulties, teachers often felt alone, frustrated, and some even contemplated leaving the profession. All of the participants expressed care towards their students and they considered themselves responsible for providing them with equitable opportunities to achieve success; it was not the students who evoked these negative feelings and experiences. Rather, teachers perceived the strains to be a result of the day-to-day responsibilities associated with their practice, the structure of the educational system, constraints in general and special education, and work with colleagues. The following results chapter presents the ways in which teachers cope with or resolve the ethical problems they described in this chapter and others that they encounter in their daily work. They discuss the supports available to assist them in managing and working though such challenges and they offer suggestions for supports which they feel would be beneficial to better prepare them for the complexities and ethical problems that occur in teaching.
Chapter 5: Findings – Coping, Resolving, and Seeking Support

Introduction

This chapter continues to present results from the study’s interviews, with a focus on the knowledge, skills, and methods teachers employ to cope with or resolve ethical challenges and dilemmas, the supports available to assist them in coping with or resolving difficulties, and recommendations for additional supports. Three major sections constitute this chapter: coping strategies and resolutions, available supports, and recommendations for supports, with each section further divided into themes based on the perspectives and experiences of the teacher participants (Table 9).

Table 9

Coping and Resolution Strategies, Supports, and Recommendations for Supports

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Major Themes</th>
<th>No. of Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coping strategies and resolutions</td>
<td>Sources for coping with and resolving ethical issues</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ignoring or avoiding ethical tensions</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting teachers</td>
<td>Relying on others</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No supports available</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations for supports</td>
<td>Professional development</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Professional learning communities</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Guidance from mentor teachers</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: maximum of n=12 for each major theme; data collected during both stages of interviews however, greater emphasis on topic placed during second stage of interviews
Although data from both stages of interviews are included in this chapter, the themes were discussed in greater detail during the second interview, which was conducted with six of the twelve interview participants. Moreover, participant statements reported relate to the accounts of challenges and dilemmas previously described by the teachers in chapter four. Here, teachers reflect on the ways in which they managed the difficulties and the assistance they sought to make resolutions in the context of their practice-based experiences.

**Coping Strategies and Resolutions: Managing Ethical Challenges in Inclusive Classrooms**

The nature of teachers’ work requires on-going deliberation and decision-making. When ethical tensions arise in the scope of their professional practice, teachers are required to resolve the issue or they must cope with the difficulty and its associated consequences. Dealing with ethical problems and dilemmas was perceived, by participants, as onerous due to the complexity of the situations, the inability to foresee consequences, and the influence of parents, colleagues, administrators, and the school system. Often, teachers are required to face predicaments and make choices based on what they believe is most advantageous, given the circumstances, with minimal, if any, support. Participants suggested that they refer to laws, policies, and regulations, professional judgment, as well as personal convictions and upbringing, as sources of guidance to help them in their decision-making. Few rely on one specific source; rather, most suggested that they utilize them in combination to work through issues, with the main objective being to serve the best interests of the student. Samantha discusses how she copes with or resolves ethical issues in her teaching practice:

I want to make the best decision for that student regardless. Mostly, I use my background knowledge. I don’t think first about teacher ethics, about the OCT [Ontario College of
Teachers], I don’t know if there is a standard of ethics. I don’t think about those. I am sure they overlap. My first thought is that child. What do they need? I think about what I should do based on the knowledge that I have, and the child, and I make a decision based on that. With all that wrapped up in my own judgment of what I think is best to do.

Despite their best intentions and efforts to make resolutions, participants reported that most ethical tensions remained unresolved, resulting in further challenges and strains for the teachers and frequently disadvantaging the students.

**Sources for coping with and resolving ethical issues**

In the context of their daily work, teachers encounter tensions and dilemmas which require them to make ethically-based decisions. Without established guidelines or procedures that they can turn to, many resorted to sources which they felt would best aid them in managing the problems. In coping with or resolving ethical issues, teachers stated that they consult with laws, policies, and regulations as well as their own professional judgment, but most admitted that they use personal convictions and their upbringing, as opposed to any external source of guidance. Amy thinks about the Education Act of the province of Ontario and “what is legally right and what is legally wrong” when she encounters an ethical issue. Emily confesses, “I don’t really know if I knew what to do much of the time,” but she believes that her actions “[were] guided by the rules in some cases.” Similarly, Joana refers to the legalities of the Individual Education Plan (IEP) for direction, which she then supplements with her own personal convictions:

In terms of students that have special needs, definitely I am thinking about the IEP because that is the legal document and I want to make sure that I met the needs of the IEP
and I’m thinking about that in making my decision. From that point on, I guess it is more personal convictions and my own beliefs and morals that help me make a decision.

While some reported that they turn to laws, policies, and regulations to govern their actions, their statements were not supported by explicit examples of dilemmas that teachers resolved using laws, policies, and regulations. It may be that teachers are thinking about laws, policies, and regulations in order to avoid situations of misconduct, as stated by Patricia, “I make sure that I am not doing anything that I am not allowed to do as a teacher.” Teachers are especially apprehensive when dealing with ethical challenges because the “appropriate” course of action is not self-evident. Participants spoke about “the blue pages,” a section of the monthly publication issued by the Ontario College of Teachers that reports teachers accused of professional misconduct. They worried about the possibility of being reprimanded by this governing professional body if they made the wrong decisions. Novice teachers who do not hold a permanent position are particularly afraid. Anna describes her fears, their source, and the ways in which they influence her teaching practice:

I definitely used board regulations. I had it drilled in my head about all the nasty things that teachers do and how you shouldn’t do this or that. I am terrified. Honestly, when I teach, the door is open. It has to be open always because they told us to do that, so I am so nervous about that. And the whole like, don’t touch a child, don’t yell at them. I am paranoid when it comes to that stuff. I was at teachers’ college… and they told us this. I also went to an orientation for new teachers at my board hosted by the union and it was called, ‘Be Wary, Be Wise’, and that’s what it was. It talked about cases of things teachers did, how they were punished, and how they were reprimanded. The whole PD [professional development] was about that. I am just so scared… To be honest with you,
each time I walk into any classroom, I feel scared because they tell you not to do all these
different things… and I just think about that and make sure I don’t do them because I
don’t even have a full-time position.

Samantha substantiates Anna’s angst, as she was also warned about the potential of disciplinary
action, “I remember even in teachers’ college the professor telling me, ‘You need to be careful
because you need to look out for your career.’” Despite the teachers’ concerns for their careers,
many felt compelled by their sense of what was in the best interest of the student when resolving
ethical problems. Anna sets aside her fears and takes into account the needs of her students, “I
know that I have responsibilities as a teacher for the child and I want to make sure that the
students are happy and that they are learning and I make decisions based on that.” Nevertheless,
she often worries about the choices she has made, those pertaining to the ethical challenges
described in the previous results chapter, and questions how they will affect her professionally.

Coping with or resolving ethical issues where teachers are concerned about negative professional
consequences are most difficult as the associated stress and fear for the self hinder decision-

making.

In addition to laws, policies, and regulations, participants suggested that they use
professional judgment when resolving ethical difficulties along with their personal sense of right
and wrong. In the province of Ontario, the Standards of Practice and the Ethical Standards
(Ontario College of Teachers, 2006a, 2006b) provide guidelines to govern the professional
practice of teachers. Although none of the participants made reference to the Standards
specifically, many referred to the components on which the standards are based, to resolve
ethical tensions that arose. These components include professional knowledge, commitment to
students and their learning, and the principles of care, trust, respect and integrity. For the most
part, teachers reported being concerned about the academic, social, and emotional well-being of their students and they were conscious of ethical principles such as fairness, care, and honesty, when making decisions. Patricia discusses the source that guides her decision as she encounters a dilemma where she has to choose between failing a student on the instructions of the school’s administrator and special education team, or act based on her ethical convictions as a teacher professional and not fail the student. She takes precautions to protect herself, but ultimately makes a choice based on what she believes to be ethical:

I ended up sending an e-mail to the support special ed teacher because I just wanted to cover my butt…. Because I thought, I don’t want to sit down and fail this child and then later on get told, ‘Why did you fail him?’ Anyone could come and ask for your lesson plans and your grade book, ‘How did you come up with these marks?’ That sort of thing. And there is also the principle. I am not going to fail a kid if he does not deserve to be failed! So, nobody responded to my e-mail. The spec ed teacher just dropped by and came to see me in my classroom. This was weeks after I had sent the e-mail. And I thought, if no one is going to put their butt on the line, if no one is going to put it in writing, if no one is going to make a record that we were told to fail him, then I am not going to do it. I am just going to stick to what my professional judgment tells me to do.

Similarly, Samantha, in the face of a difficulty, grounds herself in her commitment to and care for her student, though her actions contradict the wishes of the student’s father and therefore could be seen to challenge the ethical standard of maintaining a trusting relationship with parents:

In terms of kids with special needs, I try to do what is best for them regardless. With a little girl who was developmental [delayed], we didn’t really care what the father said.
We just gave her what she needed in class even though we were not allowed to tell him. So that was the whole ethical issue. But I think teachers in general would try to do what is best for the child. So every time there is a decision, my first inclination is to do what is best for the child and then I would think about the complications or whether it applies to teaching standards.

Dilemmas with conflicting ethical principles were most stressful and difficult to cope with or resolve, as in the account described by Samantha. Samantha decides to act based on what she believes in the best interest of the student, knowing that she would have to withhold information and lie to the parent who requested that no accommodations or modifications be made for his daughter. She questions her choice, and even honors the father’s wishes for a short time due to the guilt she feels for being dishonest, but ultimately, she elects to serve the student’s needs and provide an individualized program because she believes it is necessary for her student’s academic and emotional well-being. Teachers, like Samantha, often felt torn between two or more alternatives, and when laws, policies, regulations, or their professional judgment were ineffective in helping them to make a choice, they turned to personal convictions and their upbringing.

Personal convictions differ for each individual because they are shaped by numerous factors such as experience, culture, religion, and familial values learned when young, to name a few. Participants claimed that they relied on their “personal sense of right and wrong,” their “conscience,” or their “gut” when resolving ethical tensions and when making decisions in their teaching practice. Anna observes the behaviors of other teachers and, if they are consistent with her own upbringing and her sense of right and wrong, she emulates the actions in her own practice:
Some of it is from my observations of other teachers, from how I was raised. Some of it is intuition. I know that I have responsibilities as a teacher for the child and I want to make sure that the students are happy and that they are learning and I make decisions based on that.

Like Anna, Samantha states that she “tr[ies] to do what [she] is comfortable with ethically” and she continues to explain what this means to her:

I think it just comes from your upbringing. What you think is right, and I feel like that ties into, where do your morals come from. What is good, what is bad, like how do you define those. I guess it’s different for so many people. I don’t know if people use, I know teaching has ethical standards of practice. I learned it in teachers college. I don’t think people really refer to that, I think people refer to their own sense of what is right and wrong. I’m sure everybody comes with their own biases and their own ideas as to what education should be. So depending on what you think education should be and what you think a child has a right to, I think that kind of guides people’s decisions. For me, it’s my own sense more so than, ‘Oh let me check what the rule is for the board.’ I think it’s just more natural, like when you make a decision it’s pretty quick. So it’s just, for me more so, what do I think education is supposed to be.

For John and Patricia, it is definitely a “gut feeling.” John notes, “If I don’t have an idea if it works or not, I just try it. And it’s trial and error. Some of it is from practice, and some of it is what I feel would be good, but in the end, it’s what I think is the right thing to do.” Patricia “go[es] over all the things listed in the IEPs and see[s] are they doing this, are they doing that, in a way that is also sort of in the back of [her] mind, but that’s not what’s necessarily guiding [her] decision,” ultimately she states, “Yeah it’s my gut!” Alternatively, Hillary relies on her
upbringing and strong family values. Her family has instilled in her a sense of ethical responsibility towards those under her care, especially those who are disadvantaged and who may lack the power or voice to advocate for themselves:

I think it’s my own upbringing, … the fact that I couldn’t live with myself if I didn’t do something, if I didn’t feel that I was at least trying. That’s my own guiding principles, my own values system I suppose…. I come from a background, my parents were hippies and they were always like, you speak up for whatever you believe in, otherwise no one is going to do it. So, I am known for being very outspoken…. And my mom was a social worker, so I always sort of valued a team approach to helping people. I want to reach out and I want to get the help from people so that I can help my students who need it.

Hillary’s sense of accountability and duty make her work as a teacher very difficult because she continuously feels ethically compromised in her responsibility to the students due to the realities of the educational system. On more than one occasion, during both individual interviews, she indicated that she was contemplating leaving the profession because she believed that, despite her best efforts, she was not meeting her professional obligations to her students with special needs.

Teachers reported using a combination of sources to guide their decision-making when coping with or resolving ethical dilemmas that arose in their work. However, for the most part, they relied on their own personal convictions and lessons learned during their upbringing. While teachers discussed the ways in which they handle ethical issues in their practice, of most concern, and those which elicited the greatest degree of anxiety and guilt, were the ethical tensions and conflicts that remain unresolved and those that they ignored or avoided.
Choosing not to act: Ignoring or avoiding ethical challenges

Despite the teachers’ conscientiousness and good intentions, the majority of the participants admitted that ethical problems, such as those described in the previous chapter, are left unresolved. They said that challenges were ignored or avoided due to one or more of the following reasons; they did not know what to do, they felt that the problem surpassed their position, they feared potential consequences from getting involved, or they felt that there was nothing they could do. These situations cause stress and anxiety as teachers are aware of their professional obligations, and they understand that the choices they make, or fail to make, impact the students and their learning. Nevertheless, they feel that their capacity to make ethical decisions is constrained, leading to what they perceive are poor and ineffective resolutions. The choice “not to act” or to “leave the issue alone” causes many to feel guilt and a sense of failure as teaching professionals. Samantha, flustered, explains how she handles problems in her teaching practice and reflects on the choices she makes. Constrained by large class sizes and what she sees as insufficient support, Samantha believes that in her position, she makes decisions that allow her to get through the day:

The way I resolve ethical dilemmas, like I said, deal with the urgent issue in the class and then other kids lose out, and I don’t know what to do about that. Sometimes I feel like there is nothing I can do and then sometimes I feel like that task is bigger than me. So, I come home and complain about it rather than do anything…. I recognize that it was a bad choice… But I have to make that choice, you know, I have twenty other kids. So I feel like I’m not making the choice I should for that particular student, but I did kind of feel like I have to make a certain choice.
Anna recounts an issue she described previously with a student who was becoming volatile during a basketball game in physical education class. Like Samantha, she “does what she has to do.” Anna provides reasons for avoiding the problem:

As bad as it is, I usually leave it [the dilemma] alone. I either don’t know how to resolve it or I am too scared to resolve it or do anything about it because I am new. Like the kid in the gym class that I told you about. I just ignored the dilemma. I knew there was a problem, but I didn’t deal with it because I didn’t know how. The kids were sort of okay with it, they were seeing that he was struggling and they saw that I did not know what to do. They were okay with just letting him stay on. But, I also knew that they were getting frustrated because it was a tournament. The kid would scream and then one of his classmates would pass him the ball and he would be okay for a while and they just kept playing the game like that. I didn’t know how to deal with it at all! No clue!

While Jessica is not a new teacher, she claims that conflicts that she faces are rarely resolved. She hesitates to confront problems, although they trouble her, because she fears the consequences of getting involved, “Every choice I have ever made has resulted in me getting slapped from one direction or another.” Given her experiences, she prefers to avoid issues that are ethically problematic for her:

A lot of them don’t get resolved. I just lived with them… In my head I am saying, ‘I will do what I’m told for my job.’ I wind up doing that a lot. I wind up really having to hold back what I really want to say or do. We talk about it with the EAs [Education Assistants] at the end of the day, and then we leave it. We walk away and come back the next day. And it’s really hard to let it be and not deal with it.
Patricia regrets some of the decisions she has made, as she feels that they may not have led to the outcomes she desired; however, upon reflecting on the situation, she indicates that she still would not know how better to resolve the issue:

I would like to treat each kid as I would treat my own sons. And I know that I can never do that. There are some days when I’m like, ‘What did I do today!’ [crying]. I made the wrong choice. But, I just don’t see how I could of done it differently. Sometimes I feel like I am stuck and I want what’s best for the child, but I don’t know how to give it or get it [crying].

Participants were overwhelmed by the problems they confronted and, like Patricia, they desperately wanted to make the best choice for the student; however, many felt limited in their means to act or make a choice, especially when resolving conflicts that involved colleagues.

Collegial relations were a significant source of ethical tension for participants. Teachers frequently described conflicts they endured as a result of colleagues who behaved inappropriately or those who delivered poor programs; nevertheless, most indicated that they did not and would not confront another teacher. Some discussed the adverse report, a regulation made under the Teaching Profession Act, which requires that teachers notify a colleague in writing if they make a complaint against them (Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario, 2011), while others simply feared being socially ostracized by others in the schools. Regardless of the reason, teachers expressed their apprehension in confronting colleagues. Joana explains, “I know teachers who are unethical. But, no, I would not confront them because that would be stirring the pot and it would probably cause a little bit of tension in my office. I don’t really want to be the person who does that.” Anna, a novice teacher, agrees. She recalls the counsel she received while in her teacher education program:
You have to be so careful about what you say about another teacher if you think they are doing something wrong. They are still your colleague. They are still a teacher. No one wants to approach them directly, but going behind their back is not right either. I guess there is no way of getting the problem out or to let on that there is a problem without actually affecting the teacher and their professionalism as well as yourself and your professionalism.

Anna takes the advice and decides to ignore a conflict she experienced with a colleague while working as a long-term occasional (LTO) teacher. As new teacher without a permanent position, Anna would rather keep her head down and not instigate trouble because she fears the possibility of jeopardizing her career, but she is distressed about her choice to “do nothing.”

With the teacher I did the LTO for, I could have easily told the VP [Vice Principal] on her, but I didn’t want to create problems for myself. I want a job at this school and I don’t want to make enemies or rock the boat and possibly hurt my chances. I would more often than not leave it alone. It’s just the whole notion that it is safer to leave it alone. With the position I am in right now with the teacher, I would never ever go and say anything about my LTO teacher to anyone. I have heard others say nasty things about her, but I never say anything. I know so many things, but I will never go and say that because I do not want to be the rat.

Anna is not alone in her resolution, as other teachers at the school have also avoided reporting their colleague, despite their awareness of her problematic behaviors:

All the teachers in the school knew. The teacher in the classroom next door told me that the classroom was always so crazy and so loud that she wasn’t able to teach…. I don’t think that anything has been done. I don’t think that any teacher has actually approached
her and told her what she was doing was wrong. They all know about it and they talk about it behind her back. But you know, with the whole reporting process, no one wants to put their neck out. I know she is not liked at the school. Everyone always gives a little look when she walks by or when she comes into the staffroom, but no one has actually complained to her or even to the VP about her.

Similarly, John, a veteran teacher, describes evading collegial issues that arise. He very strongly opposes the actions of some of his fellow teachers, yet, rather than confront them or the situation, he removes himself. Unlike Anna, he does not have to establish his career, but despite his stability, his leadership position as a department head, and his wealth of experience as a classroom teacher, he also chooses not to take action:

I find myself biting my tongue a lot. I know that this is a common occurrence…. It’s always a challenge…. with colleagues… there are days when I just want to close my door and ignore these people because they are just so rude in so many ways! ‘I can’t believe that this is what you are doing and this is how you are doing it,’ and I have to turn around and go to my room and close the door. I feel bad about that. I suppose that I sound arrogant, but I do feel bad that I am turning my back on them. I just can’t always handle it. I have to ground myself somehow so that I can deal with them on a personal level because we work in the same school, let alone on a professional level.

Although participants experienced stress as a result of collegial conflicts, they were more worried about reporting a co-worker due to the adverse report policy that by necessity would compromise their anonymity as the ones reporting complaints against other teachers. In most cases, they feared for their own careers and standings as professionals, uncertain if they would be supported, and therefore they remained silent. Emily, a teacher of many years, is very familiar
with the policies and processes associated with grievances:

I can’t complain about the teacher because it’s not something that is, I use the word indictable. In other words, you can’t take it to the bank, you can’t report it, you can’t take it to the union. A lot of these things are grey areas and they are not provable. If a teacher says mean things, if a teacher says rude things, I hate it! I absolutely hate it! I cringe. And how about calling out marks. Pointing out the people who have low marks. I hate that! I have seen that happen many times! I would say that this is the biggest ethical dilemma in teaching! It’s that when you see other teachers doing these kinds of awful things, theoretically, by the rule book, you cannot report things like that. Unless it was something like when you saw a teacher smack a kid. Like, if you saw a teacher smack a kid you could take that to the bank. But would you? Would you? Because it could involve your whole career! Your whole career could go down the drain, cause other teachers wouldn’t like you, they would be afraid to have you in their classroom. And you would have to do the paper work and you would have to have witnesses and would the children witness it? If you are the only one seeing it, what are you going to do? So, you leave it alone. You leave it alone…. The rules inhibit a teacher to talk about another teacher because there is paper work involved. Whistle blowers never win! And you should know that. It is a documented fact. They do not win and you have to be very careful when it comes to things like that… I am volunteering in a classroom now where the teacher is absolutely awful and he literally abuses the kids with special needs. They don’t do any learning and they are deathly afraid of him. And there is nothing that can be done about it. The students are suffering and all the staff at the school, including administration, know that this is happening and no one is doing anything about it because
no one is willing to put themselves out. You just don’t criticize another teacher. Those are the rules and teachers really follow those rules.

Based on their experiences, as explained by Emily, some felt that nothing could be done about colleagues who are unethical even if they report the problem, “Even if you tell the principal, which by the way I have done in the past, they have their hands tied too. Often times they already know this about the teacher and there is nothing they can do. Because… the teacher is not going to hit or yell at anyone while they are being reviewed.” The risks associated with reporting a colleague are too high and teachers are not willing to compromise their professional careers in an attempt to do the right thing. But, the decision to “do nothing” leaves many teachers conflicted between their obligations to the students and their loyalty to fellow teachers and the union. Samantha states, “You do feel torn sometimes between your roles, you are part of the teachers’ union and you have a role as an advocate for the kids.”

At times, participants described ethical tensions that were unresolved or poorly resolved, because they believed they were restricted from making a decision or taking action. In such situations, the teachers lacked the power or authority to have any influence over the decision, often being forced instead to accept a course of action that was established by others, even if they were uncomfortable with the outcome. Patricia recounts the lack of power she possessed in the decision made to fail a student without cause, in order to speed up his assessment for identification and placement:

It wasn’t just the principal. It was also the school career counselor and also the support staff. They were all at the meeting. And my teaching partner. It was a horrible meeting! Can I tell you, it was a horrible meeting because it was pretty much, ‘This is the plan and
you two have to get on board.’ And it was all just pushed down and like, ‘Listen to what we are saying!’

Even Donna who has worked as a special educator for 16 years believes she has minimal control over decisions made. She describes a situation where she attempted to advocate for a student whom she feels was placed inappropriately, but her concerns were not considered a priority:

She [the principal] said she understands and she kind of does a, ‘Well, we'll play it by ear’ sort of thing, which doesn’t completely make me feel at ease, but she’s admin, there’s only so much I can do. I do feel good that I have many years of experience in special ed so I can tell professionally that my ideas and suggestions are taken seriously and that I know the program… but it doesn’t always put me in the place where I can say, ‘This is what we need to do,’ because I’m not admin. Yeah, so that can be tough sometimes.

Similarly, specialists and administrators override Jessica’s concerns and warnings. She describes a non-compliant student for whom the behavior team established a “token economy” program, a system based on rewards for compliance. Although Jessica suggested that this initiative would not work with this particular student, her suggestions were ignored and she was forced to implement a program with which she does not agree:

Okay yeah, I’ll say, ‘Okay I’ll do it. I’m against it but I will do it.’ But then don’t yell at me when it falls apart when I told you it wasn’t going to work in the first place. Because the kid doesn’t care. Token economies work for kids who care about material things. And the whole premise behind a token economy is problematic in itself.

Ethical dilemmas beyond of the scope of the classroom teacher’s influence were no less stressful for participants. In fact, participants suggested that these situations were more frustrating because
they had no influence over the decision made. The teachers continued to feel responsible for the well-being of the student, but they believed that their best interests were not served by the decision made. They felt forced to undertake actions that contradicted their personal or professional ethics, and as such, they were angered and disappointed with themselves and those involved.

Teachers, despite their years of experience and position in the school, frequently made choices they believed were unconstructive or inappropriate, or they avoided resolving ethical dilemmas that arose in their work with students who have special needs. Often, these were not lapses in judgment; rather, teachers consciously made a decision either to evade the dilemma or to take an action, which they later saw as damaging. Samantha considers the ways in which she resolves ethical challenges in her teaching practice, “So most of my dilemmas, I don’t feel good about them and the way they were resolved or not resolved.” Similarly, Emily believes that she “did the best she could,” but doubts that it was enough, “Well, maybe I should have done more.” Although they struggled internally as a result of their choices, participants suggested that they were stuck in making the decision, they would make the same decision again even though they believe it was not right, or they did not know how better to handle the situation. In conflicts with colleagues, there is no doubt that teachers would not report a co-worker, even if they had evidence that the well-being of the students was compromised. One could argue that the reality of the adverse report requirement creates a system which protects teachers regardless of the consequences because it pressures teachers to remain loyal to their colleagues, establishing the fear and silencing experienced by participants.
Supporting Teachers in the Face of an Ethical Challenge

Teachers discussed supports that were available to assist them in resolving dilemmas that arose in their work with students who have special needs including, family and friends, colleagues, and professional development. While participants spoke about supports they turn to, many were concerned about the scarcity of supports, with some suggesting that there were no supports available to help guide them through ethical challenges. As in the previous discussion of the various sources used to make decisions and manage ethical issues, teachers suggested that they often depend on more than one type of support in working through a problem. Moreover, participants stated that they may turn to different supports depending on the situation and the type of assistance they believe is required.

Of those who identified supports that they sought out when confronted with ethical issues in their teaching, many indicated that both the individuals and programs available were not effective in assisting them to resolve challenges. As Hillary explains, “I mean, there are supports, but it’s sort of haphazard… it’s a support to me in that they will listen, but, insofar as something tangible, something that could really help me, it feels like that is never there when you need it.” The people who offered support were seen more as of a means of stress-release rather than a source for assisting teachers in dealing with ethical difficulties. Nevertheless, teachers reported that they regularly discuss their school based ethical problems with colleagues and family and friends.

Relying on others for support

Ethical tensions can be stressful and frustrating, leading teachers to feel helpless and overwhelmed. Participants indicated that they rely on their family and friends as well as
colleagues to “vent” or “channel the stress” that accumulates after a difficult experience. Many, like John, speak to their spouse, “I am glad that I can come home and talk to my wife and vent a little. It’s not good to carry the weight of the world on your shoulders.” Similarly Hillary discusses her concerns with her husband; however, this at times creates more anxiety for her, as he would sometimes become exasperated himself:

My husband would listen to me more than my principal would. And he’s not a teacher. He’s an artist for goodness sake. He just wants me to go to work happy. He used to be worried for my safety. He would be furious! He would be like, ‘How come that is acceptable? How come people don’t know that this is happening?’ I’m thinking, if they knew that it was really happening people would want change. It would be better for everybody.

Others speak with their friends. Jessica states, “I mean there are times that I will phone a friend and we will go for dinner and we will sit for three hours trying to problem solve one issue.”

Although family and friends offered advice, they were disconnected from the realities of teachers and their professional practices, thus, most often, participants claimed that their families and friends did not offer tangible or probable solutions to the problem. Instead, participants depended on them for moral support.

Teachers relied heavily on the support of colleagues, including other teachers, special education teachers, specialists, and administrators, when challenged by ethical issues. Despite reports from participants, which identify collegial relations as a significant source of the ethical challenges and dilemmas they experience, most said that they turn to colleagues for advice or for an empathetic listener. The majority of teachers, like Joana, stated that they confide in other teachers:
Usually I talk to my colleagues and soundboard off of them to see what they think of the situation and what they would do to resolve it. It allows you to vent. But, if you choose the right person to go to, you can actually get some pretty sound advice. I have some pretty good colleagues luckily in my department, a couple of people that I can trust to go to for information. But, not everyone is like that. Before I had a really good department head and she was amazing to go to get advice from and to help you resolve ethical issues. But, the department head I have now, I would be much less likely to go to for advice because I just do not trust her as much as I did my previous department head…. There are definitely people who you don’t want to go to for advice.

Similarly, John describes a recent conversation he had with a colleague about engaging students with special needs. He discussed his troubles with the English teacher, and she offered possibilities for resolutions:

If I have problems, I open up about them to colleagues who are like-minded and with whom I can have a professional conversation…. This is awesome. I am really hoping that our system is progressing towards this. That we can be very professionally conversational and problem solving... It’s almost like brainstorming, but with productivity in the end.

Although teachers turned to their colleagues, many did not actually believe that they could help. Patricia said of her grade partner, “I would confide in her about it and people in the same position. And they would sympathize and offer advice. But, for the more serious stuff, I wouldn’t really hear anything more than, ‘I know. We can only try our best and that’s all we can do.’”

Hillary depends on the special education teacher at her school for support, but, like Patricia, she does not believe that her colleague will be able to resolve her dilemma. She feels that it is important for teachers to discuss ethical conflicts but she would prefer more guidance:
I will often go and vent with the special ed teacher, who listens and offers what advice she can, but I mean, she really can’t do much about it. And I think that most often, it comes out as pretty frustrated shoptalk in the staff room when you are just like, ‘Oh my God!’ In as far as identifying it as ethical dilemmas, I think it would be healthy if we did. I think it would be better if we worded it that way and really called it what it is and even better if someone could guide us.

Unlike the other participants, Daniella believes that the special education teachers at her school offer great support:

At my school I’ve had my special education teachers come in and teach classes with me. Come in and support me to look at how students learn with me, give me ideas, give me actual tools, if I needed flashcards, if I needed a certain thing done. So, those were really helpful. If we had more teachers like that it would be great, because I find them way more helpful than the workshops because those aren’t about your students. The workshops, it’s just general information that I’ve gotten before, that I could get on my own.

Daniella is fortunate, as most teachers suggested that they did not experience professional benefits, which contributed to the improvement of their teaching practice, from their colleagues. Nevertheless, there must be some value in discussing problems with other teachers as most engaged in such interactions. While colleagues served as a “soundboard” or “listening ear,” participants did not simply turn to anyone for support, rather, they relied on those who they believed they could “trust,” those who were “like-minded,” and those who were “in the same position” as themselves. Anna, who works as a substitute and long-term occasional teacher,
claims that she does not rely on colleagues as she has yet to encounter a teacher who she feels is knowledgeable and experienced in dealing with students who have special needs:

I guess there are other teachers. I am assuming that those are teachers who have been trained and you can rely on them for help. But, I don’t know because I have been in classrooms where I have seen teachers doing the wrong thing and they seem to not know what they are doing like me. I would like to think that there are teachers that have been trained and that can help me, but I have not had this experience to date.

As the only participant who did not turn to colleagues for support and assistance, it may be that Anna has yet to develop trusting relationships with colleagues due to the instability of her teaching placement.

Some teacher participants, most specifically those working in special education positions, turned to specialists such as child and youth workers, speech pathologists, behavior specialists, and special education consultants, to name a few, when encountering challenges with students who have special needs. While specialists were considered to be a valuable resource, participants reported that they were not readily available and they were limited in the time they could devote to assisting individual teachers. As such, they were rarely relied on. Jessica explains:

I have access to a regional behavior team, I have access to a special ed consultant… How available they are, that’s another question! To get the behavior team in, if I send an e-mail, because forget getting them on the phone, that’s never going to happen! They move from school to school. If I send an e-mail I can get a response anywhere from 1 to 5 business days for a meeting anywhere from one to three weeks from that day. If I am flabbergasted and beg, ‘Oh my God! SOS! Mayday!’ I may get something within 24 hours. But if you get a phone call from them in the middle of a class, you can’t really
talk to them because you are discussing a confidential issue over the phone in a class full of students. Stepping out of the hall doesn’t really work because everyone in the school can hear you.

Donna has had a similar experience when seeking assistance from specialists. Her inability to access their support often leaves her to deal with issues on her own, “We have our spec ed consultant, but he is so pulled between so many schools…. So really, I, just a lot of it I am on my own.” Samantha agrees; she feels that the speech language pathologist and other specialists who work at her school are “really nice and actually offer to come into the classroom and teach lessons,” but she admits that “they don’t come to the school all the time, sometimes you don’t see them as much.” Daniel, frustrated, questions the role of specialists, “I don’t know what they do, but they are way too busy. I never see them around, and like no principal has ever said, ‘You know I’ll call the school social worker set up a meeting with them.’” Teachers, like Daniel, would like to see more specialists as he believes that they have the knowledge and training to help students in ways that classroom teachers cannot, however, he does not regard them as a support due to their continuous absence.

Few discussed the role of administrators in supporting teachers when conflicts arose in their work with students who have special needs. There were disagreements between participants in the perceived level of assistance provided by administrators. Some, like Daniella, felt that her administrators were very helpful:

I have been very lucky with the administration that I have had. They have been very supportive. You could go to them and they would help you out any way that you would want. My VP this year, she was a special ed facilitator and so she had more ideas, more things to discuss with teachers and parents.
While others did not believe that they were very supportive. Jessica describes the drastic shift in the level of support she experienced when there was a change of the administration at her school. Her previous, “… principal was super super super supportive to special ed…. Every time we had a melt down, she would stop whatever she was doing and she would come up and hang out in my classroom to give us support.” When general educators were hesitant to include students with special needs in their classrooms, “… she would go down and speak to the teacher. She would say, ‘This is what’s happening. This is what I would like from you. This is what I am willing to provide you.’ So, teachers were more receptive.” However, Jessica’s new principal is unlike her former administrator:

We went from a principal who was uber supportive… to an administrator who, during special education parent conferences and meetings plays on his Blackberry…. He did not have the persona of, ‘I’m approachable. You can talk to me.’ … he was very hands off. I was just sitting there going, ‘Are you kidding me?! I need help!’ I didn’t feel that I was being supported.

Of those who discussed the role of administrators in supporting teachers when ethical issues arose, most, like Jessica, stated that level of support was minimal. Consistent with the teachers’ experience with colleagues, administrators were often described as a source of ethical difficulties, or as contributing to the problem, which made coping with or resolving the tension even more difficult.

Overall, teachers did not believe that they could rely on others to assist them in dealing with ethical challenges. Some turned to family and friends; however, they merely served as a “listening ear” and did not provide tangible advice that could potentially be applied in their teaching practice. Inconsistencies exist in the experiences of teacher participants regarding the
level of support they are offered by colleagues. Some thought that colleagues were a reliable support, while others did not. Teachers would seek assistance from colleagues they could trust and those whose teaching philosophy was similar to their own. In spite of that, most participants did not believe that their colleagues could resolve their ethical dilemmas, but they valued them as an outlet for sharing, stress release, and a sense of collegiality, as Samantha notes:

I know that teachers often feel that they get support from their fellow teachers, for sure. I know at my school, that’s why the teachers stay there for so long despite the challenges. It’s because those teachers mesh well together. So, I know they feel supported amongst each other, but they still feel like it’s a dead end, collectively, they feel like it’s a dead end.

Although support from specialists and administrators was seldom described by participants, reports of the level of support provided by both varied. Teachers agreed that specialists were knowledgeable and potentially helpful, however, the scarcity of their presence in the school and their lack of availability made them inaccessible to teachers. Administrators, on the other hand, were present but not deemed as overly supportive. Participants felt that most administrators were not well informed about special education policies and practices, and some, as perceived by participants, did not seem to care genuinely about the challenges experienced by teachers.

**Looking to professional development**

Several participants claimed that they seek out professional development and additional qualifications to advance their expertise in the area of special education, in the hope that the information acquired will assist them in working through some of the issues they face. Unfortunately, although most of the teachers interviewed perceived professional development as
a support, many felt that the proficiency and skills gained were not useful in their practice. Teachers raised concerns about the lack of knowledge and formal training they possess in inclusive education and the implementation of accommodations and modifications. Moreover, some of the novice teachers discussed the difficulties of accessing professional development which they hoped would prepare them for the challenges of working with students who have special needs.

Participants are troubled by the limited knowledge and lack of preparation they had in special education. Most feel insecure about their abilities to implement appropriate teaching strategies and assessments for students who have special needs in their classrooms. Hillary wants to support her students, but she feels that she herself is not supported. She has taken her special education additional qualifications and she has attended workshops, but she does not believe that these adequately prepared her for the challenges and complexities that arise:

I have no idea how to help them…. Yeah they’ll give me a book. Here is a book on it. It’s like, I’m pretty sure they don’t give a doctor a book on how to do heart surgery. Yet, you are expecting this legal document to be implemented and not providing me with any skills. And you would be surprised how many people are like, ‘Oh my God, you are so right, they are expecting us to do stuff we don’t even know…’ To me that’s one of the huge ethical dilemmas is, how do I get someone to care about the teachers’ abilities to address those students? Because I care about those students and I try everything that I can and I spend a lot of time with them, but I feel that I am spending a lot of time that is not well spent because I just don’t have the strategies, I don’t have the resources. ‘Use a computer program,’ well, I have 14 kids that are supposed to have computer access and I have 3 computers…. And I think that a lot of teachers are afraid; they don’t want to admit
that, although they are feeling it everyday. But I feel that there is no solution and no one cares that we are saying it. But imagine if doctors came out and said, ‘I’m asked to do this surgery and never have done it before.’ Would the public accept that? No, the public wouldn’t accept that at all. So, why is it ok for kids?

Similarly, Samantha has completed additional qualifications and attended numerous workshops in special education, but despite this form of support, she feels underprepared:

Often it [what was required] would exceed a number of things. It could exceed my knowledge of the students with special needs, their backgrounds, their history, their diagnosis, so it exceeds my knowledge of those things. It exceeds my capabilities… you know this child has an issue, you know they need something, and you couldn’t all year figure out what that was. And then you feel like you failed the child….I have attended workshops but I didn’t find them as helpful only because there’s so much information and you’re not given anything practical to actually take with you into the classroom. It usually takes so much more of your own time and effort anyway to set it up. Or, the workshops are so big that I’ve heard it all before, like I already know this stuff. But you know, come do it in my class and see if it’s so easy. I know the teachers in the staff room always complain about that.

Patricia observes her colleagues’ disengagement during professional development workshops and attributes their lack of focus to the lack of applicability of the material presented to classroom practices:

I guess teachers, when we go to these workshops or we have someone come it, I think that’s why a lot of teachers who are really seasoned will just tune out, because I think after so much listening to this, teachers feel like they are being sold on something and it’s
just a bunch of bologna. And they just tune out and then they become completely disengaged and it’s terrible. When I go to some of these workshops and see some of these teachers, and you can see from the glazed look in their eyes, they are completely, they have tuned out, they are not interested. They are waiting for it to finish so then they can go on with their lives and all the potential learning gets lost, and it’s sad, because these are people who are in our classrooms teaching our children, and they are completely disengaged. They have been become completely apathetic to these sessions because they don’t see them as valuable.

As Patricia explained, teachers perceived a gap between the materials presented in professional development and the realities of the classroom. This causes many to feel underprepared and uninformed despite their participation in the sessions. Participants agree that professional development needs to be “hands-on”, applicable to professional practice, and spread over several sessions so that the learning can be implemented and then reflected upon in follow-up sessions.

Experience does not seem to be a factor in the teachers’ abilities to utilize professional development as a support, as many veteran teachers who have completed additional qualifications in special education, as well as post-graduate degrees, indicated struggling with how to meet the needs of their students. Amy looks back on her experiences as a novice teacher and she recalls the challenges she faced and the limited knowledge that she had in the area of special education. As a more experienced teacher, she admits that she still experiences difficulties, which she does not always know how to handle:

I had classes where there were autistic kids and classes where this girl was deaf, or almost totally deaf. And it blows my mind that as a second year teacher, you’re standing in front of the classroom and they tell you, ‘Well this child is autistic and this child can’t
hear through her right ear, and this one has a learning disability’ how are we really supposed to deal with it? You get through it, but then you think, it could have gone terribly wrong. And even in my practice today, a lot of issues there, because a lot of teachers, including myself, we don’t feel trained to deal with students like that. We don’t know what is the appropriate way of dealing with kids. We all try to do the best we can, but sometimes we might be doing more harm than good and we don’t even know.

Donna is very familiar with the frustrations described by the general education participants. She observes the teachers she works with at her school encountering similar gaps in knowledge, regardless of the additional education they have sought out:

I think with a lot of these teachers, it’s not that they do not want to do it; they don’t know how to do it. They haven’t taken special ed or went to workshops on differentiation, or anything like that. And even if they have, they just don’t have that knowledge. And nobody has said to them, ‘You know this would really help’ or ‘let’s do this together.’ So that is one way that I would like to approach it, is to work with these teachers so that all of these students can be successful.

Donna confirms that teachers need to be supported in the issues they encounter, and the professional development they receive should directly connect to their classroom experiences as support for teachers directly influences the learning of students.

Access to professional development opportunities was a concern for a few of the beginning teachers. Those reflecting on their teacher education experiences claimed that they had minimal, if any, exposure to special education theory or practice. Anna states:

In teachers’ college, I have only seen an IEP in the last two days of teachers college. I didn’t know what this was, what it looked like or anything. It wasn’t like we even had a
formal lesson on the IEP and how you are supposed to read it, someone asked the prof and he just happened to bring it in and he just went over it with us. It was in our English class. It wasn’t like curriculum studies or special ed, or foundations of child studies. They did this in the English class because someone said, ‘I have this kid with an IEP and I don’t even know what an IEP is.’ I was looking at the IEP like, how do I even read this? I don’t even know what this means? I know that it depends on which school you go to for the format, but I think that this is definitely an issue. I haven’t seen this at all!

Teachers also struggled with being granted permissions or release time to attend training sessions. Daniella, in her third year of teaching, attempts to access professional development workshops in the hope that they will aid her in working with students who have special needs, but she is not permitted to attend because she is not a first year teacher:

I signed up for a new teacher special education workshop and because I technically wasn’t considered a new teacher, I was told I couldn’t go. Well, how am I supposed to get all these strategies and learn if you are not going to let me go? Who cares that I have only been teaching for 3 years now, I am not considered a new teacher. I am going because I want ideas, I want resources, I want to make sure that I am current. Yes, you can have a workshop to focus on new teachers, but why can’t you also have a workshop to focus on those teachers who just want ideas?

Despite the limited training provided to beginning teachers, those newest to the profession were often given the most challenging teaching assignments and they had the least stability in their position, according to some of the veteran participants. This coincides with the perceptions of novice teachers who feel underprepared and insecure with their teaching practices.
Professional development was seen to be inadequate as a support for teachers in resolving dilemmas that arise in their work with students who have special needs. A number of participants expressed the shortcomings of such supports in preparing them for the realities of the classroom. Some, specifically those new to the teaching profession, suggested that they struggled to gain access to professional development opportunities. Despite some of the supports described by participants, most felt that assistance for managing or resolving ethical problems was not available.

**Alone with nowhere to turn for assistance**

While some suggested that they rely on others and engage in professional development, most reported that there were no supports available to them because the present supports were not effective or valuable in helping them to work through the challenges they encounter. As Hillary stated, “I could confide in my colleagues, but in terms of any real supports, yeah, it’s tough. It’s really tough. Yeah, not a lot there.” Participants who accessed the supports believed that ultimately they had to depend on themselves to resolve the tensions. Jessica states, “The support I have is me, myself, and I. Ultimately it comes down to how resourceful I can be… So it’s hard,” and John agrees, “I have myself. I use a lot of what I have learned on my own through my experiences and my formal education to support my own needs.” Amy engages in self-reflection and problem solving, “The supports I have don’t really help me. At the end I try to break down the issue. I try to think, how would I treat other kids? I kind of break it down to different scenarios, if I did this, what does that mean? If I did this, what does that mean? If I do that, what would that mean?” Patricia thinks about what she would want for her own children, “I try to talk to other teachers and I try to look things up, but at the end of the day, I have nothing to
rely on. I have to make the decision on my own. So, as a parent, you have a sense of, ‘What would I want if this was my child?’ I think about what I would want to happen?” Relying on oneself was, like relying on others, not overly effective as many participants regretted their decisions, they felt alone, and some experienced so much guilt and anxiety that they considered alternative career options.

Some teachers were afraid to seek out supports and were therefore unaided in coping with or resolving ethical issues. Samantha is reluctant to seek supports because, as a new teacher, she believes that others will perceive her to be incompetent as a professional:

I tried sometimes talking to the principal. For example, with that little girl, I tried to look at all the options. So, legally what are our options if we feel that he [the father] is not giving consent but this is what’s best for the student? What can we do?... But, as a classroom teacher, sometimes I felt like I would be looked at as incapable, maybe because I am the new teacher, if I went to administration and said, ‘Oh my gosh! I feel so overwhelmed! I don’t know what to do about this student, or this student.’ So sometimes,… I would choose not to look for support because I would feel like, are they going to think that I do not know what I am doing?

Samantha was not the only teacher with this mind-set. Jessica, a teacher with 12 years experience, discussed her concerns about seeking supports, although her reasoning differed from Samantha’s. Based on her experiences, Jessica felt that seeking support and making inquiries only escalated the problem or created new challenges: “Sometimes I actually created more problems by asking questions. So, I did things on my own and I did what I was told.”

Participants who feared the consequences of seeking supports refrained from soliciting assistance
from colleagues, administrators, or specialists. They were, however, not hesitant to turn to family and friends or to engage in professional development.

For teachers working in special education roles, supports are even scarcer. General educators rely on special educators when tensions arise in their practice. Many of the teachers who hold special education positions maintain a degree of trust and are seen as experts by their colleagues. As such, the supports that special educators require, as identified by Donna, are at a level beyond what can be provided by many of the teachers at their school:

Supports…not a lot to be honest…. There is not really anybody dealing with those issues at that level of special education leadership. We have a special education head teacher, but I don’t really go to her to say, ‘What should I do in this situation?’ because I actually have more experience than she does. So, it’s difficult to go to someone who’s only been in special education for a couple of years.

Similarly, Daniel believes that supports for special educators do not exist. He responds cynically when asked about supports that were available to assist him with ethical challenges, “Oh, there are supports?” he states. Like the other participants who are special educators, Jessica struggles with the dilemmas that she faces as she teaches her students and assists general educators. With a scarcity of supports available to her, she often feels apprehensive about her position, anxious, and burnt out:

We are the ones dealing with the pooh, the pee, the swearing, the everything. It gets very tiring and very taxing, and the more things we get thrown at us the harder it gets to move through them, so… I don’t want to be at work, because I don’t know how many times admin is going to phone me, e-mail me, or my department head is going to come in to
say, ‘Have you dealt with all these issues?’ Meanwhile I am trying to teach. And really, there is no one for me to rely on for some help.

Teachers working in special education positions expressed concerns about the shortage of supports available to them. They discussed potential aids that were “theoretically in place” such as specialists, administrators, or professional development, however, their inaccessibility or the teachers’ lack of time made these almost impossible to utilize, leaving them feeling as though supports did not exist.

Aware of the scarcity and limitations of supports as well as the challenges that classroom teachers experience, special educators made an effort to assist general educators in their work with students who have special needs. Emily saw her role as a facilitator of information, “I think that sharing information is the biggest thing for a resource teacher. And making sure that it was shared. I thought that was my job.” Similarly, both Daniel and Jessica make an effort to assist teachers in the classroom by giving them ideas and strategies. Daniel states, “I provide the example… I have to talk to them in a really excited way, ‘See this literacy program! Look at that! The kids really improve!’ And that has had some benefits. My colleagues are like, ‘Yeah! Great, they have some programming going on now!’ They are encouraging their kids to do this after I talk to them about it.” But, supporting classroom teachers is not a simple task. Aside from special educators “not having the answers” at times, participants indicated that they had to be cautious about the ways in which they provide help and interact with teachers to ensure that they are not intrusive or authoritarian. It has to be a team-based relationship, as noted by Emily:

Sometimes I would go into other teachers’ classrooms and I would be horrified! They were giving the students [with special needs] totally different work or making them sit there and do paperwork. They were having an EA take the kids into a corner and work
alone with them. It was just awful. Or giving them work that was way too hard for them, giving them tests that were impossible for them to be doing. And the teachers knew that it was too hard because it wasn’t on their IEP. And then how would I tell the teachers that they were not doing it right. And also, when do you go to the principal and tell him or her what is going on? That is the hardest thing. It is very nerve wrecking. And can you? And if you do and they can’t really do anything about it, they think that you are a crybaby. That’s really tough…. These are the ethical dilemmas in teaching. Especially when you are in special ed and you are working with other teachers in their classrooms. When you are co-teaching and team teaching.

Similarly, Donna is conscious of her role as a support teacher when she enters an inclusive classroom. She recounts her interactions with a general education teacher at her school, “I try to work with the teacher and I try to make her feel comfortable so she doesn’t think that I’m in there to judge her or tell her what to do.” The struggles of special educators in gaining assistance differed somewhat from their general education colleagues, although all participants discussed accessing similar supports. Based on the perceptions of the participants, it would seem that special educators have additional pressures with fewer supports available in comparison to their general education counterparts.

Overall, supports available to assist teachers in resolving ethical issues that arise in their work with students who have special needs are limited. Even fewer supports are accessible to special educators as they are relied upon to provide assistance in the school. Participants reported that they seek help from family and friends, colleagues, and professional development. Nevertheless, most suggested that these available supports were not effective in helping them to work through or cope with special education related challenges.
Working Together to Resolve Ethical Issues: Recommendations for Supports

Participants made recommendations for supports; however, the supports addressed relate to teaching practices in special education, as opposed to those which can assist teachers in coping with or resolving ethical tensions or dilemmas. Recommendations include: increasing the availability of more applicable professional development, developing professional learning communities, and working with mentor teachers. A number of participants stated that in order for any support to be beneficial, administrators would need to be “on board” and receptive. Samantha describes, based on her experiences at different schools, what she perceives to be essential for any form of assistance, “It makes a huge difference that you know they [administrators] are supporting your decisions and that they are an advocate for you. So, for example, when you need extra support they will advocate to get you some…. I know that… there is only so much they can do, but just that they actually do what they can to help teachers….” Furthermore, Donna suggests that at least one administrator should be knowledgeable in special education: “you have to have someone who is strong in spec. ed…. not someone who is sort of getting it and learning as they go because then the teachers suffer and the students suffer.” Similarly, Daniel feels that administrators have to place more priority on special education and set a standard, which deems students with special needs as valuable and equally deserving contributors to the school population. All in all, participants believed that administrators and school boards must promote any supports that are implemented in order for them to be effective in helping classroom teachers resolve ethical challenges.
Improving professional development as a support

Participants identified professional development as a support that was currently available but not effective in helping them work through the problems they encounter in their work. Nonetheless, all of them recommended it as a support. Participants believed that professional development could be a very effective and valuable resource, if implemented and conveyed appropriately. As such, many of the participants who proposed professional development did so along with suggestions and guidelines for its execution. The teachers indicated that professional development should be practical and “hands-on,” providing ideas that can be utilized in the classroom. As Joana stated, “PD [professional development] that gives you a wide variety of instructional strategies to use in the classroom, that would be good…. a variety of instructional strategies that you can use with special ed students.” Jessica agrees; she describes professional development that is ineffective and contrasts it with what she believes would be beneficial for teachers:

We get PD on some of this stuff, it’s not effective. It’s a whole bunch of theory and pieces of paper. So, if we had effective PD that actually involved us, had us actually doing stuff and it was relevant it would be far more effective. So yes, I would love to have PD where someone sits down and says, ‘Okay when you are talking to parents here are some things to follow, here are some examples of log sheets, here are instructional strategies.’ Stuff like that would be very helpful. I have to know what isn’t working and what would work.

A number of teachers suggested that professional development should be relevant to what is going on in the school, grade, and classroom as opposed to the “generic workshops” that teachers described attending. Some of the participants favored a workshop style where teachers could
share practical ideas, as well as challenges and concerns; Daniella suggests:

Workshops would be great, focusing more on special education, not necessarily on how to create an IEP, you can only go to that workshop so many times. More so, a networking type of PD where you can go and share your ideas, your stories, your concerns and bring those things out for discussion. I find that those types of PD don’t really exist, at least not in our board… I am going [to workshops] because I want ideas, I want resources, I want to make sure that I am current. I also want advice.

Moreover, Amy claims that teachers should have more professional development opportunities in professional ethics:

Even eight years into the career, constantly there are new issues, new moral dilemmas that you struggle with. And I don’t even know, I can’t even think back to my first year of teaching, how you dealt with that. Or maybe you just don’t deal with it as a new teacher, you kind of just set it aside because you are too busy. There needs to be a course that looks at all of these issues because we deal with people everyday. That means there are a lot of ethical dilemmas…. And I think there needs to be a course, where students or new teachers are looking at case studies. I think it’s so important.

Participants believed that relevant and appropriate professional development in special education and professional ethics would be of value to teachers as they cope with and resolve the numerous difficulties that they experience.

Another factor in effective professional development, as reported by participants is, that the course or workshop should take place as a series, over a prolonged period of time. Emily states, “I think that PD would be helpful, but not a daily workshop where you are bombarded with ideas. It should be long term courses.” But, this requires a significant dedication of time,
which, as argued by Daniel, should be provided during the school day:

PD time is very precious… you have to hire a supply teacher…. It couldn’t be one of these, yeah we are given a half an hour to do this and then it is sort of not done or done in a very superficial way. It would need some teeth to make sure that it happened. Cause often, we are given time, and it’s hijacked by an admin who likes to talk too much, or it’s hijacked by some paperwork that needs to be the eventual outcome.

Daniel also believes that professional development should be mandatory for teachers, “It needs to be an expectation; it needs to be a clearly established expectation for teachers, that’s just part of professional practice.” However, not all participants agree with Daniel. Although all of the participants strongly believe that classroom teachers should engage in professional development to improve their professional practice with students who have special needs, none, with the exception of Daniel, indicated that it should be required.

Some of the teachers recommended that professional development in special education and ethics should begin in the pre-service program and continue in-service. Anna, a teacher new to the profession, recalls her teacher education program and wishes that she had learned more about special education:

I think you should be learning more about special ed in teachers college. Even just learning to read the IEP and how to help students with different needs. That information is even important for the practicum. I think there should be something like the religion AQ, having a spec ed AQ that everyone has to take. Teachers go into the classes and they have no idea what to do. Most teachers are so scared to be in the resource room. They don’t want to help with the resources room. And when they have a student with a special
need in their class and they don’t know what to do, they just send them to the resource room. But, they should be able to work with them because they are their teacher.

Anna believes that if she were provided with more information during her teacher education program, she would have been better prepared to deal with some of the ethical tensions she describes during the interview.

Professional development was seen as a potential resource and support by teachers. Participants made recommendations for how this support should be conveyed and its duration. Moreover, teachers believed that for professional development to be effective, it would have to be promoted by the administrators and the school board. One form of professional development proposed by a few of the participants was the professional learning community where learning occurs in collaboration with colleagues.

Engaging and collaborating with colleagues: Professional learning communities

Professional learning communities engage school staff in a team-based learning activity. The intention of the learning community is to focus the learning on a topic or issue of mutual interest or concern, share and discuss various strategies or ideas used by colleagues in the learning community, try out what one has learned, and finally, regroup to discuss the experience, as well as challenges and successes (Hord, 1997). Two of the participants, John and Hillary, described their experiences with professional learning communities and the benefits they gained from the support. John continuously interacts with colleagues, as his school supports professional learning communities:

In the school that I am at, they have been running and using professional learning communities for about seven years. Not all of the little groups are subject specific. So,
there could be interdisciplinary groups as well. And they don’t just talk about the weather and they don’t just talk about how do we make this exam; it is really cool integrated, in-depth discussions, with information back and forth about everything that concerns or interests the teachers. From assessment, to instruction, to classroom management, or maybe what is important currently or in that semester. They [the topics] could go on for five sessions, we meet every two weeks, or just for one session and we do something different the next time. And just recently, myself and two other groups got together and for four sessions we tackled differentiated instruction and learning strategies. We talked about them, they were presented, we incorporated IEP statements, interventions, and strategies. Everyone had to go away and for two weeks try one of them. When we came back as a group we shared it and then we took the next step, went out, tried it, and then came back. It was phenomenal. I think this is the key to making collaboration work! I know that there is Japanese lesson study. That is an awesome strategy, however it is a little too subject focused and I want something bigger. Something that incorporates different disciplines because we all have perspectives and they all influence how we look at students and how we teach students. So, I would like to talk with the art teacher, and I want to talk with the English teacher, and I want to talk with the history teacher at the same time, because good pedagogy is good pedagogy, irrespective of the subject area. I have been able to sit in on my English colleague’s class a couple of times, even if it is just for 15 minutes, and every time I have learned something really cool. I would not have necessarily learned it if I only went to a math classroom…. We have time set aside every second Wednesday at lunch. So, we have an extended lunch period. It’s like an assembly day, but the assembly time is put towards lunch. All the kids get an extra long
lunch and we get a chance to meet together for our PLC [professional learning community]. We eat together in our group. They [teachers] don’t want to give it up at all, no matter how productive it is. And for me, I look at some of the PLC groups and I think, ‘You could be a bit more productive.’ But, nobody wants to give it up because it gives them so many positives. From time with colleagues, to opportunities to discuss challenges and problems, to learning new and cool strategies for the classroom.

Similarly, Hillary described her experience with a Japanese lesson study, a professional development opportunity similar to that of professional learning communities, in the area of math, which she had an opportunity to engage in for one full school year. Based on her involvement in the study, Hillary gained a wealth of knowledge in math curriculum and pedagogy. She felt that this was the most effective form of professional learning that she has been involved in since the beginning of her teaching career. As part of the lesson study, Hillary met with fellow math educators from other schools in the board once per month. During this time, the teachers exchanged ideas and concerns, then went back to implement their learning in the classroom. They reflected on the experience and then met with the study group the following month to discuss their progress. This cycle continued all year as the group tackled various topics in the teaching and learning of math. Hillary stated that she would be very keen on participating in a similar project focused on special education. She strongly believes that the Japanese lesson study model would be helpful for her to gain knowledge in special education and could potentially help her to overcome or better cope with some of the challenges and ethical dilemmas that she was experiencing in her work with students who have special needs as she would have the chance to meet and discuss with colleagues authentic ethical issues that arise and the ways in which these problems could be resolved. Hillary, who previously stated that she felt alone and
unsupported, would then be able to implement her colleagues’ suggestions and return to discuss outcomes in a supportive environment with professionals who understand and are empathetic towards her concerns.

Although only two of the participants had the opportunity to be involved in a formally structured professional learning community, many discussed the value of similarly informal collaborative learning activities. Jessica recounts a professional development day workshop intended to be a peer-guided presentation, which turned into a large collegial discussion:

I would love to have that ability to go in to a room full of ASD [Autism Spectrum Disorder] teachers, no admin present, no department heads present, nobody other than the teachers, and have the ability to sit down and say, ‘I have this problem.’ And I kind of did that because I ran a session, I actually ran two sessions at the union led P.D. day…. I closed the door and I looked at them and I said, ‘I don’t care what anybody said about what this is supposed to be, what do you guys want to talk about? Do you want to talk about problem solving, do you want to talk about this, or any other thing?’ The fifteen of us in that room spent an hour and a half talking about different scenarios that we had and as the group of us came up with some different ideas…. And I went hmmm, I never would have thought of that, because you are putting fifteen brains that do the same thing in a room. I closed the door and I said, ‘I don’t care what anybody else is doing. If you have a problem with this, there is the door, goodbye, but I think this is going to be a much more useful bit of time.’ And that’s what we did. I think yeah, having a day or two to do that would be great, but not just once, it needs to be something that happens every couple of months. We ran over time [in the PD session that Jessica led]. The other women in the room looked at me and went, ‘Wow! That was awesome!’ So, I think the consensus in
that room was that it was something that we needed to do.

Emily and Donna consider the benefits of holding staff meetings on a regular basis where teachers can discuss their problems and learn from one another. At Emily’s school:

We would have meetings every Monday night and we also had team meetings for each grade. I think that it is essential to have that, where you can openly discuss students that you are having difficulties with and how you would approach it, and how would you deal with it…. To help teachers resolve ethical problems you have to have… teachers get together and communicate with one another. I think that this is the most important thing. And not to be afraid of that.

Donna’s school did not hold monthly staff meetings, but she would look forward to having them. She believes it would be beneficial for teachers, since many do not have the opportunity to engage in collegial discussions regularly:

To be able to plan and discuss where the students are going because if we don’t have preps together we are lucky if we get to talk at lunch… unless we have a common time, it’s very difficult. So, I think that this meeting at the beginning of the year is a very good start and hopefully… we can do this once a month… A meeting like that would be beneficial.

Alternatively, Daniel describes a smaller scale collegial discussion, which he refers to as peer-reflection, between two or more people. He frequently asks his colleagues to participate with him in the activity when he is struggling with a problem that he cannot resolve:

Peer reflection… where you sit down with somebody, and I ask my principal to do this with me, and she does sometimes. And it’s basically saying look, ‘This is how things are going, this student has been behaving this way, my reactions have been, this, this and
this, I have tried to correct this behavior, or manage this behavior, or channel this behavior in these different ways. What else can I do?’ And the peer who teaches down the hall can say, ‘You know I hear what your saying,’ and they may use what the person tells them, and give them back something…. But you do it in a safe way, so that it works.

Several of the teacher participants recommended professional learning communities or collegial discussions as a form of support which they felt would be valuable for teachers when encountering ethical dilemmas in working with students who have special needs. Although many did not have such supports occurring on an on-going basis at their school, all were interested in having them implemented. As with the proposals for professional development, teachers felt that professional learning communities or collaborative learning opportunities would need to occur consistently over a long period of time. In addition to group-based activities, participants were also interested in receiving one-on-one guidance from a veteran teacher.

**Seeking guidance from the experts**

Mentorship, a professional exchange between a more experienced and a less experienced colleague, provides individuals with the opportunity to share learning experiences. Most specifically, it allows the less experienced colleague to learn through modeling and be supported with one-on-one guidance. Participants, especially those new to the profession, state that they would be interested in being matched with a mentor teacher for support. Patricia discusses the potential benefits of an experienced mentor who could aid teachers with the challenges they experience in the classroom:

But, maybe if I had someone who could really mentor me, someone who is seasoned…. someone who is really competent in certain areas. But I know that, sometimes I feel, I
come home and I feel totally crummy because I think, I am not doing what I should be for that child. I wish I had someone to guide me. I think sometimes even just talking to someone who has gone through this, or just talking to other people, anonymously like maybe some kind of a help line? Or a mentor of some kind? I think sometimes that’s enough, because maybe you see an ethical dilemma where in fact it isn’t an ethical dilemma, or vice versa, maybe you think it’s not a big deal and in fact it is a big deal. So maybe just someone that you can talk to or access just to sort of, I don’t know, help articulate your thinking, to help guide your decision-making.

Samantha agrees. She too would like “someone” to come in and model strategies and pedagogies for her in order to support her classroom teaching practice:

I just think we need more resource teachers… working with teachers, more collaborations. I think that would be a big help. I don’t think more text resources would help too much…. I hate when people say, ‘Oh, I have a lot of help for you, look at this textbook this, this and this.’ And like okay, if I had time to read ten textbooks I would do it…. it’s not realistic…. Those who try to implement all of those wonderful things, you either need to come in and show us how to do it in our classroom or be there to listen to the problems so that we feel supported…. Because you think, ‘Okay, that’s wonderful… but can you show us how to do it in this classroom, because I can’t.’

Daniella can attest, from her own professional experiences, to the value of a mentor or facilitator who is knowledgeable in the area of special education. She believes, however, that there is a lack of such teachers, thus leaving many general educators without adequate support. Daniella recommends more individualized assistance from expert special educators:
I found recently, especially over the last year or two, working with really good facilitators, literacy coaches, special education facilitators. These really need to be put in place. It needs to be a one-on-one experience. So, having just one person,… in the primary division alone… How are they supposed to meet those ten primary teachers’ needs alone, with just one person? So, I think having more of these [teachers] in place so that they can really help and so that you have someone [that you can] go to, that would be beneficial.

A couple of participants working in special education roles agree with the novice teachers. Both Emily and Donna believe that teachers would benefit from observing experienced teachers “who are good at being inclusive… who are effective and who are willing to have others viewing them.” Donna, who is a mentor, discusses the value of modeling and peer mentorship she has observed in assisting less experienced teachers with their professional practice:

I think they need to go and do more observing in classrooms, …because in a workshop you’re going to get ideas, but then they come back to your class and you’ve got your thirty kids again, and you know you come back all pumped. I remember doing this when I was a regular classroom teacher. You come back, ‘Okay I’m going to do this and this,’ and then all of the sudden the curriculum goes thump. The curriculum pounds down on you and you go, ‘Oh my gosh, how am I going to do this? Where am I going to do this? How does this fit in? What do I do?’ So, you’re kind of back right where you started from…I have a couple of teachers that I do mentoring for,… one particular teacher that I mentor, you know he, little questions big questions, it doesn’t matter. And you know, to be able to go to someone who has that knowledge that you may feel you don’t have.

Participants believed that mentorship could provide teachers with an opportunity to observe
exemplary teaching practice. It would also provide teachers with a more experienced colleague who they could turn to for advice if ethical dilemmas or challenges arose in their work.

While teachers were asked to offer suggestions, which they believed would be beneficial in aiding them to cope with or resolve ethical problems that occur in their work with students who have special needs, all recommendations provided dealt with teaching in special education. Rather than addressing their ethical issues, participants focused on supports which could improve their teaching practices and knowledge in the area of special education including professional development opportunities, professional learning communities, and guidance from mentor teachers. It may be that the ethical concerns follow from the more generalized concerns about coping with classroom life. These recommendations are seemingly remote from their ethical problems; yet, if teachers were able to solve some of the practice-related challenges, ethical tensions may be inadvertently eased, especially given that many of the ethical difficulties described in the previous chapter occurred in the context of practice-related activities such as assessment, evaluation, discipline, and inclusion. Such supports will not, however, address all of the ethical challenges that teachers described facing. For instance, they will not offer any advice on how to deal with collegial concerns, that continuously arose during discussions with the teachers.

The special education related recommendations consisted of supports that are somewhat already in place, as participants considered them to be valuable; however, all agreed that they are in need of significant improvements in order to serve teachers adequately. Suggestions were made to develop professional development opportunities that apply directly to the classroom, occurring over a prolonged period of time to provide teachers a chance to implement the learning. Moreover, participants wanted to engage with colleagues in professional learning
community based experiences. They also recommended that mentor teachers be made available, specifically to support beginning teachers and those requiring additional assistance. It was seen as imperative that these mentor teachers be experts in special education and that they be present in the school and available for ongoing and continuous feedback.

**Concluding Remarks**

In this chapter, participants discussed the ways in which they cope with or resolve ethical tensions that arise in their work with students who have special needs and the supports currently available to assist them in making decisions. Teachers also provided recommendations for supports which they believed would be advantageous in dealing with problems specifically in the area of special education. Findings suggest that teachers rely on various sources when making choices relating to ethical issues, including laws, policies, and regulations, their own professional judgment, and their personal convictions and upbringing. Nevertheless, participants reported that they struggle to cope with or resolve ethical challenges, and therefore leave many dilemmas unresolved or resolved in a manner that does not coincide with their own ethical principles. When faced with difficulties, teachers relied on family and friends, colleagues, and professional development for support. While these supports were available, most of the teachers indicated that they were ineffective in guiding them to a satisfactory resolution. As such, many of the participants offered recommendations for supports, which they believed would allow them to learn more about the practical ways to be successful in teaching students with special needs. Suggestions for supports included: enhanced professional development, professional learning communities, and mentor teachers. All of the participants agreed that proposed supports would need to occur regularly over a long period of time to provide teachers with an opportunity to
implement the learning. The supports would also need to be easily accessible by teachers and
directly applicable to classroom practice. Interestingly, while participants spoke at length about
tensions arising as a result of colleagues, most proposed supports that are collaborative, focusing
on shared learning activities with fellow teachers.
Chapter 6: Discussion of Findings

It is very common to imagine ethics as a kind of moral calculus for solving ethical dilemmas. All we need is the right formula and all of our problems can be resolved. It would be nice if it were really that simple. In the real world, however, life is complex, ambiguous, and often tragic – it does not readily yield to such a calculus. Ethics is not about being right as much as it is about being responsible. We must intend to discover what is right, but we can be mistaken and still be responsible. However, we can only do this if we are prepared to recognize both our fallibility and our common humanity.

(Fasching, 1997, p.99)

Introduction

Howe and Miramontes (1992) state, “Education is rife with ethical problems… Such problems are often magnified within special education… Despite the ethical quagmires that special education engenders, it is probably safe to say that the ethics of special education has so far received scant attention, either as a field of ethical inquiry or as a topic in teacher education” (p. 1). It is intended that the data collected in this qualitative study will contribute to the growing body of knowledge and empirical work in the ethics of special education. The research explores the range of ethical issues and dilemmas experienced by twelve teacher participants who work with students who have special needs, and investigates the resources available to assist them in the management and resolution of their problems. This chapter presents a discussion of the findings, with support from existing literature within the field, to address the research questions of the study. To clarify, the purpose of this discussion is not to evaluate or pass judgment on the actions, decisions, or ethical principles of the teachers. Rather, my intention is to offer
descriptive accounts which speak to the challenges that classroom teachers confront in the scope of their practice, and to provide insights into the contexts in which these ethical tensions occur.

Teaching is ethical in nature. On a daily basis educators must contend with decisions which concern issues of fairness, care, honesty, and integrity while they make curriculum and pedagogical choices, assess and evaluate, discipline students, manage the classroom, and interact with students, parents, and colleagues (Beyer, 1991, 1997; Campbell, 2003; Carr, 2006; Colnerud, 1997; Hansen, 1998, 2002; Jackson et al., 1993; Norberg, 2006; Oser, 1991; Strike & Soltis, 1992). It is no surprise that all the teacher participants in my study, regardless of their years of experience in the profession, level of education, or teaching position, stated that they experience ethical problems and uncertainties in their work with students who have special needs. While not all the issues described by participants were actual dilemmas as many offered accounts of difficulties in which there was no apparent choice to be made, the circumstances, in and of themselves, were ethically charged. The teachers struggled to cope with and respond to the challenges without much guidance or support. Such complexities and dilemmas raised questions about principles of fairness, equity, and care in relation to the teaching and learning of students in inclusive classrooms.

Ethical tensions were a significant stressor for many of the teachers. Participants in the study seem to be well-intentioned individuals concerned about and committed to meeting individual needs and ensuring the welfare of all students. Situations which compromised the academic, social, or emotional well-being of students with special needs left many with a sense of inadequacy and guilt as most participants believed that it was their responsibility as the classroom teacher to promote and secure equitable opportunities. Feelings of anxiety and guilt were heightened in situations where imperatives were in conflict – particularly when the teachers
felt torn between their own ethical beliefs and the demands placed on them or the circumstances in the school. Many believed that such demands and circumstances prevented them from serving the students’ best interests, causing some to contemplate leaving the profession.

A recurring challenge for participants concerned relations with colleagues. Teachers struggled with colleagues whom they believed treated students with special needs inequitably, unfairly, dishonestly, and with neglect. The dilemma for participants was whether or not to act on their suspicions or allegations. Although many felt that their peers were disadvantaging students as a result of their conduct or professional practices, none confronted fellow teachers to attend to or resolve the problems. In fact, the majority chose to ignore ethical issues and conflicts for fear of negative consequences to themselves. The culture of collegial loyalty and the rules and regulations imposed by federations or unions established a norm or belief, reinforced by those in the profession and teacher education institutions, that reporting or criticizing colleagues, regardless of the circumstances, is prohibited. Nevertheless, overlooking ethical concerns in the interest of remaining cordial with co-workers, specifically those relating to issues which contradict the participants’ beliefs and sense of professionalism, gnawed at the teachers. Many regretted their decisions and lack of responsive action.

Managing collegial relations was not the only difficulty for participants, for many admitted that they generally did not know how to cope with or resolve ethical challenges that emerged in their work with students who have special needs. Many participants felt that the current structure of the educational system further contributed to their sense of isolation and added to their struggles because they were often forced to make choices or enforce practices with which they did not agree. Paradoxically, while teachers identified some colleagues as a significant source of tension, they also requested collaborative, frequent, and long-term,
professional development opportunities where they could discuss issues with colleagues. Furthermore, they requested more training in the area of special education and inclusive practice.

This chapter, which includes interview data from both stages of interviews, reviews the major findings of the study. The findings are organized into three sections, with the first providing an overview of the predominant ethical imperatives raised by participants concerning the challenges and dilemmas they experience. The second section is devoted to a discussion of collegial relations, and the third examines inclusion and inclusive teaching practices within the current schooling system.

**Confronting Challenges and Dilemmas in Teaching in Inclusive Classrooms**

The teaching profession has long been depicted as inherently ethical, placing emphasis on the ways in which teachers conduct themselves, the decisions they make, and the implications of their actions (Beyer, 1991, 1997; Campbell, 2003, 2004; Carr, 2006; Colnerud, 1997; Fenstermacher, 1990; Hansen, 1998, 2002; Jackson et al., 1993; Noddings, 1984; Norberg, 2006; Sockett, 1993; Strike & Soltis, 1992). Here, the notion of ethical exceeds professional codes, standards, and regulations to embrace a more practice based conceptualization (Campbell, 2003; Fenstermacher, 1990, 2001; Husu, 2001; Jackson et al., 1993) and relational understanding (Noddings, 1984, 2002, 2005) of the ethical teacher as one who embodies principles of honesty, justice, care, respect, and integrity and applies these in the context of his or her daily practice (Campbell, 2003). The teacher participants value the ethical nature of their role and identify the principles of fairness, equity, and care as being salient in their work. Many perceived ethical teaching to be synonymous with good teaching and described ideal practitioners as well-intentioned individuals who serve the needs and protect the rights of students: “put[ting] the
needs and rights of the student first” (Hillary), “put[ing] [students] at a level playing field” (Samantha), “appreciat[ing] the complexity of the classroom” (John), and “making sure that students are being treated fairly” (Donna).

Similarly, Korkmaz’s (2007) investigation of 148 teachers’ opinions about their roles and responsibilities in enhancing student learning revealed that ethical principles were regarded as essential. A majority of those surveyed indicated that teachers should be caring, understanding, respectful, and sensitive to individual needs, and more than one third claimed that they should exercise fairness. Moreover, Dempsey (1991), Noblit (1991), Rogers (1991), and Webb (1991) in the *Caring Study* found that good teaching is inseparable from the act of caring. Teachers, in their discussion of good practice, specified the different ways in which they demonstrate and provide care to their students to create an environment that promotes learning opportunities and achievement (Rogers & Webb, 1991). Based on their empirical work, Rogers and Webb argue that caring is more than affective: “In the classrooms that we observed, caring is the basis for thoughtful educational and moral decision-making, and it requires action” (p. 174). Oser (1991) agrees. He suggests that considering ethical dimensions when making professional decisions is essential for good teaching (p. 191). Ethical teaching relates to the ways in which teachers engage in their work and with their students; it cannot be discerned from good teaching. In essence, ethical teachers make decisions that serve the best interests of their students; they strive to ensure that students are treated fairly, that they receive equitable learning opportunities, and that they are cared for as individuals. Yet, the complexities of professional practice can cause even the most ethical and competent practitioners to experience tensions and dilemmas (Buzzelli & Johnston, 2002; Campbell, 2003; Jackson et al., 1993).
According to a range of research studies, teachers regularly encounter ethical challenges that require them to make critical choices (Campbell, 2003; Colnerud, 1997, 2006; Courtade & Ludlow, 2008; Goodlad et al., 1990; Howe & Miramontes, 1991, 1992; Husu, 2001; Jackson et al., 1993; Lyons, 1990; Rogers & Webb, 1991; Strike & Soltis, 1992; Tirri, 1999). Jackson et al. (1993) noted that teachers are often placed in impossible positions in which they are required to mediate between contradictory principles. The works of both Campbell (2003) and Colnerud (1997) support these observations. Both researchers provide extensive empirical evidence, which suggest that ethical dilemmas are common in the work of teachers; such challenges are not isolated incidents resulting from grave situations. Participants in my study spoke of day-to-day routines and practices which often gave rise to predicaments that induced anxiety and uncertainty. Most strove to be caring, equitable, and fair to all of their students but the demands of teaching and the realities of the classroom frequently inhibited them from upholding these principles.

Contradictions that occur in practice often lead to ethical difficulties. Teachers experience challenges and dilemmas especially when their personal sense of ethics conflicts with professional responsibilities, actions of colleagues, or institutional regulations and standards (Campbell, 2003, 2004; Colnerud, 1994, 1997). While attempting to be fair, caring, and equitable, teachers often found themselves in situations where they were required to fulfill opposing goals (Colnerud, 1997, 2006), meet competing interests (Courtade & Ludlow, 2008), or serve conflicting loyalties (Howe & Miramontes, 1991, 1992) which leave them torn between their responsibilities to the students, parents, colleagues, and the institution. Participants reported that they felt obligated to provide challenging and stimulating learning experiences for students with a range of needs and abilities with limited in-class support and minimal training. They
indicated that they had to meet the individual and collective needs of students in spite of the lack of resources and rigid special education policies. In addition, they felt professionally responsible for advocating for their students in an environment with unsupportive and at times resistant colleagues and administrators. Both general and special educators reported facing similar difficulties in relation to teaching and learning in inclusive classrooms despite the differences in their positions.

Inclusive classrooms are the preferred placement for students with special needs in Ontario schools (Burge et al., 2008; Jordan, 2001; 2007; Lipsky & Gartner, 1998; McLaughlin & Jordan, 2005; Meyen et al., 1993; Ministry of Education, 2005; Stainback & Stainback, 1992; Stanovich & Jordan, 2002, 2004; Waldron et al., 1999). While distinctions exist among the roles and responsibilities of general and special educators, changes to special education policies and practices have caused the predicaments faced by general educators to resemble those of special educators (Berkeley & Ludlow, 2008; Howe, 1996; Howe & Miramontes, 1991, 1992; Paul et al., 2001; Rude & Whetstone, 2008). In this study, parallels were found between the ethical challenges faced or observed by participants. Many remarked that there was a lack of effective supports and resources available to facilitate learning for students with special needs which accounted for significant inequalities. They worried that the needs of the students were not being met due to the inadequate implementation of accommodations and modifications. Some believed that it was their duty to serve as advocates for students which often placed them in difficult positions in relation to colleagues, parents, or the institution. To exacerbate these conditions further, conflicts with colleagues often resulted from their struggles between their responsibility to the students and their loyalty to co-workers.
Despite these similarities, slight differences in the types of ethical problems experienced by special and general education teachers were also observed. Difficulties reported solely by special educators pertained to their position as resource or support teachers, which required them to collaborate with and provide guidance to teachers in general education classrooms. General educators, on the other hand, struggled to adapt their practices to suit the range of learners in their classrooms. This came out in their effort to establish engaging and stimulating learning opportunities for all students but the ability to respond to the needs of each individual while remaining attentive to the class proved to be a struggle. Assessment and evaluation also posed concerns regarding bias and subjectivity because some felt anxious about discouraging students and others were troubled by inconsistencies in evaluation practices and inflated grades. Some of the teachers fretted over discipline and the fairness of their behavior management practices, concerned that they were either too demanding on the students with special needs or too lenient and hence, potentially giving them an unfair advantage. These problems were consistently described in reference to fairness, care, and equity, with teachers concerned that the ethical principles and their personal sense of right and wrong were being compromised.

Many of the reported ethical tensions and those that specifically troubled general educators relate to practices that are fundamental to the teaching profession and which must be exercised regularly with all students, such as assessment, evaluation, and discipline. However, participants claimed that such practices, when applied with students who have special needs, elicited greater uncertainty and doubt, as many felt that there was less direction, more subjectivity, and a larger potential for error, particularly when implemented with accommodations and modifications. Although the teachers recognize that students with special needs require accommodations, they are unclear as to how, when, and to what extent these
should be granted. Amy states in her discussion of the susceptibility of accommodations being open to interpretation, “It [the IEP] said that she was allowed a study sheet for her tests. The Special Ed Department interpreted the Atlas as a type of study note for the test. And he [the geography teacher] did not agree with this.” Similarly, Patricia explains the difficulties she encounters in assessing and evaluating work that has been modified, “[it] is not scientific. I can’t punch a whole bunch of numbers into a calculator and then come up with a number [grade]. So, it’s very subjective. And I don’t know how fair that is.”

In such situations, participants questioned what is fair, equitable, and in the best interest of the students, with many, including experienced practitioners, doubting their professional knowledge, judgment, and expertise. An explanation for this ambiguity is offered by Howe and Miramontes (1992) who claim that within special education, ethical problems are magnified due to the need to be equitable and the specialization of the field which places heavy demands on resources, practices, and the professional knowledge and skills of teachers. Given that general educators are assuming greater responsibilities for students with special needs with limited supports, resources, and training available to assist them, most reported experiencing ethical uncertainties and challenges in inclusive classrooms.

The difficulties reported by both special and general education participants correspond with those identified in the theoretical literature on ethical tensions in special education (Courtade & Ludlow, 2008; Howe & Miramontes, 1991, 1992; Howe, 1996; Paul et al., 2001; Rude & Whetstone, 2008) and empirical work on ethical dilemmas in teaching (Campbell, 2003; Colnerud, 1997, 2006; Husu, 2001; Lyons, 1990; Tirri, 1999; Tirri & Husu, 2002). These sources similarly confirm that teachers experience ethical problems in the context of collegial issues,
assessment and evaluation, discipline, distribution of time and resources, placement, integration, rights of the individual versus the group, and advocacy for students.

Participants’ accounts of challenges occurring in the context of teaching students who have special needs in inclusive classrooms primarily dealt with issues of care, equity, and fairness. Teachers were most troubled by circumstances in which these ethical principles were compromised and the best interests of students were not served. While other principles, such as honesty and integrity did present themselves in the tensions reported, they were far less substantial by comparison. Other studies of ethical dilemmas in teaching conclude that difficulties pertaining to the welfare of students arise most frequently and are considered to be especially troublesome for teachers (Campbell, 2003; Colnerud, 1994, 1997, 2006; Husu, 2001; Tirri & Husu, 2002; Tirri, 1999). Oser (1991) argues that teachers feel a professional obligation to be just, caring, and truthful in their decision-making (p. 203). He suggests that ethical conflicts occur when these imperatives cannot be met simultaneously (p. 191). Similarly, Colnerud (2006) maintains that the principles of care and justice are particularly relevant in teaching since, “everyday teachers balance justice and care in their ethical choices… they are forced to organize care and distribute it justly. Conversely, they must ensure that justice is meted out caringly” (p. 369). She notes that while care and justice may complement one another, there are instances in which they do not, situations of disagreement cause teachers to experience tensions and dilemmas as they attempt to meet the needs of all their students.

This “balancing” of ethical principles poses problems for teachers working with students who have special needs because contradictions regularly arise and often, more than one stance can be ethically justified. For instance, teachers struggle with the principle of fairness when
dividing time and attention spent with students, especially when the needs of the individual differ from those of the group. As Samantha explains:

I just felt like I was neglecting meeting the needs of the other kids in my class, challenging them academically, challenging them with their social skills. I’m just not available if I am working with the other student [with special needs]…. And it’s just too hard to juggle; I found it very difficult to juggle both. But you could be doing so much more for both parties… You are sacrificing one group for the sake of the other, and vice versa. I feel awful about that.

Samantha, like many of the participants, is torn between her responsibilities to the student, whose learning needs are distinct, and the class as a whole. Ideally, she would like to support all her students; however, she feels obligated to divide her time to address their needs separately, in which case, one party is always neglected. Participants stressed the importance of treating students equally but as Anna can attest, equal treatment can be unfair at times:

I always wondered if I should give them extra chances when they did something wrong or when they didn’t do their work, only because they had a special need… I’m thinking, if I let this kid get away with it, what about the rest of the class? At the same time, sometimes the kids with special needs deserve more chances.

And as Amy points out, when equal treatment is applied, those with special needs may be significantly disadvantaged:

A lot of teachers wonder whether the accommodations are justified and they wonder how accommodations given to one student, how that would impact the class and other students. So, looking at issues of fairness and treating all students the same. There are those who choose not to accommodate and modify. I don’t really understand some
teachers, they are really set against following through with accommodations, not completely because they don’t understand, but because they think they have to treat everyone the same or else they think it’s unfair…. and the student suffers because of it. I think that’s a huge ethical issue. It’s not good.

Many were torn between the principles of equality and equity. The first entails treating all students the same while the latter is exemplified by treating students differently based on their needs in order to achieve an equal outcome. Participants supported the inclusion of students with special needs into general education classrooms as they felt that it was fair and equitable; nonetheless, they were taxed to balance different needs. While they generally agreed that students with special needs require accommodations and modifications, whether curricular, social, or environmental, many grappled with how they should be implemented and their impact on the others. However, when the accommodations were not made available, they worried that students with special needs were being disadvantaged.

As teachers attempted to manage the tensions occurring in their practice, they negotiated between variations of fairness, care, equality, and equity along with their accountability to different individuals or policies. Patricia’s obligations, for instance, are divided between the requests of her colleagues, institutional funding regulations, and the best interests of her students. She contemplates whether or not to fail a student who requires additional supports which can only be obtained with a formal identification, and is concerned about the emotional impact this decision would have on him. Pressured by authority figures to make a choice that she believes is unethical, she stated:

At the beginning of this year, the goal was just to get him tested… And the sooner he gets labeled the sooner we can get him the help he needs. ‘You have to fail him [so that] he
can get moved towards the front of the queue and get tested,’ [she was told]. And I was like, ‘He’s not really failing my class!’ He needs a lot of support and a lot of structure, but his ideas are his own. I am not feeding him these ideas, he is just having a hard time articulating them and writing them down…. The message was very clear, ‘Fail him!’ …. Is it best for him to get the diagnosis he needs so that he can get the help that he needs so that he can move on?... But, if he is trying and then I fail him, he’s going to walk always with the idea of ‘What’s the point? Why bother trying? I am still going to end up failing.’ Is that in his best interest?

Participants, like Patricia, strove to be ethical in their practice; however, they struggled to balance competing interests while ensuring the well-being of the students. Teachers reported that they found this especially difficult to accomplish when constrained by professional demands, lack of training and resources, and other parties involved, causing many to experience anxiety and uncertainty. Those who felt that their actions contradicted their own professional judgment and personal convictions, as a result of their decision, an enforced demand, or their inaction, indicated in particular that they were troubled. Participants expressed their frustrations with the competing interests that arise in their practice and the challenges of balancing fairness, care, and equity, “You can’t always be fair and equitable to every kid. It’s really hard to balance that. So, teachers get frustrated. They feel torn,” said Daniella. Samantha agreed. She, “… juggle[s] different things at the same time…” always having to “pick and deal with the most urgent issue,” and as a result she acknowledges that some of her students are “totally overlooked,” which leaves her disheartened, “I just can’t do it. I am just one person, I can’t do all these things.” Donna, a special educator, attests to the struggles of general educators:
Teachers get very frustrated. … It’s frustrating to them because they want to reach out to the students but they don’t know how, they don’t have the resources in the classroom, or even in the school…. they feel they don’t have the time to really address the needs of the students because they are being pulled in a billion directions… There are no people to support them when they need it…

Teachers feel conflicted. They experience ethical tensions. They waver when making decisions because they are often unsure as to how they can meet professional demands while serving the best interests of each individual under their care. The participants expressed a desire to be fair, caring, and equitable; however, they acknowledged that they were not always able to accomplish this ideal in their practice due to constraints, their lack of knowledge or skills, and limitations in the supports available to them. The preponderance of ethical tensions and dilemmas occurred in the context of accommodations and modifications, assessment and evaluation, discipline, distribution of time and resources, and rights of the individual versus the group. One must appreciate the arduous position of the classroom teacher who tries to be ethical as he or she mediates between needs, interests, and principles that at times compete. Resultantly, they often have to make difficult decisions on their own with minimal time for contemplation or preparation.

The literature notes that teachers are often alone in coping with or resolving ethical tensions, when deciding which action to take (Berkeley & Ludlow, 2008; Campbell, 2003; Colnerud, 1997; Courtade & Ludlow, 2008; Howe, 1996; Howe & Miramontes, 1991, 1992; Oser, 1991). Tirri, Husu, and Kansanen (1999) and Husu (2001) suggest, based on empirical work, that the ethically based decisions of teachers are guided by their moral character. Participants in this study concurred, stating that when problems arise, they generally rely on their
personal convictions or upbringing to make a decision since they lack other sources of support or
guidance. Even fewer supports were available to those holding a special education position, as
they were the ones sought out for advice, given the expectation that they are experts in the field.
Teachers who identified supports spoke of family and friends, colleagues, and professional
development; however, most acknowledged that these were not effective in assisting them to
cope with an ethical challenge and hence, rarely contributed to a resolution. Interestingly, all of
the participants reported that the dilemmas they experience stem from colleagues, yet they often
turn to other teachers for support, although they mainly relied on those whom they trusted and
those whom they felt shared a similar teaching philosophy. While teachers did not believe that
their colleagues could offer much in the way of assistance, they valued the opportunity to share
and release stress and they appreciated having their frustrations validated. Unfortunately, few of
the described ethical tensions were dealt with, some were managed, but most were avoided or
ignored.

Ethical tensions reported as most stressful for participants were those that remained
unresolved. The majority of the teachers conceded that problems, which arose in their work,
were most often left unsettled, and if they were dealt with, the outcome was unsuccessful
because the needs of the student were not adequately met. This finding, while alarming,
corresponds with the empirical studies of Lyons (1990) and Husu (2001). Lyons (1990) noted
that of the teachers surveyed, most could not identify ways to resolve the challenges they faced.
Likewise, Husu (2001) discovered that solutions to ethical issues were ineffective and
participants generally did not discern an improvement in their situation. He argues that teachers
experience difficulties in making decisions due to the availability of multiple alternatives – each
of which has a specific consequence.
Five strategies for resolving ethical problems were identified by Oser (1991), ranging from avoidance to complete discourse. In regards to complete discourse, professionals are able to rationalize their decisions and they recognize the capacity of all concerned parties to manage ethical principles. Oser (1991) claims that although teachers view various situations differently, they generally opt for decision-making strategies that are single handed and autocratic. A similar observation was made by Tirri (1999) whose quantitative data reveals that the most commonly applied strategy for settling ethical perplexities was single-handed decision making, with the exception of those dealing with other teachers, where avoidance was used.

Applying Oser’s (1991) theory, participants in this study primarily made resolutions based on the first three orientations which included: avoidance of the difficulty, delegation of the responsibility of making a choice to someone else, or single handed decision making. Of the problems that were addressed, the teachers utilized their own judgment, rarely consulted with others or clarified their choice with those involved. For instance, this pattern is often evident in assessment and evaluation, accommodation and modification, and inclusion related issues. In situations where advice was sought out, it was seldom followed, as many of the participants believed that supports were ineffective. Consequently, they made decisions independently.

Some of the participants did take action based on what they considered to be most ethical; however the majority did not deal with ethical issues. Many of the teachers reported that they elected to ignore challenging situations because they “did not know what to do.” Some failed to make a decision or they allowed others to make the decision for them either because they felt that the problem surpassed their position, they feared professional ramifications, or they believed that there was nothing they could do. Those new to the profession were especially concerned about jeopardizing their careers, opting not to act in order to avoid potential
repercussions. This stance is exemplified by Anna, “As bad as it is, I usually leave it [the dilemma] alone. I either don’t know how to resolve it or I am too scared to resolve it or do anything about it because I am new.” However, even senior teachers, like Donna, experienced situations of professional vulnerability when encountering ethical tensions, “There’s only so much I can do. I do feel good that I have many years of experience in special ed so I can tell professionally that my ideas and suggestions are taken seriously… but it doesn’t always put me in the place where I can say, ‘This is what we need to do,’ because I’m not admin.”

While some of the unresolved ethical challenges can be attributed to the teachers’ lack of preparation in handling such complex situations, (Lyons, 1990; Tirri, 1999; Husu, 2001; Tirri & Husu, 2002) others may be unresolvable (Lyons, 1990). Ultimately, teachers are left to cope with the issues as best they can, which, as Campbell notes (2003), “may not be a source of decisive comfort to them, but rather a lingering catalyst for self-doubt and criticism” (p. 66). This was the case with Patricia:

I would like to treat each kid as I would treat my own sons. And I know that I can never do that. There are some days when I’m like, ‘What did I do today!’ [crying]. I made the wrong choice. But, I just don’t see how I could of done it differently. Sometimes I feel like I am stuck and I want what’s best for the child, but I don’t know how to give it or get it [crying].

Participants, like Patricia, were assailed with feelings of guilt and failure as a result of ethical challenges and dilemmas that were either unresolved or ineffectively settled. This was especially true for situations in which the teachers believed that they were disadvantaging or harming students with special needs due to their avoidance of the problem or their perceived inability to make a good choice.
The point is the process that underpins ethical decision-making is an ordeal that is replete with repercussions. Most notably, there is a tremendous amount of pressure placed on classroom teachers. Samantha notes:

A lot of those situations… you think maybe you shouldn’t do that. And a lot of them make you question yourself, you know, if they think this is what’s best and I think this is what’s best, then maybe I don’t know what I’m talking about. And in the end you make a decision of what’s best for every situation… you get into situations where it’s not only your own ethics, it’s your neighbors, or another teacher, or the principal, or the parents. You go through challenges with your colleagues. So all those things attribute to the fact, despite you wanting to have the same things for every child, it’s not likely to take, so you help, but there are always going to be the kids that you failed in the end.

In addition to professional demands, participants were constrained by colleagues, parents, lack of training, lack of support, lack of resources, and lack of time – all of which often impacted their ability to make decisions. Most strove to apply the principles of care, fairness, and equity when resolving challenges; however, the impossibility of some situations made this very difficult. The data raise the following question: how can teachers serve the best interests of their students when their needs are not being met and when they themselves are not supported? The teachers struggled with large classes with a diverse range of learners with minimal in-class support, they were not provided with the necessary resources to support their students with special needs. To this, they were expected to make accommodations and modifications and diversify instruction without adequate knowledge and skills in special education or inclusive instruction. They were expected to do all of this with few effective supports to which they can turn for assistance. One must question where, in the described examples, lies the fairness, care, and equity. It is no
wonder that teachers experience ethical challenges and dilemmas and consequently struggle to cope with or resolve the issues that arise.

Evidently, ignoring problems was a method of survival, as opposed to a form of evasion for teachers like Jessica, who “contemplat[ed] stress leave because [she] was so frazzled [with her] head full of all these different conundrums [and] not able to move in any different direction, [without adequate] support, [she felt like she was] liv[ing] in a pressure cooker.” It was not that Jessica did not care to make ethically sound decisions and deal with the “conundrums;” rather she felt that her capacity to act was restricted:

A lot of them [ethical tensions] don’t get resolved. I just lived with them… In my head I am saying, ‘I will do what I’m told for my job.’ I wind up doing that a lot. I wind up really having to hold back what I really want to say or do. We talk about it with the EAs [Education Assistants] at the end of the day, and then we leave it. We walk away and come back the next day. And it’s really hard to let it be and not deal with it.

Campbell (2003) purports that teachers compromise their responsibility to act ethically by justifying their behaviors as a “necessity of their job” – a response she refers to as “suspended morality” (pp. 92-3). While Jessica’s morality appears to be suspended as she explains her avoidance of ethical issues by referring to her role, she recognizes that her conduct is problematic and she maintains a sense of guilt. Colnerud (1994) suggests that teachers, like Jessica, are the most susceptible to strain because they are ethically sensitive. The institution compels them to perceive their ethical uncertainties as unacceptable and intolerable. To this, it demands that they adhere to established norms (p. 11). With many ethical problems left unresolved, many felt that they were not meeting their obligations as teacher professionals,
specifically in relation to their work with students who have special needs. The outcome lead to feelings of self-doubt, disappointment, and guilt.

Participants had a clear vision of how they wanted to behave and what they wanted to achieve as teachers; however, they were unable to realize this ideal. Some, including Hillary who has been teaching for ten years, were overwhelmed by a sense of inadequacy and regret to the point that they were unable to handle the disappointment and even contemplated leaving the profession:

I mean, I love teaching, I take it very seriously and I also enjoy it, I think I am suited to it. But, I can see why people are leaving. I have ten years of experience and I am not going to lie, I have thought about it [leaving the profession] and part of the reason why I am getting my Masters is so I can have other options. Because it’s getting to the point where you would have to be a super human to cope with the demands that are placed on you to be able to achieve the ideal, and I think that so many of us can see, we can see it and we want it [to be the ideal teacher]. We want a classroom where this, and this, and this is happening, and everyone’s needs are being met, and everyone is safe, but the lack of support around that is just ridiculous.

Disregarding their years of experience, both general and special educators considered alternative career options; only one of the four teachers in this study who contemplated leaving was new to the profession. Conversely, studies investigating the attrition of teachers maintain that teachers are most likely to leave the profession within the first few years (Brownell et al., 2002; Fantilli, 2009; Fantilli & McDougall, 2009) and show that special educators are more prone to attrition than general educators (Brownell et al., 2002, Edmonson & Thompson, 2001; Piotrowski & Plash, 2006; Thornton et al., 2007). Reasons for the high attrition rate of special educators has
been attributed to workload, lack of support, lack of resources, class loads, job stress, lack of collegiality, and issues related to the special educator role among other factors (Brownell et al., 2002, Edmonson & Thompson, 2001; Griffin, Winn, Otis-Wilborn, & Kilgore, 2003; Piotrowski & Plash, 2006; Thornton et al., 2007). Moreover, some claim that the resistance of general educators towards inclusion has heightened the stress level of special educators and contributed to role conflicts (Billingsley & Tomchin, 1992; Boyer & Lee, 2001; Carter & Scruggs, 2001; Griffin, et al., 2003). While differences in attrition rates have been noted in the literature, researchers suggest that stress for beginning special educators is similar to that of general educators (Billingsley & Tomchin, 1992; Boyer & Lee, 2001; Busch, Pederson, Espin, & Weissenburger, 2001; Carter & Scruggs, 2001; Conderman, & Stephens, 2000; Griffin, et al., 2003; Mastropieri, 2001).

Given the increasing overlap between the roles of general and special educators, one can speculate that reasons for leaving the profession could also be related. Brackenreed (2011) conducted a study investigating the strategies that teachers use to deal with the stress that arises in inclusive classrooms. Her findings reveal that while teachers generally support inclusion, they struggle to meet the needs of all learners due to inadequate supports:

Despite the history and legislation pertaining to inclusion in Ontario, many teachers continue to experience high levels of stress resulting from the inclusion of students with special education needs in regular classrooms. Inadequate preparation in pre-service and in-service programs causing low perceptions of teacher self-competency, understanding and management of student behaviors, insufficient daily support in the classroom, and meeting the expectations of others such as parents, continue to be sources of concern for teachers, contributing to inadequate coping strategies. (p. 20)
Brackenreed (2011) suggests that such stressors contribute to the attrition of teachers who work in inclusive classrooms. Likewise, Fantilli (2009) surveyed and interviewed recent graduates who had been teaching for three years or less in general education classrooms at the elementary level in the province of Ontario. His findings reveal that teachers experience extensive challenges in addressing the needs of students with special needs. It is critical to note that his respondents consistently expressed a sense of guilt and failure as they felt that they lacked expertise in special education and differentiated instruction and were therefore unable to meet the needs of their students (p. 151). While Fantilli’s work is not an investigation of the ethical difficulties experienced by teachers, it does underline the ethical nature of his participants’ troubles. The teachers experienced guilt as a result of their perceived inability to serve the best interests of their students which is consistent with that of the participants in my study. The attrition data do not focus on the ethical dimensions of teaching, thus one cannot draw the conclusion that ethical challenges and dilemmas influenced the teachers’ decisions to leave. However, given that teaching is inherently ethical, one can argue, as Colnerud has (1997), that “there are ethical conflicts to be found in teaching practice, even if they are not perceived and labeled in ethical terms” (p. 629). Consequently, it is possible that some of the factors attributed to attrition are entwined with ethical issues since the tensions experienced by the participants in this study contributed to their dissatisfaction with themselves, their profession, and in turn, compelled them to consider resignation.

Various aspects of teaching practice give rise to ethical problems and dilemmas, with those that compromise the principles of fairness, equity, and care reported as most problematic. Issues that the participants regularly identified as most stressful yet least addressed dealt with
colleagues. As such, ethical challenges pertaining to collegial relations and collegiality will be discussed in the following section.

**Relations with Colleagues**

Loyalty to colleagues weighs heavily on the decisions and actions of teachers. Many of the ethical challenges described by participants dealt with their relations with colleagues, either directly or indirectly. In such cases, teachers were concerned about the behaviors and practices of others based on their observations or interactions with them or information they had heard. In all of the reported accounts, no one was willing to confront or interfere in the affairs of co-workers despite knowledge that students were being treated unfairly or disadvantaged. Instead, participants elected to ignore the problems in order to avoid potential consequences associated with breaching their allegiance to fellow professionals. The empirical works of Campbell (1996, 2003), Colnerud (1994, 1997, 2006), and Tirri and Husu (2002) support this finding, concluding that while teachers frequently encounter ethical dilemmas and conflicts as a result of their colleagues, very few are willing to address the issues. There is an unspoken “collective norm” of collegiality which pressures teachers to forgo their ethical responsibilities to students and make decisions that protect those with whom they work (Campbell, 1996, 2003). Such conformity is the source that drives teachers to disregard many of the ethical tensions that they encounter in the scope of their practice.

Situations in which colleagues failed to demonstrate fairness, equity, and care towards students with special needs particularly bothered participants. Collegial conflicts emerged in the context of inclusion where, teachers were concerned about colleagues who refused to include students with diverse learning needs in their general education classrooms or those whose
teaching practices were not inclusive. Teachers also worried that the individual needs of students were not being met due to colleagues who failed to implement necessary accommodations and modifications. Finally, some participants were uneasy about the attitudes and beliefs that teachers maintained about disability because they influenced the ways in which students with special needs were treated. Special educators, in particular, struggled with these issues, as they were directly involved with colleagues by virtue of their position, which obligated them to work with other teachers. Both general and special educators reported witnessing their co-workers acting or communicating in ways that they deemed inappropriate or unethical, but none addressed the issues. For instance, Donna recounts a colleague’s complaint to her about a special education teacher who, “clonks herself at the back table and does paperwork” instead of assisting students and “stands in the classroom and talks about the students… on IEPs” in a manner that is audible to everyone in the vicinity. Both chose to leave the difficulty unresolved, allowing their colleague to continue with the unethical conduct. Despite their decision to ignore problems, most participants recognize their obligation to confront colleagues in order to keep students from harm; they understand this to be their professional responsibility, and they are aware that the students lack the power to change the teachers’ behaviors. Special educators, especially, felt accountable to advocate for students with special needs; however most were afraid to confront the teachers they were supporting for fear that their feedback would be misconstrued as criticism of their practice. While they believed that it was their ethical duty, as professionals in a special education position, to address such concerns, they failed to do so in order to remain cordial. Some, such as Daniel, elected to take alternative measure to protect students. Rather than directly approaching a colleague, whom he describes as “patronizing” and “nasty” towards the students with special needs who were integrated into her classroom, he chose to “de-integrate” his
students by giving up his preparation time for their benefit as he reported, “I just decided to miss my prep, which sucks for me but what can you do?” Daniel did not consider the option to speak to the teacher.

The main ethical dilemma for teachers is whether or not to address the inappropriate behaviors of colleagues. On one hand, teachers feel a sense of responsibility to their students and they recognize that their colleagues’ behavior is reprehensible on ethical grounds. On the other hand, they refuse to confront their co-workers. Such ethical tensions were mostly ignored, avoided, and therefore, unresolved. These were the challenges in which teachers were completely inactive, silent bystanders, regardless of the harm caused to students. It was the only time the teachers’ priority was not to protect the students. The results correspond to those of Campbell (1996, 2003), Colnerud (1997), and Tirri and Husu (2002) who claim that ethical problems which involve colleagues are the most difficult to solve, and, as such, they remain, in the majority of cases, unsolved. Consistent with the findings in this study, Campbell (1996) reports that fear is the cause of teachers’ nonintervention. The fear of criticizing colleagues is so intense that participants were willing to make personal sacrifices, including abandoning their ethical convictions, in order to avoid it. For instance, Emily regularly observes some of her colleagues mistreatment of students with special needs. While she feels awful because she recognizes that it is unethical, Emily allows it to continue, “If a teacher says mean things, if a teacher says rude things, I hate it! I absolutely hate it! I cringe. And how about calling out marks? Pointing out the people who have low marks. I hate that! I have seen that happen many times!” Participants deeply regretted their decisions to avoid ethically unsound situations involving colleagues; however, many rationalized that they did not have a choice, afraid of the repercussions and the potential of jeopardizing one’s career. Studies show that many teachers
consider themselves to be “cowards” in relation to issues involving colleagues (Campbell, 2003; Colnerud, 1994, 1997) and some attempt to escape the guilt by transferring to another institution (Tirri & Husu, 2002). Furthermore, as confirmed by Campbell (1996, 2003), most are reluctant to file a formal complaint or informally approach a co-worker, and, if provided with the opportunity to reverse their decision, most would elect the same course of action.

It is imperative to consider the force which drives the fear identified by teachers. What is it that causes them to forgo their professional responsibilities, abandon their intuition and conscience, and in some cases, live with overwhelming anxiety and guilt? Researchers argue that the compulsion is primarily collegial loyalty. Fear of criticizing colleagues or breaking their allegiance to them pressures teachers to disregard the students’ well-being, in the interest of preserving or protecting themselves (Campbell, 1996, 2003; Colnerud, 1994, 1997, 2006; Tirri & Husu, 2002). Colnerud (1997) states:

One of the most striking conflicts described is between protecting pupils and the social norm of loyalty to colleagues. Teachers sometimes witness, or are informed by others, that a colleague is treating the pupils in a harmful way…. Although the teacher regards the colleagues’ treatment as harmful, although he or she cares about the pupil, it is difficult to confront the colleague…. Criticism of each other within the teacher group seems to be taboo. (p. 631)

This “taboo” is both implicit and explicit – a perceived collective norm which compels teachers to turn a blind eye and remain silent. As Anna explains, “You have to be so careful about what you say about another teacher if you think they are doing something wrong. They are still your colleague, they are still a teacher.” They also work in a formalized system, influenced by the teachers’ federations that maintain the expectation of collegiality, as reported by Emily, “I can’t
complain about the teacher because it’s not something that is… indictable… you can’t take it to the bank, you can’t report it, you can’t take it to the union… when you see other teachers doing these kinds of awful things, theoretically, by the rule book, you cannot report things like that.”

The “rule book” to which Emily refers is, in the province of Ontario, the Adverse Report Section 18(1)(b), a regulation of the Teaching Profession Act which requires a teacher to inform a colleague in writing if a complaint is made against them (Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario, 2011). Failure to provide written notice within three days could result in disciplinary action on the grounds of professional misconduct. This regulation inhibits many teachers from reporting the unethical behaviors of colleagues, as they are terrified of potential consequences from either colleagues or federations (Campbell, 1996, 2003). But, what if a teacher witnesses a student being physically abused? According to Emily, most teachers would still continue to hesitate in filing a complaint, even in cases involving overt abuse:

Like, if you saw a teacher smack a kid you could take that to the bank. But would you? Would you? Because it could involve your whole career! Your whole career could go down the drain, because other teachers wouldn’t like you, they would be afraid to have you in their classroom. And you would have to do the paper work and you would have to have witnesses… If you are the only one seeing it, what are you going to do? So, you leave it alone. You leave it alone…. The rules inhibit a teacher to talk about another teacher… Whistle blowers never win!… You just don’t criticize another teacher. Those are the rules, and teachers really follow those rules.

Despite their legal responsibilities under the Duty of Care Ontario Child and Family Services Act, teachers are still hesitant to report cases of abuse due to collegial loyalty.
Novice teachers are especially vulnerable to the pressures and fears established by the culture of collegiality in the profession. Anna justifies her decision to ignore a case of verbal abuse:

I didn’t want to create problems for myself. I want a job at this school and I don’t want to make enemies or rock the boat and possibly hurt my chances. I would more often than not leave it alone. It’s just… safer to leave it alone.

But Anna was not the only teacher who witnessed the unprofessional conduct of a colleague; other teachers at the school were aware of the situation, and all of them consciously chose not to intervene. As Anna stated, “With the whole reporting process, no one wants to put their neck out. I know she is not liked at the school. Everyone always gives a little look when she walks by… but no one has actually complained… about it.” While many of the participants indicated that they would like to address the issue in order to protect the well-being of the students, none did so. Colnerud (1994) suggests that it is nearly impossible for teachers to “blow the whistle” on a colleague as it requires a great deal of courage (p. 13), and most teachers are not willing to take the risk because as Campbell (1996) and Tirri and Husu (2002) point out, in some instances, teachers are punished for complaining to administrators about a colleague.

Those who have reported teachers may believe issues are rarely resolved. Emily recounts that though she has filed complaints against colleagues, the situation remained unchanged, “Even if you tell the principal, which by the way I have done in the past, they have their hands tied too. Often times they already know this about the teacher and there is nothing they can do.” She continues to describe her current volunteer experience with a teacher who she describes as, “absolutely awful… he [is] literally abus[ive to] the kids with special needs. They don’t do any learning and they are deathly afraid of him.” Evidently, the principal and all the teachers at the
school are aware of the abuse afflicted by this teacher, yet “there is nothing that can be done about it.” Instead of filing a complaint, Emily, a retired special education teacher, is assigned to the classroom – a decision, which does not alleviate the problem – as the abuse continues. While Emily has made the difficult decision to do the right thing and expose the harmful behaviors of her colleague in the past, the principal along with the federation have not supported her.

While teachers in general are hesitant to criticize the unethical actions of colleagues, some may condemn teaching practices that undermine their credibility as professionals. Interestingly, the same collegial protection does not apply in such situations. For instance, Amy’s colleagues refuse to make accommodations and modifications for students with special needs, and they expect that she not make them either. Amy describes the complaints she receives from her co-workers: “If some teachers do not want to accommodate that’s their choice. Why is it that, when I am accommodating, other teachers have a problem with that? They come to me and say, ‘Well you shouldn’t be doing that or you shouldn’t be doing this.’” They perceive Amy as disloyal because she is not conforming to the collective norm. This judgmental view is confirmed by the comments they make to her such as, “It makes me [Amy’s colleague] look bad since I am not doing it [accommodating and modifying].” In essence, although Amy does not verbally fault her colleagues, she is seen to be doing so by virtue of her actions. Individualizing instruction for her students indirectly exposes the shortcomings of her colleagues’ teaching practices. As a result, she claims that she is taunted and challenged by her co-workers. Colnerud (1994) explains the behaviors observed by Amy: “Breaking loyalty to colleagues is apparently seen as worse then breaking the moral obligations to students. According to this norm the colleagues are more important than ethical considerations” (p. 10).
Teachers’ loyalties to colleagues and students are often in conflict. For example, Samantha claims, “You do feel torn sometimes between your roles, you are part of the teachers’ union and you have a role as an advocate for the kids.” For Amy, the decision is self-evident; she continues to make accommodations and modifications as she believes them to be both necessary as well as the “legal right” of the students; however, she is chastised because her teaching practices are at odds with those of the larger group. Most do not make the same decision as Amy; participants reported that they want to act in the best interest of the students, yet, they feel pressured to yield to the expectations of colleagues. Teachers in most situations involving colleagues, “suspend their morality… [and] conform to the collective norm, in this case collegial loyalty, even in situations in which they do not believe they should” (Campbell, 2003, p. 92). They appear to be willing to compromise the well-being of the students in order to avoid altercations with colleagues, circumvent judgment, and evade potential consequences. However, such loyalty comes at a heavy cost, as demonstrated by those participants who reported experiencing guilt, anxiety, stress, and a sense of failure. Tolerance level varies: some live with such feelings; others contemplate leaving the profession.

Collegial loyalty, while problematic because it presents teachers with ethical challenges and dilemmas, also affects the supports and resources available to them. The role of special educators is to support general educators with issues related to the teaching and learning of students with special needs. In order for their support to be effective, both teachers must work collaboratively, and the special educator must, at times, address practices, which are questionable or not beneficial. However, many participants working in special education positions stated that they had to be cautious about the ways in which they offered assistance to ensure that they were not intrusive or appeared too authoritarian. As Donna explains, “I try to work with the teacher
and I try to make her feel comfortable so she doesn’t think that I’m in there to judge her or tell her what to do.” All of the special educators reported that they would not confront teachers whom they felt were behaving inappropriately. Most described observing other teachers failing to include students with special needs, neglecting to make the necessary accommodations and modifications, and being physically or verbally abusive. Nevertheless, despite their “supportive” role and position as expert teacher, none were willing to correct or single out the negative behaviors. Instead, they remained loyal to the general educators, ignoring the issues they observed. Emily explains:

Sometimes I would go into other teachers’ classrooms and I would be horrified! They were giving the students [with special needs] totally different work or making them sit there and do paperwork. They were having an EA take the kids into a corner and work alone with them. It was just awful. Or giving them work that was way too hard for them, giving them tests that were impossible for them to be doing. And the teachers knew that it was too hard because it wasn’t on their IEP. And then how would I tell the teachers that they were not doing it right. And also, when do you go to the principal and tell him or her what is going on? … And can you? And if you do and they can’t really do anything about it, they think that you are a crybaby. That’s really tough…. These are the ethical dilemmas in teaching. Especially when you are in special ed and you are working with other teachers in their classrooms. When you are co-teaching and team teaching.

Participants were hesitant to tell colleagues how to teach or address unethical behaviors due to the real or perceived challenges associated with working with and criticizing colleagues. General educators, however, stated that they struggle to teach students with special needs, and they indicated that they do not receive adequate support; they wanted special educators to offer
guidance and make recommendations. Ironically, special educators intentionally did not do these things because they did not want to offend the general educators. This begs the question as to how general educators can receive the support they desperately report they need from special educators in the current system of collegial silencing, where action is motivated by loyalty? It is unfortunate that collegial loyalty appears to be restraining both groups of teachers from performing their jobs, and regrettably, those most affected are the students.

The paradox does not end here. Participants made recommendations for supports that involve colleagues, such as the creation of professional learning communities, collegial discussions, and mentorship programs despite the fact that the numerous challenges and dilemmas they experience directly stemmed from their co-workers. Those currently using the recommended supports reported them to be extremely valuable, and those who were not urgently wanted them. While many were convinced that these supports would be beneficial, how effective could they be in resolving challenges experienced as a result of colleagues’ actions or behaviors? Given that most of the ethical issues that were either ignored or avoided and those which elicited the greatest stress, dealt with collegial relations, one must consider the supports that could be made available to assist teachers in managing collegial difficulties – an area not addressed by the participants. When making recommendations for supports that could help teachers resolve ethical problems that arise in their work with students who have special needs, none of the participants offered suggestions for ways to cope with or resolve the challenges they experience as a result of other teachers. Perhaps the teachers failed to consider such supports because the topic is “taboo” and discussing colleagues in any way is construed as unprofessional.

Collegiality does not have to be perceived as negative. On the contrary, it could enable teachers to work together to support the students in their classrooms. Yet, when unprofessional
behaviors are eclipsed by the pressures of conformity to the norms of collegiality, when teachers are more concerned about the ways in which they relate to their co-workers than ethical conduct and practice, and when the best interest of the students are not considered, the profession as a whole fails to fulfill its mandate.

**Teaching in a Dilemma-Fraught System**

The inclusion debate has persisted for decades, with some in favor of and others in opposition to this practice. The intention of this thesis is neither to engage in such discourse, nor is the aim to evaluate the inclusive practices of teacher participants and the schools in which they work. Nevertheless, a significant finding that emerged, one which cannot be avoided, is teachers experience many ethical challenges and dilemmas in the context of inclusion. While all of the participants advocate for inclusion, most were concerned that the needs of students with special needs were not being adequately met in inclusive classrooms. Although the concept of inclusion has been adopted and is currently being promoted by educational institutions, existing policies, such as those which define how students are identified, how funding is distributed, and how supports and resources are allocated, continue to categorize and discriminate those with special needs. Similarly, the practices applied in schools and classrooms, including program delivery, the withdrawal of students with special needs from regular classrooms for designated subjects, and even the school staff attitudes and beliefs about disability, sustain exclusive practices to some degree. This systemic problem extends to the professional development of existing teachers and the preparation of new teachers, where insufficient focus is afforded to inclusion and its applications in the classroom. As a result, teachers feel underprepared or unqualified to teach those with diverse learning needs. For this reason, while inclusion is endorsed, one may
argue that the structure of the current educational system prevents it from being fully achieved, and thus inequalities continue to exist. This argument is made in light of the accounts described by teacher participants in this study, as it would appear that students with special needs are physically included in general education classrooms, but they are often denied access to equal educational opportunities. The following section elucidates the ethical problems experienced by participants related to inclusion and the challenges schools face in accommodating students whose learning needs differ from those students in the mainstream population.

There has been a shift in the ways that educational services are delivered to students with special needs. Increasingly, students with special needs are being taught in classrooms alongside their general education peers (McLaughlin & Jordan, 2005; Norwich, 2005; Polat, 2011; Stanovich & Jordan, 2002, 2004). In the province of Ontario, education policies focus on the identification and placement of students, with preference given to placement in general education settings, where appropriate (Ministry of Education, 2000). However, Bunch and Valeo (2004) point out that inclusion is not merely dependent on access but also requires that regular classroom teachers assume “ownership” of all their students, including those with special needs (p. 61). This movement towards inclusion has assigned the primary responsibility of teaching students with special needs to the general educator (Bunch et al., 1997; Bunch & Valeo, 2004). Consequently, Stanovich & Jordan (2004) argue that classroom teachers are instrumental to the success of inclusion; without their dedication, care, and skilled practice, inclusion is likely to fail. Yet, all of the participants reported experiencing numerous ethical problems related to inclusion, with most questioning the fairness, honesty, integrity, care, and equity of practices and programs implemented for students with special needs. Issues raised most frequently highlight the reluctance of colleagues to be inclusive, ineffective programming, the inequitable treatment of
students with special needs, and for some, personal insecurities related to their abilities to meet the individual needs of all of their students within an inclusive classroom. Jessica, a special educator, summarizes the negative perceptions of disability maintained by some of her colleagues:

I introduced myself. They were like, ‘Oh okay. What are you going to be teaching?’ And I said, ‘I am starting the Asperger program.’ They asked, ‘What does that mean? Are we getting the really stupid kids?’ And I said, ‘No. I am teaching students who have been diagnosed with high functioning autism.’ And he asked, ‘Are they being shipped in?’ And I said, ‘No. Believe it or not, but some of them are already in your school. You have probably taught them. You will probably continue to teach them’…. So, I knew right from the start then that I would have resistance from colleagues where I worked. Some of that had manifested in colleagues flat-out refusing to accept my students in their classrooms, where I have had to go to admin and say, ‘Look, this is what the student wants to take, there is room in the class, how do I get the student in this program?’…The most common phrase I hear when I ask about integrating my students is that my student is making the learning environment poisonous…. I have had parents come in to complain that their child is not being granted access.

Unfortunately, several participants described similar situations where teachers refused to accept students with special needs into their general education classrooms, they failed to adequately individualize instruction, or they regarded students with special needs as inferior or deficient. Such opposition is extremely problematic and counterproductive. If teachers are responsible for the success of inclusion but do not support it, how can inclusion be effective? Even for those who promote inclusion, like Donna and Anna, the attainment of successful inclusion remains an
aspiration due to the many challenges that intercept it. Donna explains her frustrations as she
witnesses the neglect of one of her students in the general education classroom where the
programming is not tailored to meet his specific needs:

I have a student who has a learning disability, but he is also gifted. A lot of times in his
regular class… the teacher doesn’t really capitalize on that [his giftedness]…. he is not
paid attention to, he just lies around on the couch in the classroom and does not really do
a whole lot… he is not really being included.

In some instances, the resistance towards truly including students with special needs is so blatant
that it comes across as mockery. For instance, in Anna’s case, a colleague once ridiculed her
efforts to teach a student with a disability:

I saw the resource teacher teaching the student incorrectly, I went over and I tried to help
her. I told her that I could explain it if she wanted and she said, ‘Oh, it doesn’t matter for
these kids. They’ll never get it anyways. It doesn’t matter how you teach it, right or
wrong, they will never get it anyways.’ So that kind of attitude is troublesome. The
teachers don’t care, it seems, whether the students learn. I have also seen that same
teacher gives students the answers because, as she explained it to me, ‘These students
will never learn it, so we might as well get it done for them so that they can go back to
their regular classroom.’ I would sit there and try to explain the work to the students and
she would laugh at me and tell me that I was wasting my time.

How can such practices and attitudes serve students with special needs? Many of the participants
think that they cannot and do not. Ethically speaking, teachers were most troubled by the many
ways in which students with special needs were disadvantaged and not afforded equitable
opportunities to achieve success. It was also the main reason provided by participants for
contemplating resignation because they thought that they were not meeting their professional obligations as a result of their own capacities or the practices of others.

As evident, the ethical issues that participants reported experiencing in the context of inclusion can be attributed to the attitudes and beliefs of teachers towards disability and inclusion, the availability of effective supports and training, and the existing structure of the schooling system. In regards to the last point, this includes the ways in which disability is defined, how funding is determined, where students are placed, and the manner in which programs are delivered. Interestingly, many of the ethical challenges identified by teachers in this study correspond with the variables identified by Stanovich and Jordan (2002) based on empirical data, which were found to influence the success of inclusion:

The most important variables in the framework are those associated with the classroom teacher. What this research is demonstrating is that there are three major teacher variables and one school variable that provide the key to successful inclusion (as measured by student outcomes):

1. Teacher beliefs held about students with disabilities and their inclusion in general education classrooms.
2. Teachers’ sense of efficacy.
3. The classroom teacher’s repertoire of teaching behaviors.
4. The school norm variable that is a composite measure of the beliefs held by the principal and the other teachers in the school. (p. 175)

According to Stanovich and Jordan (2002) these variables are interrelated as teachers who have access to adequate supports and resources are more likely to be successful at including students with special needs into their general education classrooms. Consequently, this raises their sense
of efficacy about working with students who have disabilities, in turn, making them more inclined to practice inclusion in the future. Regrettably, Stanovich and Jordan (2002) propose that the cycle can also be negative, leading teachers to be more dismissive of and resistant towards inclusion, as was often the case in the accounts described by participants in this study. The four variables identified by Stanovich and Jordan (2002) will next be discussed interchangeably in the context of my findings. Teachers are accountable for eliminating restrictions to learning for students with special needs by facilitating their full and meaningful participation in general education classrooms. Unfortunately, the personal accounts provided by the twelve teacher participants in this study raise questions pertaining to the degree of inclusivity that is effectively occurring in many schools and classrooms. Granted, the focus of this study is on ethical challenges and dilemmas faced by teachers in their work with students with special needs and the fact that most of the data consists of accounts which troubled participants – there may very well be numerous teachers who successfully practice inclusion. However, the findings reveal that some teachers do indeed struggle to include students with special needs in general education classrooms, oppose inclusion, fail to provide equitable learning opportunities to students with special needs, and sadly, believe that students with special needs are unable to learn.

Stanovich and Jordan (1998, 2004) suggest that support for inclusion varies significantly among teachers. As discussed in the review of the literature, they report two distinct sets of beliefs about disability, that which is pathognomonic and that which is interventionist. When pathognomonic beliefs were prevalent among the co-workers discussed by the participants in my study, they were often the source of ethical tensions reported. The colleagues who held such beliefs were frequently described as absolving themselves of all responsibilities related to the
teaching and learning of students who have special needs. For example, Jessica recounts the mindsets of some of her colleagues, “I’m going to teach all the kids who can learn, and the kids who can’t learn, I’m just going to send them to the SERT [special education resource teacher], or kick them out to the resource room, or put them in the hall, or get them away.” To add, Emily reiterates the same dismissive attitude in her colleagues: “Some just don’t believe that the kids with special needs should be included in the regular classroom. They’ll say things like, ‘I don’t know why they put Johnny in here. Why is he here?’ It’s very hard to convince them that there are still things that Johnny can learn in their classroom.” Participants who made similar observations felt that such a stance of colleagues on disability is unethical as it disadvantages students by depriving them of learning opportunities.

Consistent with these findings, research confirms that there is a strong association between teachers’ notions of disability and subsequently, the profound influence that they exert on their teaching practices within inclusive classrooms (Jordan, 2007; Jordan & Stanovich, 2001, 2003; Stanovich & Jordan, 1998). Those who hold pathognomonic beliefs exhibit significantly fewer instructional interactions with students to promote learning and, hence, impact the students’ achievement levels (Jordan et al., 1997). Participants in my study described ethical problems in which teachers resisted inclusion, failed to make necessary accommodations and modifications, maintained biases and prejudices about disability, and mistreated students with special needs. In essence, they did not act in the best interests of the students. However, Slee (2011) notes that teachers alone cannot be faulted for their views and behaviors:

I do not blame classroom teachers, as they have been encouraged to acquire limited and particular knowledge about disability and disablement and are constantly persuaded to defer and refer to the experts. If we live and are schooled in artificial enclaves our
knowledge of difference is predictably limited. Our anxieties and difficulties with difference are correspondingly abundant. (pp. 123-4)

Teachers’ beliefs about disability are shaped by their experiences. The empirical work of Stanovich and Jordan (1998, 2002, 2004) reports that such experiences are influenced by the level of resources and supports available, teaching efficacy, and the collective attitudes and beliefs of the principal and staff.

The lack of resources, supports, and training available to them were the reasons that participants identified as being predominantly responsible for their struggles with inclusion. Teachers attributed their inability to individualize instruction effectively to time constraints, limited accessibility to necessary tools, support personnel, and experts, and insufficient knowledge and skills — all of which are required in order to design and deliver a program that can best address the needs of their students. Participants reported that while they strive to provide each student with meaningful learning opportunities, they simply do not have the time. As Daniella explains, “Teachers want to have children be successful, whether they have special needs or they don’t. But I am only one person. I am not super human. I can only do what my limits are,” and they lack the support. Samantha concurs: “There was one LST [Learning Support Teacher], a handful of EAs [Education Assistants], and we can only put them in so many classrooms working with so many children. And the fact is that the need exceeded what we had… If there were more supports in place, there could be more done.” Moreover, teachers do not feel prepared to handle some of the difficulties they encounter in teaching students with special needs. Hillary laments:

I have no idea how to help them… Yeah they’ll give me a book… I’m pretty sure they don’t give a doctor a book on how to do heart surgery. Yet, you are expecting this legal
document [IEP] to be implemented and not providing me with any skills… Because I care about those students and I try everything that I can and I spend a lot of time with them, but I feel that I am spending a lot of time that is not well spent because I just don’t have the strategies, I don’t have resources.

Many participants worried about the well-being of students with special needs, feeling that their individual needs were often neglected, as a result of the teachers’ perceived or actual inabilities to teach in inclusive classrooms. These are essentially ethical concerns as they are based on the principles of care, fairness, and equity. Such concerns are justifiable, as research affirms that the success of students in inclusive classrooms is dependent upon effective teaching practices and the competency of teachers to make adaptations and modifications (Jordan, 2001; McLaughlin & Jordan, 2005; Stanovich & Jordan 2002, 2004). Unfortunately, as argued by McLaughlin and Jordan (2005), “few teachers are equipped and willing to provide the degree of individualization and intensive instruction that is needed in a modern and diverse classroom…leaving largely under-served both classroom teachers and their students with learning difficulties” (pp. 99). In their empirical study of teachers’ perceptions and in-service needs concerning inclusion, Buell et al. (1999) found that overall teachers do not feel adequately prepared to teach in inclusive classrooms. Areas where there is a need for training, as identified by the teachers, include: program modification and accommodation, assessment, behavior management, development of IEPs, and use of assistive technologies. Furthermore, the majority of those involved in Buell et al.’s (1999) study reported that they do not have access to the supports and resources necessary to successfully include students with special needs into their general education classrooms. Similarly, Leatherman (2007), in examining teachers’ attitudes towards inclusion, revealed that while teachers are positive about inclusion, most believe that
they need more training in inclusive education, specifically that which is “hands-on.” All agreed that the support from administrators, peers, and experts was a significant factor in the degree of success they experienced in including students with special needs into their general education classrooms. In fact, research in inclusive education indicate that lack of training, lack of support and resources, lack of administrative support, and gaps in the collaboration between general and special education continue to be raised as serious concerns by regular classroom teachers (Bennett, 2009; Bunch et al., 1997; Silverman, 2007; Slee, 2006; Waldron et al., 1999; Weiner, 2003; Woloshyn, Bennett, & Berrill, 2003). By extension, these concerns relate to the effectiveness of inclusion in schools and classrooms. Teacher participants in my study described the lack of support, resources, skills, and training in their own practice as ethical problems because they felt that these shortfalls or their perceived inabilities thwarted their efforts to meet the needs of the diverse learners in their classrooms. Accordingly, they equated their inadequacies to the disadvantages experienced by students. As a consequence, they believed that fundamental issues of fairness, care, integrity, and equity were compromised in their practice.

Teachers are increasingly overwhelmed by the demands placed on them. They are required to provide stimulating leaning experiences; make accommodations and modifications; participate in the development of the Individual Education Plan; advocate for their students with special needs, and balance the needs of all the learners in their classrooms – all of which have been shown to present challenges for participants. Needless to say, these heavy expectations are daunting for the individual teacher who additionally, must meet other work related obligations. As such, Stanovich and Jordan (2004) suggest that teachers should not feel that they must do everything alone. The success of inclusion is contingent on collaboration:
Accepting responsibility for including students with disabilities does mean: being a member of a team, being part of a collaborative school culture, collaborating with colleagues, partnering with parents, knowing when and who to ask for help, knowing where to go for and how to get resources, and knowing the kinds of questions to ask that will help you be an effective teacher for all your students. (p. 179)

Collaboration appears to be a significant factor in teacher efficacy. A survey conducted for the National Center for Education Statistics by Parsad et al. (2001) suggests that engagement in collaborative activities elevates the teachers’ sense of effectiveness and level of preparation in managing classroom demands.

Despite the value of training, support, resources, and collaboration for teachers working in inclusive classrooms, participants in my study reported that they are often alone in coping with or resolving the ethical problems they encounter. Many revealed that they do not have access to effective supports, resources, and professional development opportunities. They do not know where to ask for help, and they do not perceive colleagues to be an effective form of support, aside from their ability to listen and empathize. Patricia explains:

I would confide in her [grade partner] about it and people in the same position. And they would sympathize and offer advice. But, for the more serious stuff, I wouldn’t really hear anything more than, ‘I know. We can only try our best and that’s all we can do.’

Hillary has had similar experiences in her attempts to seek advice from colleagues:

I will often go and vent with the special ed teacher, who listens and offers what advice she can, but I mean, she really can’t do much about it. And I think that most often, it comes out as pretty frustrated shoptalk in the staff room when you are just like, ‘Oh my God!’
Nevertheless, in their recommendations of supports which they think would be beneficial in their management of the ethical challenges that arise in their practice, many of the teachers identified activities related to collaboration with colleagues, such as professional learning communities or mentorship. There appears to be a contradiction between the level and effectiveness of support received from colleagues and the recommendations the participants made for future supports. Given this inconsistency, one can only speculate that while teachers perceived collegial support and collaboration as integral to the success of inclusion and valuable in assisting them to cope with and resolve ethical issues, most did not experience such advantages in their own practice.

In this study, most of the teachers support inclusion, recognizing that it is equitable; yet, based on reports of their own practice or observations of their colleagues, it would appear that most struggle to fully and meaningfully include students with special needs in their general education classrooms. This begs the question – if inclusion is supported, why is it not practiced? Drawing on the assertions of Stanovich and Jordan (2002, 2004) one can postulate that teachers, like those participating in my study, aspire to practice inclusion but without the opportunity to collaborate with colleagues, draw on supports and resources, and employ necessary knowledge and skills, they falter. Donna, an experienced special educator, summarizes this reality:

I think with a lot of these teachers, it’s not that they do not want to do it [include students with special needs], they don’t know how to do it. They haven’t taken special ed or went to workshops on differentiation… And even if they have, they just don’t have that knowledge. And nobody has said to them, ‘You know this would really help’ or ‘let’s do this together…” [As a result] teachers get very frustrated… some of them just end up saying, they drop their hands and say, ‘This is how it is.’ And others keep trying.
Deficiencies in resources, supports, and training sustain some teachers’ negative experiences within the inclusive classroom, which in turn limits the degree of success and professional competency they feel. A manifestation of this outcome is a sense of apprehension as expressed by several of the participants. “I can’t do it” Samantha states, “I don’t know how to meet her needs,” Hillary maintains, “the biggest challenges I have with that whole thing, is not necessarily with them, but with me. With my teaching practices. How can I be better?... I know that I could be doing so much more [crying]” Patricia agonizes, and “I don’t know how to resolve the problem, but it always makes me feel awful. And I know that I don’t deal with it in the best way,” Anna worries. Low teaching efficacy leads teachers to believe that they cannot practice inclusion, and worse, it causes resentment in some.

Jordan and Stanovich (2002, 2004) contend that that teacher efficacy is associated with the teacher’s level of commitment to inclusion as well as his or her attitudes and beliefs about disability. Moreover, efficacy influences the level of responsibility, and subsequently, the role that teachers take in the teaching of students with diverse learning needs. Teachers who see themselves as successful feel more responsible for the students and are more likely to seek support in order to improve their teaching practices. The inaccessibility of adequate supports, resources, and training for teachers leads to low success and therefore low teacher efficacy. Consequently, teachers, like the participants in this study, judge themselves to be ill prepared to teach students with special needs and in some cases, as described by participants, even resist inclusion altogether.

Jordan (2001) proposes that the “best investment of resources is to support and enhance the ability of teachers to respond to the diverse needs of all students” (p. 357). This assertion is reinforced by other works in the field which have established a positive correlation between the
success teachers experience in inclusive classrooms, the effectiveness of their practices, and accessibility to support, resources, and training (Bennett, 2009; Buell et al, 1999; Bunch et al., 1997; Leatherman, 2007; Silverman, 2007; Slee, 2006; Waldron et al., 1999; Weiner, 2003; Woloshyn et al., 2003). But investing in resources, support, and training for teachers is not sufficient for effective inclusion, for the current system of schooling also needs to change.

Several participants identified a significant theory to practice gap in the way that inclusion is implemented in schools. In 2005, the Ministry of Education in Ontario made a commitment to establish accessible learning opportunities for all students in the regular classroom. Yet, based on their individual experiences, some teachers felt that many schools and classrooms continue to practice exclusion. Patricia discusses the disconnect she observes between the concept of inclusion and the realities at her school:

Is this just superficial or do I really espouse these ideas of inclusion…. we have one group of kids that are, I guess, what you call high needs kids. And they have their own special class and these kids stay in that class for the duration of the time that they are in middle school, they never move anywhere else. And so, I am thinking to myself, inclusivity? Yeah, they are at the school with other kids, but they have their own class…. I don’t know if there are two messages being sent, or multiple messages being sent to the kids when we talk about inclusivity… We have kids clustered in the regular classrooms. For example, I have the cluster of IEP [Individual Education Plan] kids. So, they all know that they are in that group. We have a cluster of gifted kids. We also cluster them in another class, all within regular classrooms. And then, we also cluster kids who are ESL [English as a Second Language], they are in another class. So, we have these clusters of specialized groups in regular classrooms. And each class has their own number. So, any
classes ending with a 3, you know that those are classes with the IEP kids. Classes with a 1 are the gifted. Classes with an 8 or a 7, those are usually FI [French Immersion] kids who are gifted. The kids know… And the kids understand that they are being slotted. I don’t think that we are doing a very good job of being inclusive.

Other teachers agree, reporting that students with special needs are often placed in general education classrooms where their needs are not adequately met. Many are seated in a designated corner of the classroom. They are not fully involved in the learning and social environment. They receive limited attention from the classroom teacher. Their instruction is delivered by educational assistants. Their IEPs are not followed, they are not provided with the necessary accommodations and modifications. In some instances, they are ignored, disregarded, and dismissed.

Given the concerns raised by participants, one must seriously question the claim that inclusion is an attribute of Ontario’s schools. Ministry documents are using the term inclusion and it is the preferred placement in legislation – but how that is implemented into practice may fall short for some schools. The Ministry of Education in Ontario, its school boards and schools are striving to embrace inclusion; however, the extant translation of the policies into practice, such as those related to the placement of students, distribution of supports and resources, and the delivery of programs, may serve to impede the full inclusion of students with special needs into general education classrooms. Inclusion continues to be defined by the placement of a student as opposed to his or her program, as explained by McLaughlin and Jordan (2005): “the child’s program and the services once in the placement do not need to be specified” (p. 93). As such, once a student’s placement is determined by the IPRC, there is no requirement for specification as to how the learning should take place, how and when it should be assessed or evaluated, or
what specialized resources, supports, or services are required – programming is primarily left to the discretion of the classroom teacher (Jordan, 2001).

There seems to be an assumption that if a student is placed in a general education classroom, inclusion has been achieved, irrespective of the accessibility to learning opportunities and level of participation for that student within the respective classroom. This presumption conflicts with the true intentions of inclusion which according to Bennett (2009), “… relates not just to access but to active and productive involvement” (p. 2). Inclusion in Ontario is viewed as the location of the student, not as the programs and services received, and this is reflected in the perceptions and practices of some schools, their personnel, and teachers, as described by participants. Hillary, along with some of the other teachers, disagrees with this stance, “’We must include all children into this classroom,’ and no support comes with it… just because you plop them into my room does not mean anything. And so many students with special needs are suffering. So many of them are not reaching their potential.” Other participants, especially those working in special education positions, such as Donna, Samantha, Emily, and Daniel, share this perspective. They describe students with special needs as being confined to a corner of the classroom, given different, and at times, meaningless activities to occupy them and keep them “quiet.” Students are disengaged in their learning: they are physically placed in the classroom but in a sense, they are distanced. Inclusion that is solely focused on placement fails to support both teachers and students. Moreover, it seems to lead to decreased teacher efficacy, at times resistance, and that which was most troubling for teacher participants, inequity for students.

Another factor which serves to impede the success of inclusion is the continued practice of the pullout or withdrawal model for delivery of special education services. Within this model, students with special needs are removed from the general education classroom to receive
specialized support, in core subjects like English and math from a special education teacher in a separate physical environment. In other words, students are not included but rather isolated. The continued use of such a practice, as argued by Slee (2011), does not allow for full inclusion, as it maintains elements of the traditional exclusionary model of special education:

Full inclusion is, however, a spurious proposition. Cascade models as devised and legitimated in the rationality of traditional special education reinforce the conditional tenure of the defective child as they are granted dispensation to be present for selected activities and classes. One is included or one is not included. Fractions of inclusion time or place are vulgar fractions. (p. 117)

With the exception of Emily, none of the participants in my study made reference to the problems they experience specifically as a result of the pull-out model. However, many including those in special education roles, provided accounts of ethical challenges they encountered in the context of inclusion which involves the withdrawal of students from the general education classroom. Issues raised include loss of valuable instructional time in the general education classroom, social stigmatization, and the removal of accountability for the learning of students with special needs from the general educator. While the pullout model allows for specialized support, it replaces one learning opportunity with another, as opposed to providing both simultaneously, as Emily reports:

The students may need to be taken out of their classroom for something and they miss what is happening in the regular classroom. It’s not really fair to the student. We are supporting them in one way and then disadvantaging them in another way all at the same time. We should have programming for all the students at the same time so all the students are getting the same type of learning opportunities.
Upon their return to the general education classroom, teachers must compensate for the learning the students missed, which places them at a significant disadvantage. Additionally, if group work is involved, the returning students must be incorporated into a group and be informed of and catch up to the group’s progress. The withdrawal of students with special needs emphasizes differences in abilities can lead to bullying and social rejection, and in turn cause emotional harm to the student as demonstrated by Donna’s experience:

Some of the boys in his class are teasing him about… having that withdrawal… But, it’s very difficult because students will just say things, even if you speak to them. It’s bullying basically…. I try to make it a very safe place for him, but it’s hard when you have all these things working against you.

Segregating students into two distinct categories, those in general and those in special education programs, perpetuates a negative representation of disability which influences the ways students with special needs are viewed and treated by their peers as well as teachers. Moreover, the removal of students from the general education classroom for core subjects shifts the accountability for the learning of students with special needs away from the general educator. Comments like, “Can you just take Mary and John and work with them somewhere else?” (Emily) or “This is what we are working on, go help them” (Jessica) confirm that some general education teachers believe that teaching students with special needs is the responsibility of special educators. This assertion corresponds with observations made by Stanovich and Jordan (2004) who suggest that, “in many schools and school districts [the] lines of separate responsibility are still being drawn… General education classroom teachers still perceive students with disabilities as requiring special skills that they do not possess” (p. 176). Such a mindset means that general educators may be less inclined to develop an inclusive curricular
program, interact with students with special needs, and seek support and professional
development to improve their skills as they see these to be outside the domain of their teaching
obligations. Full inclusion will be difficult to achieve as long as students are being withdrawn
from the general education classroom. The pull-out model appears to work against the principles
of inclusion since it fails to create equitable learning opportunities for students with special
needs. It disadvantages them socially and academically, and it provides justification for their
disregard and dismissal.

It is imperative to reveal and recognize the ongoing limitations of the current educational
system, teacher beliefs about disability and their attitudes towards inclusion, teachers’ sense of
efficacy in working with students who have special needs, as well as their pedagogies and
practices. All of these variables, based on the accounts of the participants in my study, appear to
be less than conducive to the teaching and learning of students with diverse needs in fully
inclusive classrooms. This however, is not a problem unique to Ontario, as scholars
internationally have commented on the barriers established by school systems which hinder the
implementation and success of full inclusion (Connor & Ferri, 2007; Nes & Stromstad, 2006;
Slee, 2011; Wedell, 2008). Connor and Ferri (2007) argue that the system must change before
inclusion can become a reality:

General education classes are not always perceived as adequately prepared to meet the
needs of diverse learners. The ‘readiness’ of teachers in particular is often claimed to be
lacking… Although we most often talk about isolation in special education, alienation
can occur for disabled students in general education settings… Thus, simply allowing
students to be present and visible is not the same as promoting interaction or integration.
Anything short of full and meaningful participation, which will require fundamental changes in general education, violates the principles of inclusion. (pp. 71-2)

Given this discussion, it is not surprising that teachers in this study experience ethical challenges in the context of inclusion. How can one be just, equitable, and caring when a system and some of those who work within it continue to practice exclusion? As stated by Slee (2011), “to tolerate is not to include” (p. 118). Are we truly inclusive or merely accepting the physical presence of students with special needs in general education classrooms?

All of the teacher participants described ethical tensions occurring in the context of inclusion. Most were concerned that the needs of students with special needs were not being adequately met in inclusive classrooms and attributed the ineffectiveness to the attitudes and beliefs of teachers towards disability, teaching practices, teacher efficacy, the level of resources and supports available, the support of the principal, and training and professional development. Participants believed that inclusion related dilemmas were ethical in nature as they disadvantaged students and established inequalities. Principles of fairness, care, and justice were compromised, resulting in feelings of anxiety and stress for the teachers. While the causes of the ethical challenges were variable, most could be ascribed to a system within which the established policies and practices fail to foster the full inclusion of students who have special needs.

**Concluding Remarks**

This chapter provides a discussion of the major findings of the study. Participants, in their daily work, regularly experience ethical challenges and dilemmas. Those which compromised principles of care, equity, and fairness elicited the greatest concern for both general and special educators. Teachers disclosed feelings of anxiety and guilt in situations where the best interests
of students were not served, and some even contemplated leaving the profession. Unfortunately, most of the reported ethical challenges remained unresolved; in fact, many were avoided or ignored, and this left participants despondent as often their personal sense of ethics was jeopardized.

One of the most burdensome ethical challenges dealt with relations with colleagues. Conflicts with other teachers were never addressed, regardless of the harm inflicted on the students. Participants preferred cordiality over confrontation with their co-workers. Some discussed the regulations established by federations and unions which deter, and one may argue, prevent teachers from reporting a colleague whom they believe is behaving unethically. Ironically, despite the problems instigated by co-workers, the teachers made recommendations for supports that involved colleagues, including the development of professional learning communities, collegial discussions and mentorship programs.

Another significant worry for participants dealt with tensions which occurred in the context of inclusion. Many perceived there to be a gap between the concept of inclusion and the realities of schools and classrooms, where students with special needs are not afforded the opportunity to fully and meaningfully participate and learn in general education. Instead, those with disabilities are often neglected, ignored, and excluded – a condition which teachers felt was extremely problematic. The unwillingness of teachers to fully include students with special needs into general education classrooms can be attributed to the lack of resources, supports, and training available. Participants believed that they were unprepared to deal with the challenges of teaching in an inclusive classroom, and most reported feeling alone, as support was limited.

Moreover, the structure of the school system continues to support exclusive teaching practices by focusing on placement as opposed to programming for students with special needs.
and withdrawing students from the general education classroom for delivery of special education services. Overall, participants supported inclusion and they wanted to provide students with special needs equitable learning opportunities; however, most indicated that without adequate training in special education, inclusion is all but an aspiration, not a reality.
Chapter 7: Conclusion

Inclusion is… a necessary condition of fostering equality of educational opportunity under its democratic interpretation. Inclusion is obviously not a sufficient condition. Mere inclusion, for instance, physically including children with disabilities in regular classrooms but otherwise excluding them from meaningful participation, can do little to promote equality of educational opportunity. (Howe, 1996, p. 57)

Overview of the Study

This chapter provides an overview of the study by revisiting its research questions, purpose, and major findings. The significance of the research to the fields of professional ethics and special and inclusive education are discussed in the context of the findings. Finally, recommendations for future research are presented.

The first chapter offered an introduction to the work and established a conceptual foundation for the research. Rooted in non-relativist philosophical perspectives on applied professional ethics and the moral nature of teaching as well as special education definitions as outlined in the Special Education policies within Ontario, it investigated principles of fairness, honesty, kindness, empathy, respect and integrity (Campbell, 2003, pg. 2) as they influence the teaching of students with special needs. Furthermore, it identified the rationale and significance of the study and provided a background of the researcher.

The second chapter reviewed literature relevant to the study, examined theoretical and empirical works in professional ethics, the moral and ethical dimensions in teaching, as well as salient issues in inclusive and special education. A significant emphasis in the review is on ethical dilemmas in teaching, both from a general and special education perspective, as this is the
primary focus of the research.

Chapter three presented the research design, rationale, participant selection, data collection, and analysis. Data collection and analysis occurred in three stages, with 49 participants completing the web-based survey, 12 teachers interviewed in the second stage, and 6 teachers interviewed in the third stage. Survey data were primarily used as a means of participant selection for the interviews. As such, analysis of and reporting of data is focused on the two interview stages, although some of the survey data was outlined in the methodology to establish the criteria upon which interview questions were developed.

Next, chapters four and five reported the research findings from the interview stages of the data collection. Findings were organized according to major and sub-themes that emerged from the data. Chapter four concentrated on the ethical tensions and dilemmas experienced or observed by participants. Included were accounts described by participants which were not actual dilemmas because they did not involve a choice or decision, rather they were difficulties, problems, or beliefs about others’ actions and perspectives on teaching students with special needs. These situations were incorporated in the findings as they represent the challenges experienced by teachers based on their perceptions. Moreover, some of these challenges lend themselves to discussions of the ethical principles addressed in the study and may lead to ethical dilemmas. The fifth chapter presented coping and resolution strategies that teachers use to manage ethical issues in their practice, available supports, as well as the participants’ recommendations for supports.

The sixth chapter discussed the major findings of the study in the context of the theoretical and empirical literature. It is organized into three sections which correspond to the
conclusions drawn. The first addressed the ethical imperatives raised most frequently by participants with respect to the ethical tensions and dilemmas they experience. Second, ethical difficulties experienced by teachers occurring in the context of relations with colleagues were emphasized. Last, issues within inclusion and inclusive teaching practices were considered in the current schooling system.

The case of Sarah (Kieltyka, 2006a) described in the first chapter was the inspiration for this research. Her experience, as a student with special needs who was treated differently from the mainstream population due to her disability, compels one to raise questions pertaining to issues of fairness, justice, equity, and respect. What were the perceptions of Sarah’s teacher, who, despite her better judgment, was required to implement a program and deliver a consequence for Sarah’s non-compliance merely because it was a school policy? The teacher felt an obligation to her student, yet she fulfilled the demands of the principal even though it conflicted with her own conscience and personal ethics. Was the school intentionally enforcing an ethically questionable practice? Based on my knowledge of the school and its administration, I would presume not. Nevertheless, the school promoted a program and enforced a punishment of a student who identified the injustice, completely unaware, it would seem, of the ethical implications of their actions.

Given the movement towards inclusive schooling (Bennett, 2009; Burge et al., 2008; Lipsky & Gartner, 1998; Lupart, 2000; McLaughlin & Jordan, 2005; Meyen et al., 1993; Ministry of Education, 2005; Norwich, 2005; Polat, 2011; Stainback & Stainback, 1992; Stanovich & Jordan, 2002, 2004; Statistics Canada, 2001; Waldron et al., 1999), Sarah’s case led me to consider the experiences and practices of teachers who work with students who have special needs. Surely Sarah’s teacher is not the only one who faces such complexities. In my own
practice, as a substitute teacher, I had the opportunity to visit many schools and classrooms. As I became more attentive to issues of ethical significance, specifically with respect to the teaching and learning of students with special needs, I realized that ethical tensions occur regularly in many different contexts.

Accordingly, this empirical study examines the ethical challenges and dilemmas faced by classroom teachers in relation to inclusion. The qualitative methodology is used as the individual perspectives and experiences of teachers are sought in order to gain a deeper understanding of ethical issues that arise in practice. Research questions addressed include:

1) What are the ethical challenges and dilemmas that teachers experience in relation to their work with students who have special needs in the context of inclusion?

2) How do teachers cope with/resolve such ethical challenges and dilemmas?

3) What supports or services exist to assist teachers in dealing with the ethical challenges that arise in their work with students who have special needs?

4) What supports do teachers recommend that would help them cope with or resolve such ethical challenges?

Major findings generated by the data conclude that teachers regularly experience ethical challenges and dilemmas in their work with students who have special needs. These confront teachers within the context of situations they interpret to be ethically problematic and which stir in them feelings of anxiety and guilt. In essence, ethical challenges and dilemmas, as reported in this study, are experiences that tugged at the teachers’ conscience and left them feeling uncertain and uneasy.
In addressing the first research question, such difficulties primarily deal with issues of care, equity, and fairness where teachers were concerned about meeting the best interests of their students. Often, participants were unsure as to how they could meet competing demands in their practice, specifically in relation to accommodations and modifications, assessment and evaluation, discipline, distribution of time and resources, and the rights of the individual versus the rights of the group. While these are essential practices within the teaching profession, participants reported that their use with students who have special needs elicited greater uncertainty and doubt, as there was less direction, more subjectivity, and a substantial potential for error. The teachers stated that ethical complexities arose due to the lack of supports and resources available to them and their students as well as inadequate training in inclusive education making facilitation of learning difficult.

Embedded throughout the accounts described by teacher participants are ethical problems that occurred as a result of relations with colleagues: colleagues who were unwilling to include students with special needs into their general education classrooms; those whose teaching practices were not inclusive, and those who maintained biased attitudes and beliefs about disability troubled participants. Teachers working in special education positions, in particular, struggle with these issues as, due to the nature of their job, they work directly with colleagues and many feel accountable to act as advocates for the students with special needs. The main dilemma, regarding colleagues, for both general and special educators, is whether or not to attend to the problems. Unfortunately, none of the participants confronted their colleagues to address the ethical difficulties, electing instead to avoid or ignore problems for fear of negative consequences to themselves. Such a response can be attributed to the culture of loyalty (Campbell, 1996, 2003; Colnerud, 1994, 1997, 2006; Tirri & Husu, 2002) as well as rules and
regulations enforced by federations and unions which make it unfavorable to report or criticize another teacher.

Participants also experience many ethical challenges in the context of inclusion. While all of the teachers support inclusion, many are concerned that the needs of students with special needs are not being met in the general education classroom. Many suggested that students are physically included in classrooms, but often denied access to equitable educational opportunities stemming from the reluctance of teachers to be inclusive, ineffective programming, and a significant lack of adequate supports and resources for both the students and the teachers. In fact, a shortage of supports, resources, and training is the primary reason reported by participants for their struggles with inclusion, a finding supported by the literature (Buell et al., 1999; Jordan, 2001; Leatherman, 2007; Lipsky & Gartner, 1998; McGinnis, 2002; McLaughlin & Jordan, 2005; Menzies & Falvey, 2008; Meyen et al., 1993; Stanovich & Jordan, 2002; Waldron et al., 1999).

The Ontario Ministry of Education is striving to encourage the profession to embrace inclusion, but the translation of existing policies into practice make the effective practice of inclusion difficult for teachers. The current school system is structured in a manner which identifies students based on rigid definitions of exceptionality and distributes resources and supports accordingly (Jordan, 2007, 2001, 2007; Lupart, 2000; Ministry of Education, 2001). Furthermore, there is a limited focus on the preparation of in-service and pre-service teachers in the areas of inclusive and special education. Consequently, teachers lack the knowledge, skills, supports, and resources to meet the range of learners in their classrooms, which hinders the success of inclusion. While qualitative survey data were not reported in this study, the statement of this survey participant has been included due to its relevance in encapsulating the perceptions
of most of the teacher participants:

Educators have a huge task that gets larger each year. There are fewer resources, yet greater expectations demanded of all teacher and school support staff. Without proper teacher education/experience it becomes very difficult to support students with needs beyond what the regular educator has previously encountered.

Teachers have a significant role to play in the success of inclusion. Fullan (1991) states, “Educational change depends on what teachers think and do – it’s as simple and complex as that” (p. 107). How can we expect teachers to serve the best interests of all their students when their needs are not being met and when they themselves are not supported? Without systemic changes, the attitudes and beliefs that teachers hold about disability, their sense of efficacy in teaching students with special needs, and in turn teaching practices in inclusive classrooms may not improve. Change is necessary as the current schooling system, for the most part, hinders teachers from providing equitable learning opportunities for students with special needs.

I believe, however, that this does not mean we should give up on the idea of inclusion or even assume that inclusion will not work. What it does mean is that we must shift our way of thinking and doing: teachers need support, resources, and training, they need to experience success in teaching a diverse range of learners. The system must be restructured to focus on program as opposed to placement, where curriculum and instructional plans are suited to the student’s individual needs and funding is distributed accordingly to promote academic and social development. In addition, teachers should be provided with the required supports, resources, and skills so that they may fulfill their responsibilities to serve the best interests of each student in their classrooms regardless of ability. McLaughlin and Jordan (2005) provide insights into the
As the Canadian understanding of inclusive education evolves, there are major challenges to creating a truly inclusive and seamless educational system that is designed for the needs of all students. Among the challenges is the need to create a continuum of curriculum and instructional supports within schools that can be provided without concern for labels or location of delivery, but which protects basic equity rights for students with disabilities on an individual needs basis. (p. 99)

Inclusivity must become the norm. It must become the culture and thread of the school environment in order for it to be meaningful and effective, thus serving the needs of all students equitably, regardless of ability.

Teachers spoke at length about the ethical challenges that they experience in their practice. However, in regards to the second research question, they were often unsure as to how these issues could be managed. Participants attempted to act in the best interest of their students; yet, when it came to dilemmas with colleagues, most refused to address the problems. Generally, teachers felt alone in their decision-making and they did not believe that they made the best choices much of the time. Given the complexity of their reported ethical challenges and dilemmas, many of the teachers described feelings of inadequacy and guilt. This was most frequently the case when participants believed that they were not meeting the needs and serving the best interests of their students. Many blamed themselves for their perceived failures to ineffectively cope with or resolve ethical issues that arose in their work with students who have special needs. Some reached a point where the feelings became so overwhelming that they contemplated leaving the profession.

In response to the third research question, the data suggest that supports to assist teachers
in dealing with the ethical tensions they experience in their work with students who have special needs are lacking. Participants indicated that they were often alone in managing issues, relying on their personal convictions and upbringing to help them make decisions. Of the supports that are currently available, participants consider them to be ineffective and inadequate. Consequently, the majority of ethical issues participants experienced were left unresolved. Interestingly, although all of the teachers reported experiencing ethical dilemmas as a result of colleagues, many turned to other teachers for support. Those whom the participants relied on, however, consisted of colleagues whom they considered to be trustworthy and those whose teaching philosophies were consistent with their own.

Finally, addressing the fourth research question, teachers offered recommendations which they believe would help them to cope with or resolve ethical challenges. Ironically, many of the recommendations for supports made by the participants involved colleagues. Teachers requested collaborative, frequent, and long-term professional development opportunities where they could discuss ethical problems with co-workers. None of the participants considered how this form of support would be beneficial in assisting them to manage difficulties that arise as a result of their colleagues. Overall, the recommendations made by participants focused on professional development and training in special and inclusive education teaching practices. Suggestions included the establishment of professional learning communities through collegial discussion and mentorship programs. Presumably, the teachers believed that if they gained further knowledge and skills in special and inclusive education, some of the ethical dilemmas they currently face in their practice may be diminished.
Implications for Policy and Practice and Future Research

The work of a classroom teacher is challenging and complex. There is sufficient evidence to suggest that ethical dilemmas frequently occur in the context of professional practice (Campbell, 1996, 2003; Colnerud, 1994, 1997, 2006; Courtade & Ludlow, 2008; Howe & Miramontes, 1991, 1992; Husu, 2001; Lyons, 1990; Rogers & Webb, 1991; Strike & Soltis, 1992; Tirri, 1999; Tirri & Husu, 2002). The study of such dilemmas, to date, has focused primarily on general education. Yet, scholars suggest that ethical issues are pertinent to the field of special and inclusive education (Berkeley & Ludlow, 2008; Bucholz et al., 2007; Courtade & Ludlow, 2008; Fiedler & Van Haren, 2009; Howe, 1996; Paul et al., 2001; Rude & Whetstone, 2008), especially given that the roles and responsibilities of regular classroom teachers have changed substantially with reforms to special education. Unfortunately empirical research in the area of special and inclusive education is lacking. This study contributes to the growing body of knowledge in the field. However, it is merely a starting point for further research which serves to broaden the understanding of issues faced by teachers in their work with students who have special needs. Additional research on such ethical difficulties could shed light on and offer alternative perspectives to the findings of this study.

This study provides valuable insights for policy makers, certifying bodies, federations, and teacher education programs. Increasingly, there appears to be more attention designated to ethics in teaching. From 2005 to 2006, the Ontario College of Teachers reviewed and updated the ethical standards for the profession (2006A). A number of documents consisting of case books, frameworks, and professional literature have been published by the College to provide information and assist teachers in developing the ethical dimensions of their practice. This work is on-going, and, as the College continues to recognize and support teachers, research, similar to
this study, contributes to the direction of the province. Despite the efforts of the College, the findings of this study suggest that teachers require guidance and support to cope with the array of ethical tensions and dilemmas they encounter in the scope of their work. It appears that currently there is minimal support in this area, as teacher education programs, in-service professional development, and other forms of existing supports fail to address adequately professional ethics, specifically in relation to classroom practice. This leaves teachers anxious and frustrated, problems unresolved, and students disadvantaged. Professional development in applied ethics, at the in-service and pre-service level, has the potential to aid teachers in managing ethical issues, thus preparing them for the challenges they face in the classroom.

Supports for teachers implemented at the provincial level will require more than the development of ethical standards, policies, or teacher resources, as these have been shown to be ineffective in assisting teachers to cope with and resolve ethical problems (Campbell, 2003, 2008; Colnerud, 2006; Nash, 1996; Rogers & Webb, 1991; Sileo et al., 2008). Participants reported that they want professional development that is collaborative, long-term, and applicable to teaching practice. Further research is necessary to determine the most valuable methods or approaches to provide teachers with professional development opportunities and additional supports in the area of applied ethics that will prove to be beneficial in practice, as this was not the focus of this study.

Changes to policies and practices are also required in the area of special and inclusive education. Teachers reported numerous constraints to inclusion at the school and classroom levels, many of which relate to the need for support, resources, and training to improve teaching practice. The literature suggests that successful inclusion is dependent on two factors, the classroom teacher and the school principal, as both directly influence practice (Jordan &
Stanovich, 2004; Riehl, 2000; Stanovich & Jordan, 1998, 2002; 2004; Waldron et al., 1999; Weiner, 2003). However, numerous limitations in the current delivery of educational services in Canada exist, all of which impact, directly or indirectly, the capacities of teachers and administrators to provide equitable learning opportunities for students with special needs. Lupart (2000) identifies some of the shortcomings as: ineffective teaching practice, discrepancies in the degree of general educators’ accountability for the academic progress of students with special needs, lack of teacher preparation, inadequate supports, lack of time for collaboration, lack of knowledge of school administrators in special education and inclusion, need for identification of students before obtaining specialized programming or instruction, and the lengthy time span between referral of a student for identification and individualized programming.

These gaps and limitations have also been recognized at the provincial level, specifically those pertaining to teacher preparation and education. In 2006, the Ontario College of Teachers conducted a two-year review of initial and continuing teacher education to develop recommendations for policy changes to the qualifications of Ontario teachers. The recommendations, presented in a report, Preparing Teachers for Tomorrow, acknowledge the need for teachers to be responsive to the diversity of learners within their classrooms, including those with special needs (p.8). Among many suggestions was a regulatory adjustment which specified that modifications be made to pre-service teacher education. It states, “the content of the program of professional education to identify special education as a required component within the program of professional education (Option 1.5)” (Ontario College of Teachers, 2006c, p. 101). A study conducted by Burge et al. (2008) suggests that the Ontario public would support the College’s proposal as a common perception was “that teachers are not prepared to teach children with intellectual disabilities” (p. 14).
Research maintains that professional development in inclusive and special education improves teaching practice (Holloway, 2003) and has the potential to positively influence the attitudes and beliefs of teachers (Hutchinson & Martin, 1999). The findings of this study propose that teachers experience numerous ethical challenges and dilemmas in the context of inclusion pertaining to the implementation of accommodations and modifications, assessment and evaluation, discipline, and meeting the individual needs of students, all of which are related to teaching practice. Correspondingly, participants reported that they would like more supports, resources, and training to address their difficulties. A deeper understanding of the ethical challenges faced by teachers has the potential to influence changes in policies and practices for inclusive and special education and teacher education programs to assist teachers in meeting their professional responsibilities and, in turn, the needs of students with special needs. However, addressing deficiencies in teacher education is not sufficient; changes will also need to be made to the level of in-class supports and resources available for teachers to improve their teaching practice. Supporting teachers and providing them with the resources, knowledge, and skills required to serve students with special needs will increase the success they experience in inclusive practice, which in turn, will raise their level of confidence and willingness to include students with special needs in their classrooms (Jordan & Stanovich, 2004; Stanovich & Jordan, 1998, 2002, 2004).

Finally, knowledge of the types of ethical challenges and dilemmas that teachers experience in the context of inclusion may have the potential to decrease the stress levels and attrition rates of teachers. A disproportionately high proportion of teachers prematurely leave the profession. Some of the reasons for leaving have been attributed to stress and the increasing challenges and demands placed on teachers, including those which pertain to practice with
students who have special needs. Brackenreed (2011) found that teachers in Ontario experience high levels of stress in relation to inclusion with which they are unable to cope. She associated these stressors with attrition. Similarly, the findings of this study demonstrate that ethical challenges which occur in the context of inclusion, especially those which made teachers feel that they were not serving the best interests of students, caused them to experience stress, anxiety, guilt, and a sense of failure. Some of the participants admitted that they considered leaving the profession. Although all of the participants were teaching at the time of the study, two revealed their decision to leave; one of the teachers made a decision to quit upon the completion of the existing school year and the other teacher as soon as she finished her Master’s degree and secured alternative employment. Understanding the source of stressors could assist with the development of coping strategies and supports, which may or may not involve professional development in applied professional ethics and inclusive and special education. Future research in this area is required to make such determinations and to shed light on the correlation between ethical dilemmas and attrition.

Two additional recommendations for future research may be of value to the fields of professional ethics and inclusive and special education. First, this study could be replicated in other provinces to provide a comparison between school boards and/or systems. While similarities in the educational policies and practices exist between provinces, provincial governments oversee schooling in Canada, thus differences are inevitable. Second, it would be worthwhile to conduct further research on the ways in which special education teachers can better support general educators. Special educators reported experiencing significant ethical conflicts related to relations with colleagues. Most were hesitant to address unethical behaviors or identify ineffective teaching practices due to the challenges associated with criticizing and
reporting colleagues, although tending to such issues is a requirement of their role as support teachers. General educators, on the other hand, suggested that they wanted more practice based support and guidance. Further investigation into the ethical dimensions of relations between special and general educators could provide valuable insights into the dynamics of collegiality. Moreover, such knowledge has the potential to improve in-school supports for teachers, which may enhance teaching practice and promote successful inclusion.

**Concluding Remarks**

Ethical and moral ambiguities, similar to the accounts described by the participants in this study occur regularly in all classrooms, and the responsibility for their management lies with the teacher. Changes to the roles and obligations of classroom teachers, especially due to the movement towards inclusion, have increased the demands and, one could argue, have taxed the knowledge and skills of general educators. While such reforms are a positive development for the field of special education and for students with special needs in general, they create ethical difficulties for the teachers who are not adequately prepared to deal with them. In a system where supports, resources, and sufficient preparation continues to be lacking, this study reveals that teachers are alone and overburdened as they attempt to cope and resolve the problems that arise. Most support inclusion as they believe it to be equitable and just, however, when they fail to meet their responsibilities as professionals, based on their perceptions, they experience feelings of guilt, frustration, and failure. Overall, teachers’ primary concern is the well-being of their students; most identified issues of care, fairness, and equity as pertinent to their practice and their interactions with others. However, these ethical imperatives were not always achieved, and
the participants faulted themselves in such situations. Some reached out for help, but their requests were denied by unsupportive administrators, unavailable professionals, or colleagues who, much like themselves, did not know how to respond or manage the issues. Others struggled to receive the professional development or resources required to meet their students’ needs. Many described accounts of colleagues who were unwilling to include students with special needs in their general education classrooms or those whose perception was that those with disabilities are unable to learn. They discussed problematic exclusionary practices that continue to be practiced by some teachers in their schools, such as grouping students with various disabilities in general education classrooms, confining them to a specific section of the classroom, or, at every opportunity, dismissing themselves of the responsibility for their learning.

This is not successful inclusion. These are some of the realities described by participants. Teachers want support; they want to effectively manage ethical difficulties; they want to successfully practice inclusion. One participant, in the additional comments section at the end of the survey, wrote:

It’s great that you are investigating this and if teachers were given the venue to vent about it it would be amazing because I think so many of us have these dilemmas. I am at a school with 12 teachers and I can name more than half of them with whom I have had really heart-to-heart discussions about these kinds of dilemmas. And we are all dedicated professionals who want to do the best we can and we are walking away feeling like there is nothing we can do.

Another concurs:

This appears to be very beneficial research you are conducting. I am hoping it will work in the favor of students with special needs and remove some of these ethical dilemmas
that their teachers face much too frequently.

Yet, Ministries of Education across Canada and teacher education programs continue to place minimal emphasis on professional ethics and special and inclusive education. How can we expect teachers to successfully manage ethical predicaments that occur in the context of inclusion; how can we place all the onus on teachers, when the system, in many ways, is working against them? Until teachers receive the supports, resources, and professional development that they require teachers will continue to experience ethical challenges and dilemmas in inclusive classrooms.
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Appendix A: Web-based Survey

Ethical Challenges and Dilemmas in Teaching Students with Special Needs in Inclusive Classrooms: Exploring the Perspectives of Teachers

“Exercising judgment requires special educators to weigh alternatives and select the practice that promises to best meet the needs of the child or adult with exceptionalities. When alternatives represent competing interests (the young child’s needs or the families’ priorities) or conflicting values (inclusive classrooms versus community-based instruction) professionals may face ethical dilemmas that defy easy solutions.” (Courtade & Ludlow, 2007, p. 37).

An ethical dilemma is defined as a trying situation in which the teacher must make a difficult choice between two or more alternatives. Classroom dilemmas arise in variable situations, ranging from, for example, deciding where to seat a student, the types of curriculum resources to use, how to discipline a student, how to assess and evaluate a student, to conflicts with colleagues and or parents.

This survey asks you to think about and reflect upon experiences in your teaching practice when you were faced with an ethical dilemma or contradiction while working with students who have special needs. The students referred to in this survey should be those who have an Individual Education Plan and who have been placed in your general education or inclusive classroom for all, majority, or some of the school day.

Please select one of the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I agree to participate in the survey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I do not agree to participate in the survey</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Identify your division qualifications: Please select all that apply:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Junior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Do you currently teach in an inclusive classroom? Please select one of the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

4. Do you have students who have been identified for special education in your classroom? Please select one of the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

5. In my teaching practice I have experienced situations which I believe are ethically problematic:

Please select one of the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Frequently</th>
<th>Very frequently</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

6. I work at a school that is concerned with the ethical treatment of students with special needs:

Please select one of the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Frequently</th>
<th>Very frequently</th>
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</table>
7. I experience or have experienced ethical dilemmas when working with students who have special needs:

Please select one of the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rarely</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Occasionally</td>
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<tr>
<td>Frequently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very frequently</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

8. I think about ethical teaching practices when working with students who have special needs:

Please select one of the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rarely</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Occasionally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very frequently</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

9. Describe the types of ethical dilemmas and tensions you have observed or experienced in teaching students with special needs?

10. What are the characteristics of the students who gave rise to these ethical dilemmas? (i.e. What is their designated identification on the Individual Education Plan?)

11. If and when you observed or experienced ethical dilemmas in teaching students with special needs, the causes of these dilemmas were (select up to three responses which are most relevant):

- Accommodations or modifications
- The IEP
- Classroom management
- Discipline
- Inclusion
- Teacher attitude toward student with special needs
- Teacher beliefs about student with special needs
- Collaboration with colleagues
- Cooperation of colleagues
- Cooperation of administration
12. If you selected other in question #11 please specify the cause:

13. How did you or the colleague you observed cope with these ethical dilemmas or tensions? Please provide examples if possible.

14. What supports were available to help you resolve the ethical dilemmas that occurred in your work with students who have special needs? Provide examples if possible.

15. How effective were these supports? Please select one of the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not effective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat effective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very effective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not applicable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

16. What types of supports do you feel would be beneficial in helping you to resolve ethical dilemmas in teaching students who have special needs? Explain.

17. If applicable, what additional qualifications or specializations have you completed?

18. What was the focus of your undergraduate degree?

19. Did you specialize in any particular area during your teacher education program? If so please identify.

20. Do you have a graduate degree? If so, in what field?

21. Have you ever worked as a special education assistant, resource teacher, special education teacher, child and youth worker, or any other professional designation where you were directly responsible for the learning and or development of students who have special needs?

Please select one of the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
22. If you answered yes to the previous question, please identify your position title(s):

23. Are you interested in working as a special education or resource teacher in the future? Please select one of the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
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</table>

24. If selected, would you be interested in participating in an individual interview for a duration of 1 hour to discuss your responses in greater detail at a later date?

Note: Only those who agree to participate in the individual interview will be contacted for their continued participation in the study.

Please select one of the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
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</table>

25. If selected, would you be interested in participating in a follow-up individual interview to discuss the ways in which you resolve ethical dilemmas as well as your recommendations for supports that you feel would be beneficial to teachers in resolving ethical dilemmas in an inclusive classroom?

Note: Only those who agree to participate in the follow-up individual interview will be contacted for their continued participation in the study.

Please select one of the following:

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
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26. If you indicated that you would like to continue your participation in the study please provide an e-mail address where you can be reached.

27. Please indicate anything further you would like to add or share.

Thank you very much for your participation! Your contributions are invaluable to the study! If you have indicated your interest in continuing your participation in the study, you will be contacted via e-mail to arrange an individual interview date, time, and location of your choice.
Appendix B: Individual Interview Protocol

**Preamble:** In the survey you were invited to think about the ethical dilemmas that you experience or observe in your work with students who have special needs. In this interview we will be discussing those dilemmas in depth and I will also be asking you to describe additional ethical issues. As you may recall from the survey, an ethical dilemma is defined as a trying situation in which the teacher must make a difficult choice between two or more alternatives. Classroom dilemmas arise in variable situations, ranging from, for example, deciding where to seat a student, the types of curriculum resources to use, how to discipline a student, how to assess and evaluate a student, to conflicts with colleagues and or parents.

During the course of this interview, please think about and reflect upon experiences in your teaching practice when you were faced with an ethical dilemma or contradiction while working with students who have special needs. The students referred to in this interview should be those who have an Individual Education Plan and who have been placed in your general education or inclusive classroom for all, majority, or some of the school day.

**Guiding Questions:**

During the interview participant may be asked for elaboration or clarification on information described in the survey. Probing questions will differ for each participant and are dependent on the content covered in the survey.

Discuss specifically the following areas:

(1) What types of situations cause ethical dilemmas in your practice of working with students who have special needs?
   - Accommodations or modifications
   - The IEP
   - Classroom management
   - Discipline
   - Inclusion
   - Teacher’s attitude toward student with special needs
   - Teacher beliefs about student with special needs
   - Collaboration with colleagues
   - Cooperation of colleagues
   - Cooperation of administration
   - Cooperation of parents
   - Differentiated instruction
   - Assessment and evaluation
   - Other

(2) Describe ethical dilemmas that you have experienced in working with students who have special needs.
   - What happened?
• What did you do?
• Why did you do that?
• What else happened? What did you do then?
• How else did you respond?
• What were you hoping would happen?
• How did you feel about that?
• Who else was involved?
• How did they respond?
• What did you think of that?

(3) Have you ever observed or discussed with your colleagues their experiences with ethical dilemmas in working with students who have special needs? Explain.

(4) How did you resolve the above described ethical dilemmas?

(5) Do you believe that you handed the dilemma in the best way possible? If not, what would you have done differently?

(6) When making decisions that are ethical in nature in the classroom what do you rely on to guide your decision-making?

  • Personal convictions
  • Ethical standards for the profession
  • Board regulations/policies
  • Special education regulations/policies
  • Human rights
  • Other

(7) What supports were available to help you resolve these ethical dilemmas?
(8) What kinds of things negatively affected or interfered with your ability to resolve/respond to the ethical dilemma(s)?
(9) What supports would be beneficial in helping you resolve the ethical dilemmas you experience in practice?
(10) Do you have anything to add before we complete the interview?

Ask if the participant has anything further to add before thanking him or her and bringing the interview to a close.
Appendix C: Follow-up Individual Interview Protocol

Preamble: In our individual interviews we discussed various ethical dilemmas you experience in working with students who have special needs in depth. Thinking back to those dilemmas or considering new dilemmas that you have encountered since our last meeting, discuss your choice of decision-making and resolution as well as supports in place to help you deal with the ethical dilemmas that arise in your classroom, specifically when working with students who have special needs.

Guiding Questions:
(1) If applicable, please describe any additional ethical dilemmas that you encountered or experienced since our last meeting.
   At this time participant may be asked for elaboration or clarification on information discussed in the initial interview. Probing questions will differ for each participant and are dependent on the content covered in the interview.
(2) Provide an example of a choice you deemed to be very effective in dealing with an ethical dilemma arising within the context of your work with students who have special needs?
(3) Why was this a good decision?
(4) Where did the judgment you exercised come from? What led you or guided you to make this decision?
(5) Provide an example of a choice you deemed to be very ineffective in dealing with an ethical dilemma arising within the context of your work with students who have special needs?
(6) What made this a bad decision? What were the consequences of your actions?
(7) Where did the judgment you exercised come from? What led you or guided you to make this decision?
(8) Overall, in your teaching practice, when resolving ethical dilemmas do you feel that you make good or poor choices most of the time?
(9) What or whom do you generally rely on to help you cope with, make decisions, or resolve ethical dilemmas that arise in your teaching practice?
(10) What supports are available to help you cope with or resolve ethical dilemmas in your teaching practice? How effective do you find these supports?
(11) What supports do you think would be beneficial in helping you to resolve the ethical dilemmas you encounter in your practice? Please provide recommendations for supports.

Ask if the participant has anything further to add before thanking him or her and bringing the interview to a close.
Appendix D: Ethical Review Approval

University of Toronto Office of the Vice-President, Research
Office of Research Ethics

PROTOCOL REFERENCE # 24958 February 23, 2010

Dr. Elizabeth Campbell Dep’t of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning OISE/University of Toronto 252 Bloor St. West Toronto, ON M5S 1V6

Dear Dr. Campbell and Mrs. Kieltyka-Gajewski:

Mrs. Agnes Kieltyka-Gajewski Dep’t of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning OISE/University of Toronto 252 Bloor St. West Toronto, ON M5S 1V6

Re: Your research protocol entitled “Ethical Challenges and Dilemmas in Teaching Students with Special Needs in Inclusive Classrooms: Exploring the Perspectives of Teachers”

Original Approval Date: February 23, 2010 ETHICS APPROVAL Expiry Date: February 22, 2011

Continuing Review Level: 1

We are writing to advise you that a member of the Social Sciences, Humanities & Education Research Ethics Board has granted approval to the above-named research study, for a period of one year, under the REB’s delegated review process. Please ensure that you submit an Annual Renewal Form or a Study Completion Report 15 to 30 days prior to the expiry date of your study. Note that annual renewals for studies cannot be accepted more than 30 days prior to the date of expiry, as per federal and international policies.

All your most recently submitted documents have been approved for use in this study.

Any changes to the approved protocol or consent materials must be reviewed and approved through the amendment process prior to its implementation. Any adverse or unanticipated events should be reported to the Office of Research Ethics as soon as possible.

If your research has funding attached, please contact the relevant Research Funding Officer in Research Services to ensure that your funds are released.

Best wishes for the successful completion of your project. Yours sincerely,
Daniel Gyewu Research Ethics Coordinator

McMurrich Building, 12 Queen’s Park Cres. W, 2nd Floor Toronto, ON M5S 1S8 TEL: 416-946-3273 FAX: 416-946-5763 EMAIL: ethics.review@utoronto.ca