IT IS IN GIVING THAT WE RECEIVE:
THE SPIRITUALITY OF SPECIAL EDUCATION ADMINISTRATORS

A dissertation submitted to
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by

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The overarching purpose of this study was to explore how special education administrators experience spirituality in their work. Specifically, it sought to understand the meaning they make of their work, how they lead and support others, and how they cope with the demands they face.

Eight special education administrators participated in this descriptive qualitative study. Data were gathered via written personal narratives, semi-structured interviews, and participant journals. Analysis of the data was conducted through a recursive coding and content analysis process. A researcher reflective journal and group member check were also utilized to facilitate interpretation and trustworthiness.

The findings formed several themes, with the Ultimate at the center and service to students with disabilities as the essential motivator for the special education administrators’ work. Appreciation of the grace of the Ultimate in success and reliance upon the support of the Ultimate during struggles was another key theme. Additionally, paradoxical pairings emerged: (a) productive thought processes/feeling inadequate, (b) enacting core values/working within restrictions, (c) fulfilling collaboration/frustration with others, (d) resilience to/being overwhelmed by change, and (e) work integrated into life/work pushing life out of balance.
Deeper analysis suggested three significant influences on the participants’ experience, including (a) inherited factors, (b) environmental factors, and (c) choice factors. The swirl of special education administrators’ spiritual leadership depicts the integrated themes revealed through this study. Vitally, the participants choose to cultivate a sense of the Ultimate throughout all aspects of their work life. The autonomy inherent in their ability to choose, especially, supports the conclusion that there is hope for improved outcomes for students with disabilities. Recommendations are provided for prospective and current special education leaders, other professionals who work with them in the schools, and for institutions of higher education that prepare them for this avocation.
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Reflecting on the process of creating this dissertation, I feel satisfied and grateful. Through the alchemy of grace, effort, and support, the project has come to fruition, and this is an opportune time to express thanks.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>xiv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>xv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Narrative</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growing Up</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Adulthood</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adulthood</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus of the Study</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumptions</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of Methodology</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operational Definitions</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Statement</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal Influences on P–12 Education</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problematic Outcomes for Special Education Students in the U.S.</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement gap</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status post-high school for young adults with disabilities</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Interventions in Public Education</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education Administrators: An Understudied Group</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Different Angle</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why Spirituality for P–12 Education?</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual Presence of Americans</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptual Framework</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of the Study</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delimitations of the Study</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations of the Study</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. LITERATURE REVIEW</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Process</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education Administrator</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

vi
Leadership

Work

Adult Development

Foundational Theories of Development

Cognitive-structural development

Intellectual/cognitive development

Moral development

Epistemological development

Perry’s scheme of intellectual and ethical development

Women’s ways of knowing

Psychosocial development

Identity and consciousness development

Maslow

Kegan

Wilbur

Ego Development Theory

Seven stages of personal/school consciousness

Spirituality/faith development

Definitions/What is spirituality?

Theories

Fowler

Nash

Work Life

Career

Career development

Professional identity development

Meaning

Stress Associated With the Demands of Work

Coping with work stress

Spirituality as a mechanism for coping with work stress

Spirituality at Work

Spirituality in the business world

Spiritual intelligence

Spiritual audit of corporate America

Spirituality of the organization

Leadership

Definition

Spiritual Leadership

Servant leadership

Transformational leadership

Leading with soul

Enlightened leadership

Spiritual leadership model

The five exemplary practices of leadership
Data Analysis ........................................................................................................ 162
  Organizing and connecting the data ............................................................... 162
    Categories ................................................................................................. 163
  Immersion in the data .................................................................................. 165
    Listening ..................................................................................................... 166
    Reading ...................................................................................................... 166
  Coding and categorizing ............................................................................. 167
    Latent content analysis .............................................................................. 169
    Responsive interview coding .................................................................... 170
    Interpretive analysis .................................................................................. 171
    Coding written narrative .......................................................................... 172
    Coding interviews and journals .................................................................. 173
    Deductive versus inductive analysis ......................................................... 176
  Memos and diagrams .................................................................................. 177
    General comments about data analysis ...................................................... 178
  Forming themes ........................................................................................... 179
  Conceptualizing the whole .......................................................................... 181
    Artwork ...................................................................................................... 182
    Graphic ....................................................................................................... 183
    Master outline with supporting data .......................................................... 183
  Member checking .......................................................................................... 184
    Group member check ................................................................................. 185
    Email member check .................................................................................. 186
  Revisions ....................................................................................................... 187
  Corroborating and legitimating the data ....................................................... 187
  Credibility ...................................................................................................... 188
    Triangulation ............................................................................................. 189
    Member checking ........................................................................................ 189
    Prolonged engagement .............................................................................. 190
  Transferability ............................................................................................... 190
  Dependability/confirmability ....................................................................... 191
    Personal narrative ...................................................................................... 191
    Bracketing .................................................................................................. 192
    Researcher reflections ............................................................................... 193
  Conclusion .................................................................................................... 193

IV. RESEARCH FINDINGS .................................................................................. 195
  Introduction ................................................................................................... 195
  Themes in Graphic Form ............................................................................. 197
  Presentation of Themes ............................................................................... 200
  Path of Service ............................................................................................. 201
    First career ................................................................................................ 201
    Move to administration .............................................................................. 201
    Divine intervention ..................................................................................... 202
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preparation for leadership</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The future</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thematic Findings</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A higher power permeates</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with disabilities at the center</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Productive thought processes</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive personal qualities</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optimism</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping calm</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling inadequate</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflective metacognition</td>
<td>209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filtering thoughts</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Things seem worse beforehand</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sticking with values</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enacting core values</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repair mistakes</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honesty</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working within parameters</td>
<td>214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct assistance to families</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Productive partnerships</td>
<td>216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulfilling collaboration</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listen carefully</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentors</td>
<td>218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persistence</td>
<td>218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Golden Rule</td>
<td>219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skill deficits</td>
<td>220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will deficits</td>
<td>220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions of others</td>
<td>221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secretd spirituality</td>
<td>221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resilience to uncertainty and change</td>
<td>222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-regulation strategies</td>
<td>222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body-focused</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being in nature</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consuming adult beverages</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slowing down</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church-based</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual reading</td>
<td>224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prayer</td>
<td>224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meditation</td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little reminders</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letting go</td>
<td>228</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
V. DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS ........................................... 241
   Introduction ............................................................................................................. 241
   Summary of the Study ............................................................................................. 241
   Discussion .................................................................................................................. 243
      Overview of the Graphic ....................................................................................... 244
      Path of Service ....................................................................................................... 247
         Move to administration ....................................................................................... 247
         Divine intervention ............................................................................................. 248
         Preparation for leadership ................................................................................. 248
         The future .............................................................................................................. 249
   Thematic Findings .................................................................................................... 251
      A higher power permeates ..................................................................................... 251
      Students with disabilities at the center ................................................................. 252
      Productive thought processes .............................................................................. 254
      Personal qualities ................................................................................................... 254
         Keeping calm ........................................................................................................ 255
         Optimism .............................................................................................................. 256
         Feeling inadequate ............................................................................................... 256
      Reflective metacognition ....................................................................................... 259
         Filtering thought ................................................................................................. 260
         Things seem worse beforehand ...................................................................... 261
         Sticking with values ........................................................................................... 261
      Enacting core values ............................................................................................. 262
         Trust ...................................................................................................................... 264
         Repair mistakes .................................................................................................. 265
         Honesty ................................................................................................................. 266
         Working within parameters .............................................................................. 267
      Direct assistance to families .................................................................................. 267
      Productive partnerships ......................................................................................... 268
Summary and Conclusions ................................................................. 314
Summary ......................................................................................... 314
Conclusions ................................................................................. 318

APPENDICES ................................................................................... 321
APPENDIX A. INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL .......... 322
APPENDIX B. INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A
RESEARCH STUDY ........................................................................ 339
APPENDIX C. AUDIO RECORDING CONSENT FORM .................... 342
APPENDIX D. RECRUITMENT COMMUNICATION ............................ 344
APPENDIX E. INTERVIEW #1 QUESTIONS ..................................... 347
APPENDIX F. INTERVIEW #2 QUESTIONS ...................................... 350
APPENDIX G. JOURNAL ENTRY GUIDELINES ................................. 352
APPENDIX H. GROUP MEMBER CHECK POWERPOINT .............. 354

REFERENCES .................................................................................. 368
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Conceptual framework for exploring spirituality of special education administrators</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Summary of analysis procedures</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Special education administrators’ experience of spirituality in their work</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The swirl of special education administrators’ spiritual leadership</td>
<td>245</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Performance Responsibilities for a Special Education Administrator</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Comparison of Underlying Human Development Theories</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Gilligan’s Stages of the Ethic of Care</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Summary of Women’s Strategies for Knowing</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Cook-Greuter’s Ego Development Theory Stages (Adult Stages Only)</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Barrett’s Seven Stages in the Development of Personal/School Consciousness</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Definitions of Spirituality</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Fowler’s Faith Development Theory (Adult Stages Only)</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Nash’s Religious Narrative Types</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Super’s Stages of Career Development</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Purpose and Process in Helgesen’s Web of Inclusion</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Definitions of Leadership</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Sokolow’s Principles of Enlightened Leadership</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Fairholm’s Seven Competencies of Spiritual Leadership</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Kouzes and Posner’s Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Participant Characteristics</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Special Education Administrators’ Experience of Spirituality in Their Work</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Personal Narrative

In October 1980, an eight-year-old girl who lived in a high-rise apartment with her single father and little sister was assigned an autobiographical essay by her fourth grade teacher, Mrs. Dawson. It was in the days before computers were prevalent, and the final draft was penned in careful, but unskilled cursive on lined manila paper. This girl, whose mother had left the family and moved out-of-state in April of the same year, wrote that she liked watching the Cleveland Browns, collecting records, swimming in the complex’s pool, and eating pizza on Friday nights. She desperately wanted a cat, but had to settle for two guppies because of apartment rules. Her favorite subjects in school were math and reading. She also wrote that when she grew up, she wanted to be a child psychologist.

Growing Up

Perhaps it is not surprising for me to reveal that I am the little girl in the story. As I write these words, I have tears in my eyes, thinking back to this tumultuous, scary time in my life. I often had tears back then, too, as did my dad, my sister, and the paternal grandmother who tried her best to fill the hole left in our lives by a mom who gave what she could, but was both physically and emotionally distant. I do not specifically remember this writing assignment or the act of its creation, yet I can easily conjure up memories that confirm those were, in fact, my true thoughts and desires at that time in my life.
Almost a decade passed. Many things changed: My father became a successful businessman and remarried, the Browns uprooted and went to Baltimore, and our blended family transitioned from the apartment into a beautiful, new construction home (in the same school district). I got a temperamental, but treasured tuxedo cat, named Blackberry (in honor of a character in Richard Adams’ novel, *Watership Down*), and I fell out of love with math. Some things also remained consistent: Grandma and Dad were sources of love and encouragement, and Mom inconsistently present in my life. Pizza and reading remained among my favorites, and I continued to be sports and music oriented, becoming involved in varsity softball and show choir in high school. In the late 1980s at Willoughby South High School, there was no such thing as President Obama’s “college and career ready,” and there was much less discussion with adolescents about what they would do after graduation from high school. With my good grades and my dad’s savings for college tuition, there was no doubt the plan was for me to go to college, and I did.

**Early Adulthood**

In college, I became very interested in the field of psychology. While I took a variety of classes at the small, liberal arts Marietta College (where I was in the majority as a person of European-American descent), I was most inspired by those focused on the study of the human mind and behavior. Based on outside influences, real or imagined, I chose business management as a major, sideling psychology to a minor. After graduation, a shamefully brief “career” in the world of outside sales, and a difficult break-up with my college boyfriend, I decided to explore graduate school.
I do not remember how I settled on searching for Master’s programs in school psychology. I did not know any school psychologists and it is not a commonly occurring profession. Unlike many people, though, I had contact with school psychologists when I was tested for early entrance to kindergarten and gifted services in elementary school. I have some specific, pleasant memories of those assessments, and I wonder if they played a role in my selection. On a conscious level, I felt working with children, especially those who had some difficulty in their lives, and the security of working in public education, was the right direction for me.

I finished my coursework in school psychology at John Carroll University in May 1996 and proudly embarked on an internship in Akron Public Schools for the 1996-97 school year. My dad and step-mom had moved out of the house where we all lived together and had Christmas at their new home. One of my presents was a scrapbook created by my father. He put together all of the pictures and mementos, such as varsity letters, school photos, and so forth, he found when they had moved. In this large book was the essay written by my nine-year-old self. I was amazed when I read that I had wanted to be a child psychologist, realizing that I had fulfilled my childhood dream. It was a very emotional incident, and a realization that somewhere deep inside, I had known all along what I would become—even though it was not always clear to me on the surface.

During the same year, two other significant events occurred. One was the passing of my beloved grandmother. I missed and grieved her, yet was able to accept her death
as a natural part of her long and rich life. The other was becoming involved, with my dad and sister, in a meditation practice.

Throughout my formative years, formal religion was not a factor. I was not baptized, and no one in my extended family even belonged to a church or other religious organization. There was, however, frequent talk of “spirituality” in our home, and dad read metaphysical books (such as Illusions by Richard Bach) and encouraged my sister and me to see the world as a play of consciousness, with unseen connections among all living creatures, even across multiple lifetimes.

I lived with these general beliefs, using them as touchpoints when there were small and large things to decide. As I completed graduate school, and we found a specific program of meditation, spirituality gradually took on a higher priority in my life. As I travelled through some times of stress, including September 11, 2001, being non-renewed at a job I loved, losing my mother to a battle with breast cancer, having my sister victimized by an abusive boyfriend, and grappling with persistent body image concerns, the spiritual outlook I cultivated provided an invaluable source of strength and resilience.

Adulthood

Although I was very satisfied in my work as a school psychologist, I decided I wanted to further my education. I explored two very different pathways—education administration and health psychology—and eventually chose education. I chose it because it was the more practical of the two: I would obtain a Pupil Services license as part of the program, programs were readily available, and I understood what kinds of jobs
would be available with the credential. I would not say that I chose it because I felt any deep connection to education administration, itself, but others I respected said that it would be a good fit for me.

Shortly thereafter, I was offered the opportunity to become the director of pupil services in the school district where I worked as a school psychologist. Thinking mostly about the status, pay raise, and the achievement of “moving up,” I accepted the position.

It was a difficult transition. The administration of special education programs is fraught with change, conflict, and constant lack of resources. I missed the frequent contact with students and the daily conversations about the learning, emotional, and behavioral needs of specific students who needed help. I felt cut off from the work upon which I had built my professional identity, one that I had conceived initially as a youth. Perhaps as a result, I began to wonder what my next career step would be; thinking my dissatisfaction could be grounded in the particular administration job I had found.

Following the path taken by my immediate supervisor, I decided to enroll in a doctoral program in K–12 Educational Leadership. At the same time, I was grateful to have a steady spiritual diet of daily meditation and other allied practices to support me as I wrestled with my career path, the challenges in my job, and life, in general.

Even as I applied to doctoral programs, I knew I wanted to do a dissertation related to spirituality. I can vividly recall talking about it with the interview committee, and being relieved that the idea was not dismissed. Instead, I was given the great advice to refine the idea during the coursework phase whenever possible.
As I completed my courses and the ideas for my dissertation began to crystallize (in part through a pilot study), I came to realize my interest in exploring how other special education administrators experience their spirituality in their work. Returning to my roots in psychology, I was interested in their experiences across stages of development, before, during, and after their transition from their careers as a practitioner (teacher, speech therapist, school psychologist, etc.) to their careers in administration. Furthermore, because I care deeply about the children with disabilities who are receiving special education services and the educators who provide those services, I chose to gear my study toward recommendations for improving their experience in schools and resulting outcomes.

Bringing my narrative up to the present time, I decided to leave the field of P–12 special education administration. With much reflection and preparation, I pursued and obtained a position as an elementary school principal in the spring of 2013 for the start of the 2013-14 school year. This change occurred during the same semester I passed my comprehensive exam at the university, and both were truly culminating experiences.

I shared my personal narrative in this introduction to illustrate my deep interest in this study and to trace the generation of the idea for the study to its point of origin. While it is critical that there is also significance for this study beyond my own fascination, Marsden (1997) defended the legitimacy of scholars establishing connections between their moral/spiritual beliefs and their scholarly pursuits. Furthermore, Sullivan (2003) suggested scholarship cannot be fully what it ought without the aid of spirituality. Both authors bemoaned the tendency of higher education to demand separation of the
researcher’s deeply held beliefs and the topics of the research, indicating it has led to disconnection between the parts of a person. These ideas gave me a sense of confidence and conviction about commingling the passions of my life as I formulated my research.

**Focus of the Study**

As I described in the opening narrative, a study that merges special education administration, identity development, and spirituality is central to my very being. Because I believe there is strong potential for others to benefit from further study of these elements, and because there is a gap in the existing literature, I want to become more knowledgeable about their intersection and to contribute to the vibrant conversation about school leadership and spirituality.

The purpose of my study is to explore purposively selected special education administrators’ experience of their spirituality in the context of their work life. It is my belief that there is a need for original research in this area based on the status of the American educational system and contemporary interest in spirituality. Because I wanted to find out whether there were useful insights grounded in spirituality, I interviewed special education administrators who described themselves as having a deeply held spiritual outlook in their personal and professional lives.

The scope of this study in its final form includes a critical analysis of the relevant literature, the appropriate methodology for the research, the research activities, presentation of findings, verification of claims and sources, locating of the work and findings in the broader field of education, and an effective communication, both oral and written, of the research and analysis.
**Research Questions**

In this study, I have one central research question: How do P–12 special education administrators experience spirituality in their work? Three sub-questions provide clear direction for the study:

1. How is the spirituality of special education administrators related to the meaning they make of their work, including their career choices?
2. How does special education administrators’ spirituality enable them, as leaders, to serve and support others?
3. How do special education administrators access their spirituality as a resource to help them cope with the demands of work and continue to nurture their own development?

I am interested in learning about the people who choose to pursue this career, stay in it for at least two years, and see themselves as spiritual beings. What are their beliefs? Motivations? Internal and external struggles? Goals at work and in life? Via examination of these questions and others, I hope to better understand special educators’ career and spiritual journey, and to use the newfound knowledge to make a contribution to the field.

**Assumptions**

In terms of assumptions, there are two to note, both related to the term *spirituality*. The first assumption is related to spirituality and religion. The focus of this study is spirituality, not religion, and there is ample evidence that the two may be viewed as separate but related constructs in our situated place and time.
Tisdell (2003) wrote that spirituality and religion are not the same, but for many people they are interrelated. She observed that the ongoing spiritual development of most of adults cannot be completely separated from how we were socialized religiously as children, and that those experiences formed the foundation of adult spiritual development (p. 29). That being said, my study does not address religion, per se, but relies upon participants to make connections between spirituality and religion, or not, for themselves.

Given Nel Noddings’ (2007) contention that “it is possible to discuss spiritual experience without promoting or undermining religion” (p. 185), this stance seems legitimate and defensible. In reference to the provision of the First Amendment to the United States Constitution that the legislature should make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof, Thomas Jefferson coined the well-known phrase about “building a wall of separation between Church and State.” With this long-standing practice in mind, there are potentially fewer complications with discussing spirituality in an education setting without a religious connotation.

Houston (2002) characterized religion as specific and spirituality as generic. He shared a vivid metaphor likening religion to all different types of pipes: large, small, plastic, copper, straight, bent, and so forth. He said we choose the pipe that best suits our needs, and that pipe—our chosen religion if we have one—is the conduit for interfacing with our chosen deity. Spirituality, though, is the energy that connects us to the deity, whatever its origin.
Oman (2013) advised that researchers often must simultaneously define both spirituality and religion and articulate their relationship. He presented the idea that the terms religion and spirituality can either be viewed as complementary or polarized, and that the population’s view of the terms has evolved over time.

As of 2002, most U.S. adults described themselves as both spiritual and religious (Marler & Hadaway, 2002), with the chief difference between the two being religion having an organizational context and spirituality placing a “greater emphasis on feelings and experiences of connectedness to sacred beings or forces” (Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2005, p. 26). While Zinnbauer and Pargament listed the psychologically-relevant dimensions of religion and spirituality as biology, sensation, affect, cognition, behavior, identity, meaning, morality, relationships, roles, creativity, personality, self-awareness, and salience, Oman (2013) stated that researchers should not unidimensionally define these elements, due to their characteristics of being both complex and dynamic.

Finally, His Holiness the Dalai Lama (1999) lent considerable credibility to the distinction between spirituality and religion:

Religion I take to be concerned with faith in the claims of one faith tradition or another, an aspect of which is the acceptance of some form of heaven or nirvana. Connected with this are religious teachings or dogma, ritual prayer, and so on.

Spirituality I take to be concerned with those qualities of the human spirit—such as love and compassion, patience, tolerance, forgiveness, contentment, a sense of responsibility, a sense of harmony—which bring happiness to both self and others. (p. 22)
Conversely, Blanton (2007) stated, “I believe and will assume that spirituality cannot be separated from its roots in religion” (p. 28), citing Beringer (2000); Dyson, Cobb, and Forman (1997); Hill et al. (2000); J. E. King and Crowther (2004); and Korac-Kakabadse, Kouzmin, and Kakabadse (2002) as support. He expressed disdain for some of the current literature on spirituality, and wrote,

American individualism and dualism is reflected in the growing emphasis on the person and private nature of religion and spirituality. It is both erroneous and ironic to include caring and community as aspects of spirituality that is private. If [spirituality] is intensely private, then why all the discussion? (p. 30)

For the purpose of this study, I take a differing perspective. Although I acknowledge the points made by Blanton (2007), I do not see the necessity of discussing whether spirituality can exist without religion. As long as the participants are able to explain what spirituality is to them, and I, as a researcher, can describe how the term is used in the study and can satisfy the reader of the study that I am aware of my own biases, then I think the term has been defined adequately. Furthermore, it is my judgment as a novice researcher that there are a plethora of deeply considered definitions of spirituality in the literature. Nevertheless, I provide Blanton’s (and others’) view here in an effort to recognize there is not universal agreement on the subject.

The second assumption is related: the terms core values, beliefs, and spirituality were regarded as synonymous. In her work in spirituality in adult education, Tisdell (2003) noted that spirituality is always present (though often unacknowledged) in the learning environment. I assert that spirituality, according to the definition chosen for this
study, is always present in the lives of P–12 educators—full stop—though some people may not think of it in terms of their definition of the word.

Further support for the interchangeable use of the terms came from Astley (2003), who indicated the first dimension of spirituality “is a set of attitudes and values and of undergirding beliefs and practices” (p. 141). When M. King et al. (2006) developed a standardized measure of spirituality, they named it Beliefs and Values Scale. They avoided using the word spiritual in the title, opting for words used by participants in qualitative interviews when they described what is spiritual.

Issler (2009) made a distinction between core beliefs and professed beliefs. His valid point was that core beliefs are the ones that actually guide what we do, whereas professed beliefs are the ones we say we believe in. Sometimes they are only tangentially related, and this may provide fertile ground for interview questions. The changing of core beliefs is something that happens over time, and may occur within the context of spiritual practice (Issler, 2009).

**Summary of Methodology**

Significant consideration was given to various methodologies when deciding how best to gather data about special education administrators’ experience of their spirituality in their work. Both the theoretical position and the methods to be used were thoughtfully selected.

I chose an interpretive constructivist stance because I believe it is a good match for the problem being researched. It allows participants’ experiences to be accepted
prima facie, with recognition that their experiences are valid simply because they had them.

In terms of methods, rather than claiming a specific genre, I utilized a basic, descriptive qualitative method. I allowed me to use applicable facets of several different established methods (e.g., phenomenology, narrative inquiry) without the necessity of restricting to one type or another.

**Operational Definitions**

For the sake of clarity, there are terms that need to be defined for the reader of this study. They were used as defined here, unless otherwise specified. I recognize that each term may be defined in its own way under other circumstances, so a delineation of their use in this study was necessary.

*Consciousness:* Barrett (1998, p. 56) defined:

A state of awareness of self (thoughts, feelings, ideas), based on a set of beliefs and values through which reality is interpreted. A shift to higher states of consciousness involves a change in beliefs, values, and behaviors. The values at the higher level of consciousness promote greater inclusiveness and connectedness and less separation and fragmentation.

*Meaning:* something significant and/or symbolic to the participant. As Starratt (2003) described, meanings may be “attached to or embedded in events, circumstances, information and symbols” (p. 28).

*Special Education Administrator:* a person who (a) previously has worked as a practitioner in the field of special education, defined as a special education teacher (i.e.,
intervention specialist) or related service provider (e.g., school psychologist, speech/language pathologist, etc.); (b) has an administrative license from the Ohio Department of Education; and (c) is employed by a public school district as a director of pupil services, director of student services, director/supervisor/coordinator of special education, or other under another title with similar duties. The definition does not include professionals who play dual roles as practitioner and quasi-administrator. Furthermore, it does not include other school district administrators (e.g., superintendents or principals) who have duties that may include, but range far beyond, student services.

**Spirituality**: “Spirituality, which comes from the Latin, *spiritus*, meaning “breath of life,” is a way of being and experiencing that comes about through awareness of a transcendent dimension and that is characterized by certain identifiable values in regard to self, others, nature, life and whatever one considers to be the Ultimate” (Elkins, Hedstrom, Hughes, Leaf & Saunders, 1988, p. 5). In the literature, I found a great deal of discussion about the term spirituality, and in Chapter 2, I expand on what I found. I chose the definition proposed by Elkins et al. because it is deeply rooted in the classic theories of psychology and was vetted via interviews.

**Stage**: a purely abstract, psychological construct that has no correlate in the brain. “In developmental psychology, stages are the different, consistent ways of how people make sense of coherent experience” (Cook-Greuter, 2000, p. 232).

**Problem Statement**

In order to understand the rationale for the study, some context about P–12 education in the United States is needed. A basic history of the federal role in special
education is embedded in the review, since this research is situated in that field. Furthermore, special education administrators are human beings operating in the milieu of their own background, beliefs, and experiences commingled with the demands placed on them by parents of students with special needs, district financial constraints, accountability for results, student and teacher characteristics, and constantly shifting, detailed legal requirements. They constitute a unique population with significant influence on the outcomes for students with disabilities, and should, thus, be studied and understood.

Federal Influences on P–12 Education

The Tenth Amendment to the United States Constitution states, “The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution nor prohibited by it to the states are reserved to the states respectively, or to the people” (U.S. Const. amend. X). Accordingly, by the 1950s, state governments had become heavily engaged in public education, bearing a significant portion of the growing cost (Hayes, 2004).

In spite of the Tenth Amendment—and the long tradition of state and local supremacy over education—the U.S. Congress (as a manifestation of President Lyndon B. Johnson’s War on Poverty) passed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 1965. The ESEA was a major federal aid program that gave significant funding to school districts for assistance in providing instructional opportunities for students from disadvantaged homes through Title I and Head Start (Hayes, 2004).

In the next decade, Public Law 94-142, The Education for All Handicapped Children (1975), pushed the federal government even deeper into the arena of public
education. This law required schools to identify and offer services to children from birth to age 21, when found by a local committee to be in need of special education services, no matter the severity of the disability. School districts, thus, are mandated to provide individualized education program (IEP) services in the least restrictive environment.

In 1983, a landmark study, *A Nation at Risk*, was issued by the National Commission on Excellence in Education (U.S. Department of Education). Its memorable introduction captured the essence of the report and remains fresh against the current global backdrop:

> Our Nation is at risk. Our once unchallenged prominence in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation is being overtaken by competitors throughout the world . . . If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might have well viewed it as an act of war. As it stands, we have allowed this to happen to ourselves. We have even squandered the gains in student achievement made in the wake of the Sputnik challenge. Moreover, we have dismantled essential support systems, which helped make those gains possible. We have, in effect, been committing an act of unthinking, unilateral educational disarmament. (para. 1-2)

The recommendations of the report suggested the responsibility for financing public education should remain with the state and local governments, however it also said the federal government “should help meet the needs of key groups of students, such as the gifted and talented, the socioeconomically disadvantaged, minority and
language-minority students and the handicapped” (Findings Regarding Teaching, para. 4).

The No Child Left Behind Act (2002) is the current moniker for the reauthorization of the ESEA. While it includes many recommendations from *A Nation at Risk*, many stakeholders believe it is too Draconian to result in the desired change for schools and students who are not already achieving. In its latest incarnation, attempts are being made to hold the high standards set by NCLB yet give more control back to states and local schools to decide how to accomplish them (Weiner & O’Donnell, 2012).

In 1991, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) replaced P.L. 94-142, and its latest iteration is the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2004). Certainly, the social justice intentions for IDEIA are obvious. As Hayes (2004) wrote, however, meeting the requirements of this law has cost billions of dollars and created a cadre of special education teachers and specialists, as well as a whole new bureaucracy in order to manage this fiscal link between the federal, state, and local education agencies. With limited resources and the federal mandates for special education, there has been a siphoning effect on the number of teachers and programs for students not required by federal law (Hayes, 2004).

**Problematic Outcomes for Special Education Students in the U.S.**

There are several indicators that, in spite of the precious resources that are flowing to support special education, the outcomes are not satisfactory. The cost, achievement levels, and post-high school results for students with IEPs are all bellwethers of a system in need of assistance.
Cost. According to the Federal Education Budget Project, during the 25 year period between 1980 and 2005, the IDEA population increased by 37%, whereas the general education population grew by only 20%. This has a significant impact on the cost of special education to state and local entities because, although the IDEA was supposed to provide more than half of the funding necessary for these services, educators estimate the federal government provides less than 17% of the cost of the programs it mandates (Weiner & O’Donnell, 2012).

Additional pressure has been placed on public schools providing special education services as a result of shrinking state funding. Between 1987 and 2000, the average local share of special education spending increased by 10%, from 36 to 46% of the total cost (Federal Education Budget Project, 2012). With local school levies often achieving passage rates below 50% in a given election, this creates a difficult situation for districts.

Achievement gap. A study by the EPE Research Center, *Special Education in America* (Swanson, 2008), used the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) to compare the reading performance of 12th graders with and without disabilities. While 5% of students with disabilities scored at or above proficiency, 36% of nondisabled students attained the same measure of achievement, a gap of 31 percentage points. The majority of disabled students (73%) tested below the basic level on NAEP (Swanson, 2008).

Status post-high school for young adults with disabilities. Although there has been legislation in place to address their needs for nearly 40 years, students with disabilities are not rising to the level of their typical peers as they move beyond high
school. For example, according to a national study, compared with 44% of typical young adults living independently after graduating from high school, only 36% of those with disabilities were doing so (National Longitudinal Transition Study – 2 [NLTS2]; Sanford et al., 2011). In terms of being productively engaged in the community (i.e., being employed, in college, or in job training), 85% of students with disabilities responded in the affirmative, as compared with 95% of typical peers.

There is ample evidence that while public schools are required to educate students with disabilities and a great deal of money is spent doing so, the outcomes for these students, both during their school years and after they exit high school, are unacceptable. Special education administrators are uniquely positioned at the local level to influence the expenditures and a variety of practices within a given district’s special education department. Thus, a study focused on special education administrators could provide a valuable contribution to the field.

**Current Interventions in Public Education**

The profession of P–12 education is not simply standing idle, watching the struggles occur. There are several current interventions that are addressing the problems noted above.

In 2009, President Barack Obama signed into law the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). The ARRA provided $4.35 billion for the Race to the Top Fund, a competitive grant program designed to encourage and reward states that are creating the conditions for education innovation and reform, achieving significant improvement in student outcomes (including making substantial gains in student
achievement, closing achievement gaps, improving high school graduation rates), and ensuring student preparation for success in college and careers (USDoE, 2009).

At a quasi-governmental level, the Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSS; National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010) has been developed. Recognizing the unique educational challenges for teaching students with disabilities and English language learners, the Common Core website suggested the sharing of experiences across states can lead to improved ability to serve these special populations, and noted the CCSS includes information about how to apply the standards for these at-risk students.

Research is also offering supports to students with disabilities and the adults who work with them. For example, many schools are adopting practices of data-driven instruction that include the elements of assessment, analysis, action, and reflection (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2010). Another well-known and commonly cited reform effort is including the nine most effective instructional strategies in teachers’ daily instruction (Marzano, Pickering & Pollock, 2001).

**Special Education Administrators: An Understudied Group**

With the notable exception of high-powered recruits from the business world becoming superintendents, P–12 education administrators have been practitioners in the field of P–12 education prior to moving into administration. Typical avocations include: special education teacher, psychologist, or school social worker (Carter, 2011).

While there have been studies exploring what motivates students to become teachers (Marshall, 2009), teachers to become principals (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Gates,
Ringel, & Santibañez, 2003), and college students to become educational specialists such as school psychologists (Graves & Wright, 2007) or speech/language pathologists (Brodsy & Cooke, 2000), I did not find any research on the subject of understanding the career transition for practitioners who chose to become special education administrators.

Although she did not use the term *spirituality*, McIntire (1944) advocated for attention to the full range of characteristics, including self-awareness and sensitivity, when selecting persons to supervise work in special education. She wrote:

> It is so easy for the special supervisor to get “lost in the woods.” The best person is deeply human, carefully objective, always constructive in her approach to problems. . . . Her interest is more highly flavored with sense than sentimentality and she never loses herself in a maze of technicalities. She is an efficient person with regular methods of procedure for handling various types of problems, but her techniques are only tools. She recognizes the fact that the supervision and administration of special education is not a pencil and paper job. (p. 78)

Carter (2011) indicated, “the practice of special education administration is a highly rewarding yet often stressful profession” (p. 104). Since her review of the literature found few studies on special education administrators and burnout, she conducted a preliminary study utilizing the Maslach Burnout Inventory to determine levels of stress and burnout among this population. Given her findings that administrators of special education had above-average levels of emotional exhaustion when compared with professionals in teaching, post-secondary education, social services, mental health, and medicine, further study is warranted. Covey’s (1989) exhortation that
administrators should “build endurance, flexibility and strength, and the spirit, whether it be through music, prayer, continuing education, reading good literature, or personal emotional management strategies” (p. 288) lends credibility to the direction of this study.

If special education administration were similar to any other position within a school district, it would be the principalship. Since trends indicate that filling open principalships will become more difficult, due to the pool of qualified candidates willing to take on the work growing smaller and that fewer people are choosing to become principals (Gates et al., 2003), it is logical that the same trends apply to special education administration. Thus, a study that investigates the career formation of special education administrators and asks questions about their background, beliefs, and motivations to find out who they are as complex human beings could be helpful in recruiting, training, and retaining these professionals. Furthermore, it would address Browne-Ferrigno’s observation that “changing educational careers requires an individual to relinquish the comfort and confidence of a known role . . . and experience the discomfort and uncertainty of a new role” (2003, p. 470).

McEwan (2003) claimed that in order for principals to be highly effective, they also need to be emotionally, physically, and spiritually healthy individuals. Keyes, Hanley-Maxwell, and Capper (1999) heard, in interviews with principals, that spirituality was essential to their success. Further, in their landmark study, Mitroff and Denton (1999) found that spiritual reasons for work are the biggest motivators for leaders. Thus, in terms of caring about special education administrators’ overall effectiveness, attention to their spiritual development is highly recommended. Even though there are myriad
challenges to school leaders, there are many who accept the role, are successful, and are
dedicated to the profession. This study sought to learn how these special education
administrators utilize their spirituality to support their work.

A Different Angle

While there are seemingly constant educational reforms, concerns about funding,
new requirements, and new research-based practices to try, there is a cyclical “feel” to
them. Blanton (2007) pointed to the research on the concept of caring, socially
responsible leadership as an option (Giroux, 2004; Starratt, 1995) and asked, “If real
reform has ever taken place, why does talk and study about school reform continue?
How many reformations can there be?” (pp. 3-4).

These are valid questions, and beg for alternatives to school reform to be offered.
Through a study of spirituality, an alternative avenue for understanding will be widened.
I agree with Dana Zohar’s assertion that “all fundamental transformation (for individuals
and companies) is ultimately spiritual transformation, spiritual in the very broadest sense
as issuing from the level of reflection, meaning and value” (1997, p. 18). It is imperative
that we understand ourselves in order to understand the external world (Walsh, 1998). It
is easier said than done, however, in that “contemplative practice is sometimes difficult,
painful work. It involves facing our demons, our shadow self, our uncertainties, our
deepest fears, our sorrows, and our joys” (Rendon, 2000, p. 10).

Why Spirituality for P–12 Education?

Some readers may be dismissive of the concept that the study of spirituality could
be good for P–12 education. However, just as complementary and alternative medicine
have been shown to be exponentially compatible in the healthcare field (e.g., Oman & Neuhauser, 2012), studying spirituality in conjunction with other, more traditional reforms in the P–12 education workplace may have similar utility.

I believe that any use of the idea of spirituality, in any work setting, could eventually lead to something worthwhile, even if it begins as a psychological feel-good or simplified self-development process within an organization, perhaps even to promote productivity. As Pascale, Sternin, and Sternin (2010) wrote, “People are much more likely to act their way into a new way of thinking, than think their way into a new way of acting” (p. 38). By opening up the discourse, it is anticipated more special education administrators will gain comfort with language of spirituality and think more about its presence in their work as school leaders.

There is a solid foundation for the statement that spirituality is an aspect of the human educator worth investigating. Education philosopher Parker Palmer (1993) lamented, “education is the slave of an economic system that wants to master and manipulate nature, society, heaven, and the human heart in order to gain profit and power” (p. 107). He put forth the idea that only by transcending self and world can we find authenticity and spontaneity and sidestep the endless, futile quest for power. He elaborated:

When we know self and the world from the vital center . . . then we are free from the cycle of dominance, free to love the world, each other, and ourselves. An education in transcendence prepares us to see beyond appearances into the hidden realities of life—beyond facts into truth, beyond self-interest into compassion,
beyond our flagging energies and nagging despairs into the love required to renew
the community. (p. 13)

He explained that transcendence is not an upward escape from the realities of self and
world, but, instead, a breaking-in, a breathing of the Spirit of love into the heart of our
existence, a literal in-spiration that allows us to regards ourselves and our world with
more trust and hope than ever before. These ideas provide a sense of optimism for the
downtrodden field of special education.

In an interview with Halford (1999), Nel Noddings commented that people are
longing for the sacred, and that buying into the economic, consumerist argument that
education is a single-goal enterprise of teaching what is on the academic tests, getting
kids ready to go to college, get a good job, make money, and buy lots of stuff has been
enormously damaging. She also expressed that Western democracies’ efforts to keep
spirituality out of public schools may protect schools from complaints, but it also protects
ignorance. Education for a truly flourishing human life, she argued, must directly
confront questions of meaning and worth, not deny them (Noddings, 2007). She wrote,
“It is a rather poor life that never asks the questions, How should we live? Is there
meaning to life? Why is there something rather than nothing?” (Noddings, 2007, p. 29).

Rabbi Michael Lerner (2006) also commented on the spiritual and moral vacuum
that is influencing America’s poor results in education. He suggested the bottom line of
money and power in our country, with a lack of emphasis on spirituality, is causing deep
levels of depression in a large part of the population. While Noddings (in Halford, 1999)
cited the separation of church and state as one reason for the current state of affairs,
Lerner pointed to perceived liberal excesses of the 1960s and 1970s that fueled a backlash in the 1980s. The so-called reforms and calls for accountability that originated in the 1980s, then, have resulted in the divides that exist within our country today.

Thompson (2008) described the situation poignantly:

"Here is the heart of the dilemma: we all have to survive in a secular, money-driven world that runs on cost-efficient thinking. Yet our children simply cannot be comprehended in the terms of cost-efficient thinking. Only a moral or spiritual way of thinking can come close to the way we think (and feel) about our children. So how does an administrator navigate these two divergent modes of thinking?"

(p. 140)

Former Director of the American Association of School Administrators (AASA), Paul Houston (2002), added his voice to the question of why spirituality has a place in the world of P–12 education. His conversations with school leaders around the country elicited comments about a search for meaning and comfort in the face of difficult, draining work. Going inside themselves and finding the part within that is more than flesh and bone was necessary in order to survive despite the challenges. He also added a special emphasis for education in that all leaders must be attuned to the third dimension beyond thinking and doing, to what it is to “be” a human in touch with the divine, but because of their responsibility for the future through influence on the lives of children, educational leaders have an even greater obligation to nurture awareness of the transcendent. Based on the comments of the administrators to whom he has spoken, Houston stated, “Clearly, a hunger in our midst exists for finding our deeper purpose and
for conducting our work in a more enlightened manner” (p. 7). Perhaps a contributing factor to Houston’s statement was the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NAPSA) establishment of a conference on the topic of spirituality the year before his comment (Estanek, 2006).

**Spiritual Presence of Americans**

This is the right time to study the spiritual disposition of American special education administrators based, in part, on the rise in interest about spirituality in the United States. According to Fraser (2007), “There is a resurgent interest in spirituality in the Western world, [with a focus on] an inclusive paradigm that embraces diverse views, beliefs and universal values” (p. 289). Kapuscinski and Masters (2010) concurred that empirical study regarding the role of spirituality in human experience and behavior has increased markedly during the past few decades, and speculated that psychology’s emerging focus on spirituality may reflect the success of prior work in understanding spirituality as a way to comprehend various aspects of human functioning.

Furthermore, Wuthnow (1998) stated that our culture’s interest in spirituality has been steadily increasing due to the trend of individual beliefs becoming more eclectic and externalized, evolving into a “spirituality of seeking” (p. 3), or as Zaleski and Kaufman (1997) described, a nation of pioneers turning inward. Zaleski and Kaufman further observed that the genre of spiritual writing is basking in the sun, and Wuthnow (1998) speculated that the reason for the smorgasbord of books about spirituality being published is Americans’ search to overcome psychological estrangement.
Examples of America’s attention to the spiritual aspect of life are replete in other media, as well. Opportunities for spiritual support are easily found on television (e.g., Oprah Winfrey’s Super Soul Sundays), through smart phone apps to enhance spirituality (Johnson, 2012), and on the Internet, where I came up with nearly 1 million hits when I typed ‘spirituality in educational leadership’ into the Google Internet search engine in June 2014.

Although it could be argued that America’s interest in spirituality is potentially beneficial, it is not necessarily the case. Simply reading books/websites or watching television shows on a wholesome topic will not result in improvement in the interactions among adults in P–12 education settings or in the outcomes for children, especially those with disabilities. Thus, I wonder the same thing as Blanton, when he asked, “If spirituality is not expressed, then what good is it, especially when considering the lives of students and schools?” (2007, p. 30). I am conducting this study in order to bring forth knowledge about how spirituality guides career development as well as the meaning these leaders make of their work, how they use it to serve and support others and how it helps them cope with the demands of their work.

**Conceptual Framework**

According to Miles and Huberman (1994), “A conceptual framework explains, either graphically or in narrative form [diagrams are much preferred], the main things to be studied—the key factors, constructs or variables—and the presumed relationships among them” (p. 18). Maxwell (2005) emphasized that the conceptual framework is
something constructed, not found. While it incorporates borrowed pieces, the overall coherence is something built by researchers, themselves.

Developed in detail in Chapter 2, the conceptual base I have created for this study is comprised of five main theories: Sinnott’s Theory of Felt Connection (2005), Ego Development Theory (Cook-Greuter, 2000), The Holistic Development Model (Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2011), the Seven Stages of Development of Personal and School Consciousness (Barrett, 2010), and The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership (Kouzes & Posner, 2002).

This existing theoretical and research literature was used as a scaffold on which to build this study exploring the spiritual work experiences of special education administrators. In order to pass muster, a dissertation must suggest significant, relevant research that will make a unique contribution to the field and go beyond the interests of the researcher. Based on the elements of the study, there were several compelling reasons to conduct it.

**Significance of the Study**

In spite of the expense and immenseness of P–12 special education, very little research has been conducted with special education administrators as participants. There are thousands of these administrators in the U.S., overseeing millions of dollars of federal, state, and local funds. They support and influence principals, special education teachers, and other service providers, and parents, and thus have a large impact on our nation’s most at-risk students. It will be valuable to learn more about the experience of these professionals.
While there has been some empirical exploration of individuals’ rationale for becoming a teacher/other direct service provider in the P–12 setting, and on reasons for leaving the profession of P–12 education, little research was found on the topic of “front line” educators electing to transition to administration. Given the current and expected shortage of qualified P–12 administrators, this study will provide some valuable insight into the reasons cited by experienced, successful school leaders.

Most importantly, the study is anchored in the concept of the spiritual experience of P–12 special education administrators. Lerner (2006) suggested there is great potential for addressing existing problems through spirituality. Extensive literature searches have confirmed that other researchers agree that spirituality of P–12 educators is worth examining, based on studies of teachers, principals, and superintendents, yet the topic has not been broached with special education administrators. Since there are so many external and internal challenges for these professionals, this line of inquiry may yield beneficial data for the spiritual leaders who participate, other professionals in the field, those with whom they work, and the faculty who train them at the university level.

With the upsurge of interest in spirituality in the U.S., this is the right time to do this study. Given my keen interest in and dedication to the topic, I was well situated to relish the complete immersion required to bring the study to fruition.

**Delimitations of the Study**

According to Cline (n.d.), “the delimitations of a study are those characteristics that limit the scope or define the boundaries of the inquiry, as determined by the conscious exclusionary and inclusionary decisions that were made throughout the
development of the proposal” (Limitations, Delimitations, para. 3). This study was limited to exploring the spiritual experience of special education administrators before, during, and after their transition to administration. It did not attempt to make connections between religious beliefs and spirituality, or explore religion at all.

In order to create a focused study, only special education administrators were participants, excluding other administrators, teachers, and classified staff working in schools. Although it might be an interesting field for study, student perspectives on spirituality and spirituality as part of public education was beyond the limits of this investigation.

Another element beyond the scope of the study was an attempt to causally link spirituality to stress levels at work. During the pilot phase of this study, it was included. After reviewing the data, it appeared that exploring that idea would widen the breadth of the study overmuch.

**Limitations of the Study**

Limitations of a study are those characteristics of a design or methodology that set parameters on the generalizability and utility of the findings (Cline, n.d.). The study involves a purposive sample of special education administrators in public schools in Ohio. Due to the specific nature of the participants, discretion must be used in the areas of credibility, transferability, and dependability/confirmability.

The findings of this study are applicable to special education administrators’ outlook, in general, but not necessarily other types of administrators or to teachers or classified staff. Additionally, the findings may not be transferable to special education
administrator of non-public schools, especially if the schools have a religious affiliation, or to institutions of higher education.

A final limitation to note is applicable to any qualitative study. Since I am the lens through which the data is generated, those reading the study will need to judge for themselves whether I have adequately addressed potential bias in order to make the findings useful for others.

Conclusion

Through the basic descriptive qualitative study, I seek to understand the spiritually inclined special education administrators’ experience of their beliefs in their work. Specifically, I want to know more about how their spirituality influences their career choices, the meaning they make of their work, the way they interact with others, and the way they use it for ongoing personal development.

There are several indicators of significance for the study. While there is ample data about the challenges of providing special education, the outcomes are not yet satisfactory. Even though there are reform efforts and ever-increasing requirements to guide special educators, there has been little, if any, empirical study of special education administrators. Furthermore, through inquiry about special education administrators’ choice of career, new, worthwhile data will be contributed to the field. The thread that draws the elements of this study together is the concept of spirituality. By engaging in this research, I strived to illuminate the internal thoughts of special education administrators to add them to the body of literature that exists with other groups of educators and professionals.
As a result of this study, my hopes are fourfold. First, especially considering the difficult conditions under which they work, this study, focused on their “higher” nature, may bring greater perspective and opportunity for contentment to special education administrators, themselves. With the idea that helping one person is the start to helping many people, this would be a positive influence of this study.

Accordingly, by externalizing the spiritual outlook special education administrators use in their work life, I endeavor to suggest an additive factor in the way these professionals communicate with, engage with, and think about others. Thus, the topic of spiritual leadership is included in this study’s review of the literature and in the discussion of the findings.

Another possible use of this study’s results will be in the field of higher education. Given the high stakes associated with the work of special education administrators, recruitment and academic preparation are important. The findings of this study will be considered in terms of the potential for personal and professional development for educators considering entering the field of special education administration.

The ultimate dream for this study is that it would, in some small way, provide knowledge that would increase success for students with disabilities. By helping these students, everyone could benefit, including schools, communities, and our country as a whole. I recognize this is a lofty aim; at the same time, I find companionship in words often attributed to Mother Teresa, “I alone cannot change the world, but I can cast a stone
across the waters to create many ripples” (http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/49502-i-alone-cannot-change-the-world-but-i-can-cast).
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

As described in the first chapter of this document, I have a passionate personal interest in the topic of spirituality in special education administration, and I also described the reasons to study it in this place and time. In order to engage in the scholarly work of beginning a dissertation, the prospective researcher not only must justify the reasons for the study, but also must expand her knowledge of the subject matter through a review of the extant literature.

According to W. L. Miller and Crabtree (1999a), “The initial goal of a literature review is to search out the literature’s assumptions and expectations and then to identify key conceptual domains around which an interview guide can be developed” (p. 94). It is used to identify the existing descriptive, theoretical and analytic categories, and should be broad; for most topics studied are reported in the social science, psychology and philosophy literature (W. L. Miller & Crabtree, 1999a).

Maxwell (2005) stated that the literature review section of a dissertation has two key functions: (a) to show how the proposed research fits into what is already known and how it makes a contribution to our understanding of the topic and (b) to explain the theoretical framework that informs the study. Pointedly, he emphasized the reason for writing a review of the literature is not simply to summarize what has been done in the field, but to ground the study in relevant previous work and give the reader a clear sense of the researcher’s theoretical approach (Maxwell, 2005).
My Process

Embarking on the endeavor of a literature review, I was inspired by the words of T. S. Eliot, “We must not cease from exploration and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we began and to know the place for the first time” (p. 208). To me, this quotation has a quality of academic rigor as well as a deeper, timeless sensibility that was evocative of the topic of spirituality.

I also tried to heed two of Stephen Covey’s (1989) maxims: “Begin with the end in mind” (p. 97) and “Seek first to understand, then to be understood” (p. 237). In the context of this paper, beginning with the end in mind means to be reflective about where I am positioned and mindful about where the research is going, not simply getting involved in the business of activities associated with it and letting it drive itself.

When Covey (1989) discussed “seek first to understand, then to be understood,” he was referring to empathetic listening and diagnosing before prescribing. Both of those images were helpful to me as I commenced and sustained the effort of “listening” to what others have had to say related to my research topic, long before I would have the wherewithal to draw conclusions of my own. Seeking first to understand also communicated a sense of patience and going slow, which are important qualities in an in-depth research project.

Throughout my doctoral coursework, I had the good fortune to develop my research ideas through class assignments and a pilot study. As I neared the end of the coursework phase, I shared my research ideas with my advisor and worked with her to refine them. Upon her approval of the direction of the study, I met with the research
librarian for the College of Education, Health and Human Services to be sure I was searching for sources efficiently and effectively. Working from her advice, I explored the intersection of the subjects of special education administration and spirituality, building on the sources I already had from my coursework experience. I utilized Kent State University’s online access to browse Academic Search Complete and ProQuest Dissertation and Theses, as well as some of the subject-specific databases. Some of the search terms used included: special ed* admin*, spiritual* education* admin*, and education* admin* spirit* (*is a search term designed to find words with the same root. For example, ed* would find articles with educator, education, educational, etc.). Then, I was able to find additional relevant articles and books through reading the reference lists of key articles and select dissertations. While I searched and previewed sources, I kept a guiding question in mind, “How will this help me define and support my proposed study?”

Through this process, I was exposed to a wide variety of ideas from diverse disciplines, related in some way to my research question and sub-questions. Based on what I learned through reviewing these sources, I believe this chapter meets the previously cited criteria delineated by Maxwell (2005) and W. L. Miller and Crabtree (1999a).

In order to lay the foundation for my study, the literature review includes the topics of special education, adult development (including spiritual development), work life, and leadership, with several subtopics within each of those broad areas. At the
culmination of this chapter, I present my unique conceptual framework that underpins the study.

**Special Education**

The problem statement in the first chapter described the need for this study by recounting some of the failings of education in the United States, and also enumerated some specific crises in the area of special education. To give a deeper perspective, a brief history of special education is provided, as well as some background on the role of the special education administrator.

**History**

Commonly, people believe the concept of special education originated when the U.S. Congress passed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (Public Law 94-142) in 1975. In fact, various forms of public policy on federal state and local levels were already in place by that time (Bird, 1997).

According to Bird (1997), Horace Mann’s belief—that a public school system should be available to all people—was critical for the success of the nation. Mann was a member of the Massachusetts Senate, and under his watch, the first State Board of Education was formed in 1837. At that time, schools began to be established around the country.

Another benchmark in the development of special education in the U.S. occurred in 1922, when the International Council for the Education of Exceptional Children (ICEC) was formed by a group of practitioners meeting at Teachers College, Columbia University, New York (Bird, 1997). This group was ultimately renamed The Council for
Exceptional Children. During the period of the mid-1900s, legislation was prolific in the areas of providing programs for children with impairments in vision, hearing, mental ability, and physical/motor handicaps (as they were referred to at that time).

In 1951, the Council of Administrators of Special Education (CASE) was founded, composed of people directly concerned with the administration and supervision of special education programs (Bird, 1997). As more programs developed to serve children with special needs, CASE became an important resource for information about teaching techniques, curriculum adjustments, and special therapeutic services. CASE is a thriving organization to this day, and regularly authors policy and action recommendations for administrators in the field of special education.

In terms of training for special education administrators, the literature of the 1960s indicated consensus that at least two years of experience as a professional worker in the field was essential (Jones & Wilkerson, 1975). The experience requirement is still prevalent in most states.

Another national organization related to the field of special education administration is the National Association of Pupil Service Administrators (NAPSA), originally formed as The National Association of Pupil Personnel Administration (NAPPA) in 1966. NAPSA is geared toward the areas of attendance, counseling, psychology, speech therapy, social work, medical consultation, and gifted and handicapped pupils (Childs, 1978). In 1971, a requirement for membership in the organization was that the professional be involved in “services for exceptional children.”
Thus, when President Gerald Ford signed P.L. 94-142 into law on November 29, 1975, there was already a group of professionals ready to provide administrative support. With the guarantee of a free appropriate education for all students with a handicapping condition required by this law, it is apparent why the visibility of special education, and those who administer the programs, increased dramatically after 1975—and continues to increase today.

**Special Education Administrator**

In the first chapter, I provided an operational definition for the term Special Education Administrator. Some elaboration of the term, as well as additional context about the work of special education administrators, is provided to help the reader understand the work in which the participants of the study engage.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics is the federal agency charged with developing profiles of professions. According to the Bureau’s *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, 2010-11 Edition entry for Education Administrators:

Successful operation of an educational institution requires competent administrators. Education administrators provide instructional leadership and manage day-to-day activities in schools, preschools, daycare centers, and colleges and universities. [They] set educational standards and goals and establish the policies and procedures required to achieve them. They also supervise managers, support staff, teachers, counselors, librarians, coaches and other employees. They develop academic programs, monitor students’ educational progress, train and motivate teachers and other staff, manage career
counseling and other student services, administer recordkeeping, prepare budgets and many other duties. (p. 1)

Within the profession of education administration, special education administrators play a complex role in school districts, with no two positions being exactly alike. Finkenbinder (1981) characterized the responsibility for children, personnel and programs as “tremendous” (p. 493).

**Job description.** One Ohio school district’s job description for Director of Student Services challenged the administrator to be the “district expert” concerning the rules and regulations governing special education (Olmsted Falls City Schools, 2009). The job goal and performance responsibilities for a special education administrator in a central Ohio school district are typical of the role, and are illustrated in Table 1.

**Circumstances for special education administrators.** There is theoretical and empirical evidence for claims that special education administration is challenging work. Marvell, Galfo and Rockwell (1982) found that 47% of school related civil cases litigated nationally pertained to some aspect of special education and were usually directly related to P.L. 94-142. Jones and Wilkerson (1975) wrote that the administrator of special education today is one of the few administrative personnel in the schools who has a true K-12 responsibility, and Lashley and Boscardin (2003) observed that those who oversee services for students with disabilities “are now at a crossroads in the field. Their challenges will be promoting collaboration between general and special education teachers and administrators to assure that high quality educational programs are accessible to all students” (p. 3).
Table 1

*Performance Responsibilities for a Special Education Administrator*

| Job Goal: | To provide coordination and supervision to all special education programs in the school district and to ensure appropriate special education services to all students with disabilities. |
| Performance Responsibilities: | Coordinates all special education programs, related services, and psychological services for the School District. |
| | Supervises and assists all staff members involved in special education programs. |
| | Coordinates all special education in-service, curriculum development, and program development. |
| | Assists in the development of and implementation of local procedures and policies for identification, evaluation, and placement of students with disabilities. |
| | Oversees the development and maintenance of all child information management system (CIMS) and other special education records. |
| | Stays abreast of all legal requirements governing special education and their application to programs in the schools. |
| | Makes budget and staffing recommendations on special education programs as is appropriate. |
| | Assists in the development of positive relationships with parents of students with disabilities to help them better understand their child’s unique needs and to provide support to these parents. |
| | Assists in recruitment and selection of all special education personnel. |
| | Assists in arranging transportation of students with disabilities. |
| | Other duties as assigned by the Superintendent or his or her designee (Dublin City Schools, n.d.). |

Burrello and Zadnik (1986) acknowledged special education administrators are subject to a wide variety of pressures from varying interest groups that have different intentions and goals. Their study explored the idea that effective special education leaders and organizations need not only to demonstrate competence in Sergiovanni’s
technical, human, and educational aspects of leadership, but also successfully attend to the informal, subtle aspects (symbolic and cultural) of work. This quantitative study, based on survey data, found that successful administrators valued the symbolic and cultural elements of their work more than randomly selected administrators did.

Based on his literature review of studies regarding special education and administration, Finkenbinder (1981) concluded that professionals moving into the field need (a) knowledge of exceptional children; (b) acquaintance with school law; (c) familiarity with elementary, secondary and vocational education, and the curricular implications of the least restrictive environment; (d) understanding of budgeting, finance and negotiations; (e) fluency with in-service techniques; (f) strong clinical supervision skills; and (g) a humanistic point of view, with the ability to “empathize with their staff, assess when they lose their objectivity, know when to intervene on behalf of children and parents, and be a warm yet forthright decision maker” (p. 494).

Pazey (1995) expanded the importance of empathy when she described the ethic of care. “The ethic of care views the self and other as interdependent and develops relationships with others through networks (p. 299). Because the work of special education administrators is linked with children and parents who are sometimes marginalized, Pazey posited that “an ethic of care, inherent in women’s leadership styles, is an essential link for administrative practice” (p. 302) and

When school culture reflects an ethic of care for others, the participants look beyond themselves. School and classroom membership for students with disabilities is built on relationships rather than rules. Intellectual activity and
social interaction have equal value . . . [and] failures and weaknesses of teachers and students are viewed as opportunities for growth and improvement. (p. 307)

Based on the knowledge gained about special education administrators though this literature review, it is hoped the reader has an understanding about the purpose they serve within the context of the school setting. With that foundation element in place, the focus of this chapter turns, now, to adult development. Referencing Pazey’s sentiments, it may be that it is the looking beyond ourselves that drives identity development for adults.

**Adult Development**

This study, focused on special education administrators’ experiences of spiritual experience at work, has three major underpinnings within its theoretical base: adult development, work life, and leadership. With my research questions in mind, set against the specific backdrop of P–12 special education, I engaged in an extensive review of the literature to find prior work to inform my study.

While human development encompasses the entire life span, I am most interested in the development during the years a person is expected to work (approximately age 20 to age 70). While some psychoanalysts suggest the most important psychological development takes place early in life, constructivists, in contrast, tend toward the position that life can (or should) consist of continuous growth and change (Soldz, 1996).

Contradictorily, McCrae and Costa (1990) found strong evidence that personality traits are remarkably stable in adulthood (defined by them as after age 30). The authors’ explanation for their unexpected findings is that humans remember themselves as having
changed much more than longitudinal data support. Both of these perspectives were kept in mind throughout the process.

As I turned my attention from finding evidence of a problem to be investigated through research, I began to read the extant literature with an eye toward how the work of others could lend credibility to the kernels of my ideas. Almost immediately, I was reassured to find the work of “old friends” as part of the relevant literature. Psychological giants such as Abraham Maslow (in the area of motivation and self-actualization), Erik Erikson (psychosocial development), Lawrence Kohlberg (moral development), and Jean Piaget (stages of human cognitive development) form the basis for the theories of the contemporary researchers whose work creates the base of my own conceptual frame.

Another pleasing feature of the literature I read in my search for theoretical elements was the wide range of disciplines from which I was able to glean sources. Thus, I was able to be discerning in my selection, and did not need to rely on sources that were not as good a fit. After careful reading and consideration, I chose five main sources, with one each from the fields of higher education, psychology, career counseling, and business/school management. Each one is embedded in the broader review of the literature in this chapter, with a graphic representation of how they relate to one another as the conceptual framework for this study near the end. Through this heterogeneous mix, I seek to approach my questions with an open mind.
Foundational Theories of Development

There are four legacy theories that underpin the scholarly work applicable to this study. Throughout the literature review, I discovered that many authors provided comparison charts of the theories of interest (and I also noted that no two charts described the same theories exactly the same way). I believe organizing the background knowledge necessary for understanding the rest of this chapter is beneficial, so I have provided Table 2 listing the stages of Piaget (1970), Erikson (1980), Kohlberg (1969), and Maslow (1954, 1999), aligned based on various sources, including Fowler (1981), Helminiak (1987), Barrett (1998), Wilbur (2000), and Evans (2011).

Cognitive-structural development. The cognitive-structural perspective is an outgrowth of the work of Piaget (1970). In this field of study, which explores how people think and how they make meaning out of the experiences they have in their lives, there are stages that occur sequentially, regardless of culture or circumstance. They are rooted in human biology, but cognitive-structural theorists also acknowledge the role of the social environment (Evans, 2011). Further, since Piaget’s time, scholars have acknowledged that various lines of development progress simultaneously with cognitive development, including ego, moral, interpersonal, and so forth (Wilbur, 2000). While the tempo through which a person passes through the stages is variable, the fact that each stage is supported by its predecessor, yet is qualitatively different/more complex, is a constant. It is appropriate to review cognitive development at the start because, as Wilbur (2000) noted, cognitive development is necessary (though not sufficient) for other types of development. Additionally, identity development with an exploration of
## Table 2

**Comparison of Underlying Human Development Theories**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age (if applicable)</th>
<th>Piaget Cognitive Development</th>
<th>Erikson Psychosocial Stages</th>
<th>Kohlberg Moral Development</th>
<th>Maslow Hierarchy of Needs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Infancy (Birth–2)</td>
<td>Sensorimotor (Sensory input is constructed into language and symbols)</td>
<td>Trust vs. Mistrust (Hope)</td>
<td>Pre-conventional 1. Punishment/obedience 2. Naïve hedonism/Instrumental exchange Thinking is concrete and self-focused. Societal rules and expectations are not yet understood</td>
<td>Physiological (Basic life needs-food, shelter, sleep, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Childhood (2–6)</td>
<td>Pre-operational/Intuitive (Magical explanations for causal relationships, not able to think in terms of processes)</td>
<td>Autonomy vs. Shame &amp; Doubt (Will)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Safety (Law, stability protection)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Initiative vs. Guilt (Purpose)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childhood (7–12)</td>
<td>Concrete Operational (Emerging stable, flexible system of logical thought about objects)</td>
<td>Industry vs. Inferiority (Competence)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Belongingness (Family, affection, relationships)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolescence (13–21)</td>
<td>Formal Operational (Abstract, logical reasoning about concepts; the ability to think about thinking)</td>
<td>Identity vs. Role Confusion (Fidelity)</td>
<td>Conventional 3. Approval of others 4. Law and order/Conscience The rules of society and the opinions of others take precedence in decision making. Being a good citizen is an important criterion for action.</td>
<td>Self-esteem (Achievement, responsibility, reputation)</td>
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Table 2 (continued)

Comparison of Underlying Human Development Theories

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<th>Age (if applicable)</th>
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<th>Maslow Hierarchy of Needs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Young Adulthood (21–35)</td>
<td>Intimacy vs. Isolation (Love)</td>
<td>Post-conventional/Autonomous/Principled 5. Social contract/Individual rights</td>
<td>Self-actualization (Personal growth, self-fulfillment)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adulthood (35–65)</td>
<td>Generativity vs. Stagnation (Care)</td>
<td>6. Universal ethical Reasoning is based on self-determined principles and values. Individuals choose their own direction rather than following a prescribed path.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maturity (60+)</td>
<td>Integrity vs. Despair (Wisdom)</td>
<td>Post-post conventional 7. Universal spiritual (Wilbur, 2000, only)</td>
<td>Self-transcendence (Help others find self-fulfillment; connect with something beyond the ego)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

transpersonal psychology and the development of consciousness is discussed based on its relevance to the study of spirituality.

**Intellectual/cognitive development.** As a school psychologist, part of my regular work for 12 years was assessing intelligence/cognitive ability of students aged 3 to 21. In spite of that work, I was unaware of much of the history behind understanding adult intellectual and ethical development. In order to study the development of special
education administrators, it was essential that I gain understanding about their learning and meaning making systems.

Jan Sinnott, a Professor of Psychology at Towson University in Maryland, has centered her research on adult learning and the development of logic in adulthood (1998b, 2005, 2006). She developed a Theory of Complex Postformal Thought:

Postformal thought is a type of complex logical thinking that develops in adulthood, most likely when we interact with other people whose views about some aspect of reality are different from ours. We learn new “logics” in that way, and must deal with the existence of these other ways of viewing reality. When examined from the standpoint of Piagetian theory, postformal thought builds on concrete and formal (scientific) Piagetian thought skills. Postformal thought allows a person to deal with everyday logical contradictions by letting that person understand that a reality and meaning for events are co-created by both the knowers and the external realities they know. (Sinnott & Berlanstein, 2006, p. 388)

This theory was chosen as part of the conceptual framework both because of its consistency with the epistemology for this study where human perception is the source of truth and reality, and because it is part of another of Sinnott’s theories, the Theory of Felt Connection (1998, 2005, 2011). Central to the theory is that we, as humans, paradoxically desire both continuity and change.

Sinnott’s Theory of Felt Connection (1998, 2005, 2011), developed through interview data derived from the use of a questionnaire, is centered around the Self. There
are three types of feeling connected: connect sides of self, connect to others, and connect with transcendent. Among the three types, there is dynamic interplay, where change in one area results in the opportunity for change in another, which she compared with a dance.

Each of the types of feeling connected (sides of Self, to others, with transcendent) contains within it a motive for connecting and a pathology that could emerge from failure to connect. When the multifaceted sides of the self are connected, there is inner healing, but inner conflict results from lack of connection. In terms of connection to others, the motivation to do so is that relationships are important to every species. When there is a lack of connection with others, there is a danger of isolation. Finally, when human beings connect with the transcendent, they are able to widen their sphere of living. Unfortunately, when adults do not connect with something transcendent, their life lacks meaning.

Sinnott’s Theory of Felt Connection brings to this study an acknowledgment of the value of connection with the transcendent—a part of my chosen definition of spirituality—as a factor in human development. It also is tied to the research questions regarding self-nurturance and interacting with others at work.

Suggestions for further research in Sinnott’s (Sinnott & Berlanstein, 2006) writing also support the study. Hypotheses considered and integrated in some way include: (a) Those who can form transcendent relationships can more easily integrate the parts of the self and create loving felt connection with others; (b) The more mature person generally feels more connected to others and creates felt connection in situations where it does not
exist; and (c) The more mature person makes more use of spirituality in daily life (p. 399).

**Moral development.** Relevant to this study, and supporting the inclusion of moral development in the areas covered in the literature review, are Nash’s (1996) comments, “To be a metaphysician is to seek the deepest truths to the most existentially central human dilemmas” (p. 38). He continued, “Without an understanding of what they consider to be of spiritual significance, I do not think that [people] will ever be able to dig deeply enough into the metaphysical world in order to discover what gives ultimate moral meaning and purpose to their lives” (p. 43).

Evans (2011) defined moral development as the process by which individuals go about making decisions that affect themselves and others. Moral reasoning, she noted, is the cognitive component of moral behavior.

A thorough exploration of moral development must include Kohlberg’s work. Prior to academic work in moral reasoning, Lawrence Kohlberg (immediately after high school) signed up to be a crewman on a freighter to help Jewish refugees escape to Israel from World War II Europe. The situations in which he found himself during those adventures made him think about how unprepared he was to deal with complex moral scenarios (Fowler, 1981).

After finishing his work with the refugees, he enrolled at the University of Chicago and studied the work of John Dewey and J. Mark Baldwin, who combined philosophy and psychology in an approach to moral reasoning. The six-stage model of moral development (see Table 2) Kohlberg created as a result of a series of studies is
centered around the concept of justice, or the primary regard for value, equity, and reciprocity among human beings (Evans, 2011).

Kohlberg (1969) stated (as Wilbur [2000] later observed) that the ability to reason logically and see others’ point of view is necessary, but not sufficient for moral development. Human beings move to subsequent stages of moral reasoning when they experience situations that challenge their current way of thinking (Evans, 2011).

When she wrote In a Different Voice, Carol Gilligan (1982/1993) asserted, “females simply do not exist” (p. 18) in the work of Piaget and Kohlberg in the arena of moral development, based on their samples and perspectives. She interviewed women about a serious moral dilemma they were actually facing and came to describe “the ethic of care” or “the response mode” to moral conflict, rather than the heavy reliance on justice and rights ascribed by Kohlberg (1969; Belenky & Stanton, 2000, p. 78).

The response mode indicates moral dilemmas are resolved through dialogue. As stated in Belenky and Stanton, “In this mode, questioning, listening, and responding to everyone’s concerns is seen as the way to bring about lasting and satisfying solutions to moral predicaments. Resolutions are reached through conversation, storytelling, and perspective taking” (p. 79). Gilligan’s alternative model of moral development is depicted in Table 3 (Belenky & Stanton, 2000; Evans, 2011; Gilligan, 1982/1993).
Table 3

Gilligan’s Stages of the Ethic of Care

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 1: Orientation to individual survival</td>
<td>• Decisions are centered on self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition 1: From selfishness to responsibility</td>
<td>• Desire to take care of oneself remains but is in conflict with the belief that the right thing is to care for others</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Level 2: Goodness as self-sacrifice | • Acceptance by others is paramount  
• Care for others and protect them  
• One’s own desires are secondary |
| Transition 2: From goodness to truth | • Begin to question the logic of always putting self second  
• Recognize need to care for self and others |
| Level 3: The morality of nonviolence | • A moral equality between self and other |

Research presented by Evans (2011) suggested (a) justice and rights and (b) care and responsibility are two real bases for moral judgment, and she also found that they are gender-related, rather than gender-specific. Thus, Gilligan’s work provided a useful addition to the groundbreaking efforts of Kohlberg.

The theories about cognitive and moral development form two important elements of the foundation for adult learning. As summarized by Labouvie-Vief (1994), complex thinking is related to levels of intelligence, education, and the existence of a supportive culture that fosters it. Epistemological development, or how meaning is made, forms another element.

**Epistemological development.** Because this study is directed toward the study of adults engaged in work life, I have generally chosen not to describe studies and theories
focused on non-adult students. Nevertheless, Perry’s (1970) scheme is influential enough to be included as a precursor to describing the work of Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986), Lips-Wiersma (2002), and Lips-Wiersma and Morris (2011).

**Perry’s scheme of intellectual and ethical development.** In the 1950s and 1960s, Perry conducted a study at Harvard in which students were asked, each spring, how their thinking had changed in the past year (Belenky & Stanton, 2000). Based on their responses, he developed a set of nine positions, as he rejected the notion of a stage (he felt that stages were too static; Perry, 1970). He did, however, ascribe to Piaget’s concepts of assimilation and accommodation, and that the sequence of development is both logical and hierarchical.

There are four major positions in Perry’s (1970) scheme about social perspective, including duality, multiplicity, relativism, and commitment (Evans, 2011). The first position, duality, indicates that things are either right or wrong, and there is only one correct point of view. Students at the college level usually either have already moved beyond this level or soon do after arriving on campus.

Multiplicity forms the second cluster of positions in Perry’s (1970) theory, wherein humans realize that truth is relative to the frame of reference, rather than being absolute. Importantly, the learner’s position must be extensively adapted, because assimilation into the existing dualistic organizational scheme is not feasible (Rapaport, 2013). Here, students begin to rely less on authorities (Evans, 2011).

The third position in Perry’s (1970) scheme is relativism. In this position, there is a major shift in thinking to viewing knowledge as contextual and relative (Evans, 2011).
Judgments are made based on the evidence presented and different reasoning methods are developed by individuals to evaluate the argument.

Finally, Rapaport described the Commitment/Constructed Knowledge position as “Integration of knowledge learned from others with personal experience and reflection” (2013). Through experimentation with different commitments, a person develops “a personalized set of values, lifestyle, and identity” (Evans, 2011, p. 177).

As with most theories, even good ones, there are some limitations to Perry’s scheme that needed to be addressed. While Perry emphasized that learners approach knowledge from a variety of starting points (based on gender, race, culture and class, for example), his sample was limited in diversity (Rapaport, 2013).

*Women’s ways of knowing.* In order to address some of the shortcomings of Perry’s study, Belenky et al. (1986) endeavored to study the intellectual development of women, and they specifically sought female participants from a variety of circumstances for a rich sample (Evans, 2011). Women were asked, through extensive interviews, to describe how they go about getting knowledge and ideas (Belenky & Stanton, 2000). The collaborators on the project wondered, “What had helped her gain her voice and develop powers of mind? What had held her back?” (p. 80).

As a result of the study, five perspectives or “ways of knowing” were named (Belenky et al., 1986). It is important to note that based on the methods used in the study, the findings are considered to be co-created with the participants, increasing their trustworthiness. In 1996, the positions were reframed by the authors, as strategies for
knowing (Taylor, Marienau, & Fiddler, 2000). Table 4 summarizes information found in sources such as Belenky and Stanton (2000), Taylor et al. (2000), and Evans (2011).

Table 4

Summary of Women’s Strategies for Knowing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position/strategy</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Silence (Knowing-in-action)</td>
<td>• Mindless, voiceless, total subject to external authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Obtains knowledge through concrete experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Grew up in the midst of great violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Received knowing</td>
<td>• Can and do understand things when explained</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Can use knowledge provided by external authorities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Soaks up information, but seldom gives opinions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Not aware they can develop knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjective knowing</td>
<td>• Intuitive and aware they can give birth to ideas of their own</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Listen to their own inner voices for a truth that is right for them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Will articulate their own thoughts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedural knowing</td>
<td>• Have made an investment in learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Possess the tools needed for highly reflective dialogue, empathy and collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Look for objective procedures to see if information is valid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Aims to see the world as it really is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separate knowing</td>
<td>Impartial, impersonal approach to knowing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connected knowing</td>
<td>An approach that is relational and based on personal experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constructed knowing</td>
<td>• Understand they can create knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Constructivists”</td>
<td>• Use meta-thinking: evaluate, choose and integrate many aspects to make meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Integration of separate and connected modes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An interesting difference found between the Perry (1970) study and the Belenky et al. (1986) study was that the young men in Perry’s research tended to describe knowing and learning in terms of “looking” and “seeing,” whereas women in the WWK
study tended to use metaphors of “hearing” and “speaking” (Taylor et al., 2000). Additionally, Perry’s study did not find anything akin to Silence (Belenky & Stanton, 2000).

**Psychosocial development.** Adjacent to cognitive-structural development, psychosocial theories focus on issues individuals face as they mature psychologically and experience life challenges that trigger dissonance, “including issues such as defining self-concept, determining how to relate to others, deciding on life directions, and establishing belief systems” (Evans, 2011, p. 169), as well as how they are resolved. The seminal work in psychosocial development was done by Erikson (1980), who suggested that development occurs within stages that are sequential and associated with age. The goal of each stage is to resolve developmental crises, which, in turn, leads to the person acquiring new skills and perspectives.

Not only does psychosocial theory address child and adolescent development, but also there are specific theories related to adult development in this area. According to Evans (2011), there are three genres in the field of adult psychosocial development. First are the life stage perspectives. In this type, it is believed that individuals become unique and complex as they progress through life. Akin to Erikson’s stages, the life stage perspective suggests developmental changes are on a timetable, although some theorists believe they are linked to age, and others do not draw that connection (Evans, 2011).

In the second perspective—called life events and transition—the “timing, duration, spacing, and ordering of individual and cultural life events (such as having a baby or experiencing an economic downturn)” (Evans, 2011, p. 173) result in adult
development. There is no assumption that the development comes in predictable stages and the focus is on how adults make meaning of the events that occur.

Thirdly, the life course perspective emphasizes the importance of the environmental social roles in adult development (Evans, 2011). Rather than focusing on universal stages or particular events, Evans described these theories as linked to “the socially-constructed beliefs people hold about the roles they assume, such as about what it means to be a parent, worker, partner or friend” (p. 173). This perspective is consistent with Wilbur’s (2000) observation that one of the major difficulties people have in coming to terms with a stage conception is that most people, even if they are in fact progressing through stages of competence, rarely experience anything that feels or looks like a stage.

Identity and consciousness development. Identity theories evolved from earlier theories that were considered lifespan and psychosocial in nature (Torres, 2011). These theories are typically referred to as ego development theories, and emphasize a person’s biological characteristics, psychological needs and cultural environment (Torres, 2011). Erikson (1980), likely the best-known life-span theorist, defined ego identity as “certain comprehensive gains which the individual, at the end of adolescence, must have derived from all of his pre-adult experience in order to be ready for the tasks of adulthood” (p. 108).

Erickson (1980) also suggested that meaning gradually evolves throughout a person’s lifetime where one obtains insights into particular tensions as one moves through different developmental dimensions such as (in adult years) intimacy versus isolation, generativity versus self-absorption, and integrity versus despair. He wondered,
Is the sense of identity conscious? At times, of course, it seems only too conscious . . . We are most aware of our identity when we are just about to gain it and when we (with what motion pictures call a “double take”) are somewhat surprised to make its acquaintance; or, again, when we are just about to enter a crisis and feel the encroachment of identity diffusion . . . An increasing sense of identity, on the other hand, is experienced preciously as a sense of psychosocial well-being. Its most obvious concomitants are of being at home in one’s body, as sense of ‘knowing where one is going,’ and an inner assuredness of anticipated recognition from those who count. (p. 127)

In this survey of the literature related to human identity development, especially given the prominence of spirituality in the research questions, some space must be dedicated to the field of transpersonal psychology.

Lajoie and Shapiro (1992) defined transpersonal psychology as the field of psychology that studies the transpersonal, self-transcendent, or spiritual aspects of the human experience. Further, this branch of psychology, formally named in 1969, is concerned with the study of humanity’s highest potential, including recognizing, understanding and realizing the uniative, spiritual, and transcendent states of consciousness. Issues considered in transpersonal psychology include spiritual self-development, self beyond the ego, peak experiences, and other expanded experiences of living (Lajoie & Shapiro, 1992). Caplan (2009) wrote, “Transpersonal psychologists attempt to integrate timeless wisdom with modern Western psychology and translate spiritual principles into scientifically grounded, contemporary language” (p. 231). Key
points from influential transpersonal psychologists Maslow, Kegan, and Wilbur are described, in addition to relevant findings of researchers in other disciplines (Fowler and Nash), before a description of Cook-Greuter’s and Barrett’s theories, which are used as part of the conceptual base for this study.

**Maslow.** While learning about transpersonal psychology, I was surprised to discover that Abraham Maslow was a transpersonal psychologist. I, like most students of psychology, was familiar with Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, but (perhaps because my earlier studies were focused on child and adolescent development) I was not aware that the depth of his work rested in expanding on self-actualization. In his view, the greatest attainment of identity, autonomy, or selfhood is itself simultaneously a transcending of itself, a going above and beyond selfhood (Maslow, 1999).

Elsewhere in this chapter, the concept of paradox has been mentioned, and it is a regularly occurring theme in the related literature. Maslow (1999) described it, as well, when he wrote,

I wish to underscore one main paradox I have dealt with when we must face even if we don’t understand it. The goal of identity (self-actualization, autonomy, individuation) seems to be simultaneously an end-goal in itself, and also a transitional goal, a rite of passage, a step along the path to the transcendence of identity. This is like saying its function is to erase itself. Put the other way around, if our goal is the Eastern one of ego-transcendence and obliteration, of leaving behind self-consciousness and self-observation . . . then it looks as if the
best path to this goal for most people is via achieving identity, a strong real self, and via basic-need-gratification rather than via asceticism. (p. 125)

By this, he meant that living in the real world, dealing with the workaday issues of life, is the way to attain the highest consciousness.

In 1954, Maslow wrote,

The pursuit and gratification of higher needs have desirable civic and social consequences. To some extent, the higher the need, the less selfish it must be . . .

People who have enough basic satisfaction to look for love and respect tend to develop such qualities as loyalty, friendliness, and civic consciousness, and to become better parents, husbands, teachers, public servants, etc. (p. 149)

Kanungo and Mendonça (1994) hypothesized that in Maslow’s theory of metamotivation, the spiritual experiences of pursuing values such as truth, goodness, and beauty are regarded as a major part of one’s self-actualization. They also noted that “there is a remarkable parallel asserting these same values in Hinduism: truth (satyam), goodness (sivam), and beauty (sundaram)” (p. 195).

Furthermore, Maslow (1999) described “peak experiences.” At these times, we are surprised by joy and a feeling of gratitude is expressed as or leads to an all-embracing love for everybody and everything, to a perception of the world as beautiful, and good, often to an impulse to do something good for the world, an eagerness to repay, even a sense of obligation. This idea has a relationship to the study, in that I am interested in finding out the connection between special education administrators’ higher development and their work lives.
Kegan. In his often-cited book, *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life*, Kegan (1994) delineated a theory called The Five Orders of Consciousness. He indicated it addresses “meaning regulation, transformation of consciousness, the internal experience of these processes, and the role of environment in this activity” (p. 7). During development, a person’s consciousness spirals back to prior learning to make new meaning of old experience as new awareness is gained. Kegan did not discuss spiritual development specifically, but talks about spiral development in all the domains.

The stages or “orders of mind” begin, as all of these human development theories do, at birth. Since this is a study focused on adult development, I only note the stages that occur in adulthood. These include the third, fourth, and fifth orders.

The third order is the Socialized Mind. Interpersonal relationships and a person’s needs, interests, and desires are at the forefront. According to Pruyn (2010), about 58% of the adult population is at this level or below.

The Self-Authoring Mind is the fourth order of consciousness. Self-authorship, identity, and ideology form the structure of what a person at this stage knows, characterized by self-directed, independent thought. Pruyn (2010) shared that approximately 35% of the adult population reaches this plateau of development.

Less than 1% of the adult population reaches the fifth order, called the Self-Transforming Mind (Pruyn, 2010). At this level, Kegan (1994) suggested that mature thinkers can tolerate ambiguity, if not outright contradictions, as they consider multiple ideologies simultaneously. According to Irwin (2006), fostering this higher level of consciousness is Kegan’s agenda for adult learning. As with Maslow, this point
makes a connection to this study in that it is concerned with adult spiritual experience at work. If special education administrators are able to develop a dialectic, or internal conversation, about the paradoxes they face, it will be evidence of a higher level of consciousness development.

**Wilbur.** Ken Wilbur (2000), a transpersonal psychologist and developer of integral psychology, used the Great Nest of Being as the framework for his theory of development. It is highly complex and detailed. He depicted it as a set of concentric circles in which each layer “transcends but includes its juniors, so that this is a conception of wholes within wholes indefinitely, reaching from dirt to Divinity” (p. 5). It is underpinned by the ‘Perennial Philosophy,’ or common core of all the world’s great spiritual traditions, which says, “reality is composed of various levels of existence—levels of being and knowing—ranging from matter to body to mind to soul to spirit” (Wilbur, 2000, p. 5). Paraphrasing Aldous Huxley, Eknath Easwaran (1989) listed four principles of Perennial Philosophy: (a) there is a light in the soul that is uncreated and uncreatable, (b) this divine essence can be realized, (c) this discovery is life’s real and highest goal, and (d) “when we realize this goal, we discover simultaneously that the divinity within ourselves is one and the same in all—all individuals, all creatures, all of life” (p. 9).

There are five basic elements to Wilbur’s paradigm of the evolution of consciousness:

1. Basic levels, structures or waves (matter, body, mind, soul, spirit)
2. Developmental lines or streams (moral, aesthetic, religious, cognitive, affective)

3. States (peak experiences, dream states, altered states)

4. Self (the seat of identity, will and defenses)

5. Self-related lines (self’s central identity, morals, needs). (2000, p. 89)

In addition to the comprehensive map of the human mind developed by Wilbur, he provided a multipart definition of spirituality. In the interest of effective organization and for purposes of comparison, I have included it in a later section of this literature review where other definitions of spirituality are explored. It is appropriate to note here, though, that Wilbur (2000) wondered whether spiritual development was separate from the other lines of development, such as cognitive development. After consideration, he decided that it was connected to the others, rather than being isolated.

It was necessary to present the underlying structure of Wilbur’s framework in order to come to his ideas most germane to this study of the spiritual experiences of special education administrators. Wilbur (1996) proposed two dimensions by which to sort and understand the varieties of spiritual experience. The first dimension is inner versus outer; the second is the individual versus the group, community or society.

Thus, there are four distinct orientations toward spirituality:

- Inner-individual—this is what most people mean by spirituality. It is purely subjective, and unique to each person’s innermost feelings

- Outer-individual—spiritual experience is known by the actions of a person and the effects those actions have on others
• Inner-communal—spiritual experience is a function of the culture in which a person lives.

• Outer-communal—spirituality is revealed in the structures (organizations) that a society has to help the less fortunate.

Wilbur (1996) made two helpful statements about the construct of spirituality.

First, he said, “In the end, spirituality is its own fuel. It provides the abiding hope, boundless energy, and enthusiasm needed to surmount all the obstacles that always lie in its path” (p. 183). Second, he noted,

Spirituality is not a final state. It is an ongoing process—a process that leads to itself. Above all, spirituality is not a simple-minded how-to list or checklist. It is a perpetual process of becoming, a continual unfolding of the human spirit. (p. 185)

**Ego Development Theory.** Prior to selecting Susanne Cook-Greuter’s Ego Development Theory as the identity development core of my conceptual framework, I reviewed many others, including Kegan’s Five Orders of Consciousness (1994), Fowler’s Faith Development Stages (1981), Alexander’s Levels of Mind (Alexander, Heaton, & Chandler, 1994), Wilbur’s Spectrum of Consciousness (2000), and Levinson’s Seasons of a Man’s/Woman’s Life (1978, 1996), in addition to the legacy developmental theories that form the framework for these contemporary theories, as mentioned earlier.

After careful consideration, I chose Cook-Greuter’s work—an extension on Jane Loevinger’s research on ego development—for its fit with my project. Cook-Greuter has built a long career as an independent researcher and scholar. She is an expert scorer of
the projective *Washington University Sentence Completion Test* (SCT; Loevinger, 1976, 1985), and is the principal of the consulting firm Cook-Greuter & Associates.

According to Loevinger (1976), the ego is hypothesized as a master trait, with four domains: character development, cognitive style, interpersonal style, and conscious preoccupations. Irwin (2006) summarized the developing ego as a progressive reorganization of the underlying structures, making Ego Development Theory Neo-Piagetian.

“Ego development theory (Loevinger, 1976; Cook-Greuter, 1990) described the growth of the self from undifferentiated early infancy to self-actualized mature adulthood. It proposed ten distinct mental models of reality, four of which are Postconventional” (Cook-Greuter, 2000, p. 229). In her refinement on the model, Cook-Greuter maintained Loevinger’s early stages, or Preconventional first tier, of ego development (2000). Stages one through four are concerned only with childhood development, so are not covered in this context. Table 5 describes the adult stages of this theory.
Table 5

**Cook-Greuter’s Ego Development Theory Stages (Adult Stages Only)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Conventional Tier** | *The most common stage achieved by adults (Irwin, 2006).*  
| **Stage Five: Self-Aware** | • The individual conceptualizes the self as separate from the group—and making unique choices against group norms is possible—yet the reaction of the group has a strong influence.  
| **Stage Six: Conscientious** | • The major elements of conscience are in place, including a sense of responsibility, differentiated self-criticism and long-term, self-evaluated goals.  
| | • Because the norms of our culture (including developing a secure, rational, individuated identity) match the “adult worldview” of the Conscientious stage, it “acts as a kind of ceiling or barrier, and moving beyond it is difficult” (Cook-Greuter, 2000, p. 233).  
| **Postconventional Tier** | *Increased sense of individuality, yet also is emotionally dependent.*  
| **Stage Seven: Individualistic** | • There develops a greater awareness of inner conflict and the ability to tolerate the discrepancy between inner awareness and outward appearance.  
| **Stage Eight: Autonomous** | • An autonomous person “unites and integrates ideas with a high toleration of ambiguity” and “recognizes the other’s need for autonomy” (Irwin, 2006, p. 318).  
| | • Recognizing that reality is more complex than previously suspected, the individual strives for meaning based in self-actualization.  
| **Postautonomous Tier** | *Less than one percent of SCT respondents score at the two Postautonomous stages.*  
| **Stage Nine: Construct Aware** | • A dialectic operation comes into play, whereby, in the Hegelian sense, a process of change begins to move the individual from securing his or her separate identity to the opposite of moving toward a unity consciousness. “By turning further inward, they start to see through their own thought and language habits, and become aware of the profound splits and paradoxes inherent in rational thought” (Cook-Greuter, 2000, p. 234).  
| | • Persons at the Construct-aware level see that the ego cleverly tries to preserve itself. Gaining that awareness, the individual sees the complexity of human interactions and becomes “concerned with uncovering and facing their own habits of mind and heart—those automatic behaviors that are based on memory and life-long cultural reinforcement and amplification” (Cook-Greuter, 2000, p. 235).  

*(table continues)*
Table 5 (continued)

Cook-Greuter’s Ego Development Theory Stages (Adult Stages Only)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Stage Ten: Uniative | - Individuals learn to accept themselves and reality “as is.” Their ability to accept the simultaneous existence of polar opposites happens at the affective, not just the cognitive, level, and these juxtapositions are valued “as part of the eternal cycle of creation, destruction and re-creation” (Cook-Greuter, 2000, p. 236).  
- The individual is comfortable not knowing who s/he is, and there is an ability to tolerate a consistently changing experience.  
- They tend to witness rather than judge experiences and often express joy because the need to measure up to expectations of self or others has lessened.  
- Cook-Greuter (2000) described that they come across (on the SCT) as having a “profound and compassionate understanding of the human condition” (p. 236). |

There are several reasons why I chose Cook-Greuter’s Ego Development Theory for my theoretical frame. First, it is based on a very substantial data set using an instrument (SCT) that has been demonstrated to have content validity. Second, I appreciated that this theory has been revised and refined over time to reflect additional nuance in adult development, especially in terms of movement toward the transcendent. Since ‘awareness of a transcendent dimension’ is part of the definition of ‘spirituality’ for the study, there was a good match for this theory. Lastly, while Cook-Greuter addressed ideas of both Western and Eastern psychology, the terms she used to describe the stages were both unusual enough to avoid assumptions about her meaning, yet clear enough not to invite skepticism.

Torres (2011) indicated there is a recent theme in identity theory that addresses understanding beyond the adolescent years. Specifically, researchers have described a
life-long process whereby identity is not linear or completed at a certain point, but moves forward and back, often in response to changes in adults’ lives (Torres, 2011).

Identity may be seen as an individual’s personal theory about self, about the world, and about the relationship with the world and vice versa (Saari, 1996). Through this theory, which is often conceptualized as an autobiographical narrative, the individual organizes past experiences and plans future actions (Saari, 1996).

After describing the first two parts of the conceptual framework for this study (Felt Connection and Ego Stages), the next section explores a modern theory of motivation.

**Seven stages of personal/school consciousness.** Richard Barrett, a Britisher who left his position as Values Coordinator for the World Bank to start his own consulting firm, Barrett Values Center, developed a model of consciousness that expanded Maslow’s (1968) Hierarchy of Needs. Barrett (1998, 2010) proposed that each of Maslow’s levels could be re-framed as a state of consciousness, and that the Maslow’s pinnacle—self-actualization—could be expanded into four distinct stages.

Thus, he developed a model of motivation with seven levels of personal consciousness (see Table 6). The first three stages, or Life Themes—Survival, Belonging and Self-Esteem—are familiar refrains of Maslow (1968). Barrett (2010) indicated these initial stages mark the formation of the individual’s ego, and are focused on self-interest. The fourth stage of personal consciousness is called Transformation, and it indicates the tipping point where one learns to balance his or her needs with the needs of others. The final three stages in Barrett’s theory are said to correspond with the development of the human soul.
Table 6

*Barrett’s Seven Stages in the Development of Personal/School Consciousness*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal Consciousness Stage</th>
<th>School Consciousness Stage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Life Themes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 1: Survival</td>
<td>Stage 1: Survival</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 2: Belonging</td>
<td>Stage 2: Relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 3: Self-esteem</td>
<td>Stage 3: Self-esteem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition Stage</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 4: Transformation</td>
<td>Stage 4: Transformation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of the Human Soul</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 5: Cohesion</td>
<td>Stage 5: Internal Cohesion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 6: Inclusion</td>
<td>Stage 6: Making a Difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 7: Unity</td>
<td>Stage 7: Service</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The fifth stage is Cohesion, where the motivating force is bringing meaning to one’s existence. Stage six is Inclusion. According to Barrett (2010), the motivation underlying this stage is making a difference in peoples’ lives; creating beneficial outcomes for individuals or groups. Finally, the seventh stage is Unity. Here, serving humanity and the planet is a total way of life, and the wisdom of the individual grows.

Barrett (2010) described the most common ego-soul conflict as work. There are often choices to make about whether to prioritize financial gains over humanistic endeavors. This idea tethered personal consciousness to the construct of a work life. Because the environment of a workplace is central to the lives of most adults, Barrett (1998, 2010) not only suggested stages of personal consciousness, but also uniquely linked them with stages of organizational consciousness. Germaine to this study, he later adapted them into levels of school consciousness (Barrett, n.d.).
To describe school consciousness briefly, Survival comes from financial stability, and Relationship is found through student, parent, and employee satisfaction, with open communication and employee recognition. Self-esteem is gained by focusing on quality, excellence, and professional growth, while avoiding silo mentality and arrogance. Transformation is the fourth stage and is characterized by adaptability, accountability, empowerment, participation, and continuous learning. Internal Cohesion flourishes with shared vision and values, integrity, trust, fairness, and transparency. The sixth stage, Making a Difference, occurs when partnerships and strategic alliances are formed with other schools, parents, and the local community. The Service stage is manifest through organizational practices that take a long-term perspective and emphasize social responsibility. The qualities of compassion, humility, wisdom, and forgiveness are evident in the culture of the school (Barrett, n.d.).

Barrett’s (1998, 2010) Seven Stages of Personal Consciousness forms part of the conceptual framework for the study for several reasons. With its developmental nature grounded in Maslow’s hierarchy, it has more weight than many other theories emerging from the business world. Although Barrett originally proposed stages of organizational consciousness, he recognized that P–12 education is not a business venture (and many educators become defensive when the comparison is made). Nevertheless, there is pressure for education to adapt and adopt practices from corporate culture. By including Barrett’s work, I hope to leverage knowledge gained in the corporate sector that has been consciously modified for an educational setting. Thirdly, the research questions for the study are based in work, and the work takes place within schools. When considering the
data, it may be important to think about the developmental stage of the organization in which the participants work, in addition to their personal perspective.

Adult development is a highly complex topic and has been well studied and theorized. I strived in this section to provide a review of intellectual/cognitive, moral, epistemological, psychosocial, and identity development that was both thorough and concise. It is my belief that a firm basis in the literature on those domains of adult development is a prerequisite to the discussion of spiritual development.

**Spirituality/faith development.** Within the literature, many sources begin the discussion of spirituality with the sentiment that it is an elusive topic (Shahabi et al., 2002; Tisdell, 2003). Wilbur (2000) reminded me, “The word psychology means the study of the psyche, and the word psyche means mind or soul. [Thus], one is reminded, yet again, that the roots of psychology lie deep within the human soul and spirit” (p. vii). According to this line of thought, it naturally follows that those studying human development would also study human spirituality. Oman et al. (2009) added that understanding adult spiritual development will illuminate their experiences, and may be informative for others, perhaps through modeling. The fact that use of the term spirituality has increased forty-fold in professional publications in psychology from the 1970s to the 2000s proves that it is an area of rising, and related, interest (Oman, 2013).

As I delved into constructing background knowledge based on the vast literature on spirituality, I found comfort in the words of Fraser (2007), “It is not the intention here to comprehensively review the myriad of perspectives that exist on spirituality, but rather
to highlight some of the emerging trends and definitions that relate to the concept of spirituality” (p. 290). With this in mind, I address the definition of spirituality.

**Definitions/What is spirituality?** According to Shahabi et al. (2002), “The inherently personal nature of spirituality is perhaps its greatest strength, but also its greatest weakness, at least as far as scientific study is concerned” (p. 67). Thus, before summarizing the literature in the area of spirituality, the broadly used term must be defined. Beringer (2000) acknowledged, “spirituality is conceptually challenging and difficult to define, a difficulty not eased by the facts that the phenomenon seems to be multidimensional and profoundly personal, and that the meaning of the term seems to be changing” (p. 157). In case a researcher was tempted not to attempt to define the term, Beringer cautioned that would be “deeply unsatisfactory.” Heeding Beringer’s words, I felt the need to choose one definition for the study.

Several sources provided guidance on choosing a definition of spirituality. Oman (2013) described a process for choosing definitions for both religion and spirituality, suggesting there are three approaches: (a) religion and spirituality as a search process, (b) spiritual development as an inherent capacity for self-transcendence, and (c) one religion, multiple spiritualities. He also observed that most contemporary scholars believe religion and spirituality are each multidimensional.

Interestingly, Koenig (2011) pointed out that if a definition does not involve connection to religion or the supernatural, it would be humanistic, rather than spiritual. Spilka’s (1993) review of the literature led him to conclude that spirituality is multidimensional and most current understandings of spirituality can be categorized in
three ways: (a) a God-oriented spirituality, (b) a world-oriented spirituality stressing one’s relationship with nature, or (c) a humanistic spirituality, emphasizing human achievement or potential. Another review of the literature conducted by Dyson et al. (1997) indicated

The self, others, and ‘God’ provide the key elements within a definition of spirituality, and that other emerging themes, namely meaning, hope, relatedness/connectedness, beliefs/belief systems and expressions of spirituality, can be articulated in the context of those three key elements. (p. 1183)

It was with consideration given to the above ideas that a multidimensional definition of spirituality for this study was chosen. As indicated in Chapter 1, the working definition of spirituality for the purpose of this study is the one devised by Elkins et al. (1988):

Spirituality, which comes from the Latin, *spiritus*, meaning ‘breath of life,’ is a way of being and experiencing that comes about through awareness of a transcendent dimension and that is characterized by certain identifiable values in regard to self, others, nature, life and whatever one considers to be the Ultimate. (p. 5)

To expand beyond the brief description provided in the introduction, this definition was formed by the authors reviewing the literature of major writers who had approached spirituality from a primarily phenomenological perspective. The list included such classic theorists as William James, Carl Jung, Abraham Maslow, John Dewey, Erich Fromm, Viktor Frankl, and others.
According to Elkins et al. (1988), the authors’ works had convergent and overlapping elements of spirituality, but none specifically defined the term. After creating a list of core dimensions, the authors interviewed several persons, from diverse religious traditions, to informally validate the defining characteristics. At that point, the authors were able to assemble to definition of spirituality offered above. Subsequently, an inventory, the Spiritual Orientation Inventory (SOI), was created as a measure of humanistic spirituality. It is comprised of nine elements: (a) Transcendent dimension, (b) Meaning and purpose in life, (c) Mission in life, (d) Sacredness of life, (e) Material values, (f) Altruism, (g) Idealism, (h) Awareness of the tragic (this involves paradox), and (i) Fruits of spirituality.

Although I chose one definition to ground my study, there are a wide range of definitions utilized across disciplines such as religious studies, psychology, sociology, education, medicine, and business. Some of them are cited in Table 7 in chronological order to give the reader a sense of what is in the larger body of literature.

While some endeavored to create a succinct definition of spirituality suitable for a table, others have created more in-depth descriptions. Wilbur (2000) expressed there are at least five definitions of spirituality (two with stages and three without):

1. Spirituality is an attitude (such as openness or love) that you can have at whatever stage you are at. This is most common and popular definition, but is difficult to define or state in a coherent fashion.
Table 7

** Definitions of Spirituality 

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Definition of spirituality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Starratt &amp; Guare (1995, p. 191)</td>
<td>What does spirituality mean? It means that we recognize in ourselves and in our experience a depth beyond the surface appearances, a depth in which the meaning of who we are and what we are experiencing is connected to larger meanings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nash (1996, p. 43)</td>
<td>Spirituality summons up oceanic images of incorporeality, the sacred, the breath of life, the animating principle that bestows life in a person, the environment, otherworldliness, health, happiness, ‘feeling good about oneself’ and what the theologian Matthew Fox calls ‘heart-knowledge.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wuthnow (1998, p. viii)</td>
<td>All the beliefs and activities by which individuals attempt to relate their lives to God or a divine being or some other concept of a transcendent reality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hill et al. (2000, p. 66)</td>
<td>The feelings, thoughts, experiences, and behaviors that arise from a search for the sacred.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lantieri (2001, p. 8)</td>
<td>Spiritual experience can be described as the conscious recognition that goes beyond our own minds or emotions. It’s the kind of experience that sometimes leaves us without words to describe it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puchalski et al. (2009, p. 887)</td>
<td>The way individuals seek and express meaning and purpose and the way they experience their connectedness to the moment, to self, to others, to nature and to the significant or sacred.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Spirituality basically involves peak experiences. These are not stage-like and are temporary, passing and transient.

3. Spirituality involves the highest levels of any of the developmental lines. It means our highest cognitive capacities, most developed affects, our highest moral aspiration, our most evolved Self. In this usage, it definitely follows a sequential or stage-like course. It is a very common usage.
4. Spirituality is the sum total of the highest levels of the developmental lines. This would not be stage-like. Every person’s progression would be very unique.

5. Spirituality itself is a separate developmental line, with its own stages. The work of Brown (Eastern traditions), and Chirban (Christian tradition) have found that there is an unvarying sequence of stages, despite vast differences in culture, language and styles of practice. (p. 129)

Derived from Tisdell’s (2003) qualitative research with adults in the field of higher education is a useful set of seven assumptions about the nature of spirituality in relation to education:

1. Spirituality and religion are not the same, but for many people they are interrelated.
2. Spirituality is about an awareness and honoring of wholeness and the interconnectedness of all things through the mystery of the Life-force, God, higher power, higher self, cosmic energy, Buddha nature, or Great Spirit.
3. Spirituality is fundamentally about meaning-making.
4. Spirituality is always present (though often unacknowledged) in the learning environment).
5. Spiritual development constitutes moving toward greater authenticity or to a more authentic self.
6. Spirituality is about how people construct knowledge through largely unconscious and symbolic processes, often made more concrete in art forms such as music, art, image, symbol, and ritual, which are manifested culturally.

7. Spiritual experiences most often happen by surprise. (pp. 28-29)

Tisdell (2003) also indicated that spiritual development is not a completely separate aspect of development, but was more likely to be an integration of the various areas, informed by the social-cultural environment in which that development takes place (i.e., cultural background, gender, historical era, education and religious upbringing). She summed up her study by observing that perhaps spirituality is “finding the extraordinary in the ordinary business of life” (p. 114).

As a result of in-depth interviews and focus groups (with individuals from many different religious perspectives), an additional list of components of spirituality was created by Underwood and Teresi (2002). The goal of the qualitative methods used was to categorize the findings and to construct a rating scale of spiritual experiences with the “hope of heal(ing) the fragmentation that was beginning to develop in the field of the scientific study of religion” (Underwood, 2006, p. 183). As a result of the work completed, the spiritual experiences identified include connection, joy, transcendent sense of self, strength/comfort, peace, divine help, divine guidance, perceptions of divine love, awe, thankfulness/appreciation, compassionate love, union/closeness, being fully present in the moment, integration of the spiritual with the mental/physical aspects of life, and detachment (Underwood, 2006). After noting descriptions of spirituality, two theories of spiritual/faith development are explored.
**Theories.** While it is true that there are many different definitions and conceptualizations of spirituality, I found there are common threads that run through them, and I did not find any irreconcilable differences. In order to further understand spiritual/faith development, the ideas of Fowler (1981) and Nash (2002) are shared.

**Fowler.** James Fowler (1981) conducted a study by interviewing almost 600 people, posing questions about life and their beliefs. Accordingly, he created the Theory of Faith Development. When considering Fowler’s work, it is important to note that his sample, while large, was 97% White and Judeo-Christian. In the literature his work is oft cited and clearly respected, yet other authors usually note this caveat. In spite of the limitations of Fowler’s study, it contributed to the understanding of how people construct knowledge through image and symbol, an area largely ignored by most development and learning theorists (Tisdell, 2003).

Fowler’s Faith Development Theory is comprised of six stages (1981). The first two, intuitive-projective and mythic-literal, are exclusively about childhood, so won’t be discussed further in this context of exploring adult development (see Table 8).

Considering the overall landscape of the study of human development, Fowler (1981) added a spiritual dimension and described the journey of life as one of faith, involving the making, maintenance, and transformation of human meaning. He viewed the process of meaning-making as a process of learning about faith, life and self. For my study on the spiritual experience of special education administrators, Fowler’s study, built directly from the theories of Piaget, Kohlberg, and Erickson, was an important one with which to become familiar.
Table 8

Fowler’s Faith Development Theory (Adult Stages Only)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Third Stage: Synthetic-</td>
<td>• Emerges in early adolescence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conventional faith</td>
<td>• Synthetic means pulling together pieces of one’s identity into a coherent whole, but it is conventional in that it is developed in light of the approval of significant others and authority (Fowler, 1981).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• In this stage, beliefs and values are passed on and accepted with little question.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Fowler noted that some adults stay at this stage, but many adults move on to the next stage in early adulthood.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth Stage: Individuative-</td>
<td>• Life circumstances make it necessary for adults to “examine and make critical choices about the defining elements of their identity and faith” (Fowler, 1981, p. 49).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reflective faith</td>
<td>• Roles and relationships defined by others are called into question and people here often move away from their childhood religious tradition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fifth Stage: Conjunctive faith</td>
<td>• Often emerges at midlife and is characterized by some adults’ ability to hold a tension of opposites (Fowler, 1981).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• In addition to being critically reflective, those in this stage are able to hold as valuable the truths of different traditions and communities—in essence these ideas become “conjoined” with their own.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The ability to deal with paradox and resolve the tension of accepting and seeing as valued different points of view is a key in this stage where the person is “committed to the greatest good for the greatest number” (Fowler, 1981, p. 83).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sixth Stage: Universalizing faith</td>
<td>• One person in the study was described at this phase (thus, Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. were used as examples), and this stage is largely under-defined (Tisdell, 2003).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Fowler (1981) noted those in this stage move beyond the self to a universalizing concern for all humanity and a realization that all are one in God or a higher power.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• They articulate and act on moral principles in the service of justice.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Nash. Less well known, perhaps, but applicable to my study because I want to better understand the spiritual characteristics of special education administrators, are Nash’s (2002) eight types of religious narrative. He studied college students representing every age- gender-, racial-, ethnic-, and socioeconomic group. He clarified his findings by stating they are not pure types, and they are not necessarily mutually exclusive. The types of believers he identified are noted in Table 9.

Nash (2002) described spirituality as, “the name I give to the never-ending struggle that for each of us in escapable; the need to provide answers to life’s most insistent questions about meaning” (p. 20). He also went on to say that he sees God as being better understood as a story to be narrated, rather than a doctrine to be believed.

Since the purpose of this study is to understand how special education administrators experience spirituality in their work, it was critical to investigate the literature to learn about special education and adult development, including, but not limited to spiritual development. In order to round out my background knowledge, exploration was needed in the areas of work life and leadership.

**Work Life**

There is a large body of research in the field of vocation and occupation, and it was important to narrow the scope of the review to the elements relevant to this study. Areas discussed include: (a) career, (b) professional identity development, (c) meaning, (d) work stress, (e) spirituality at work, and (f) spirituality within organizations. Finally, as a culmination of the entire literature review, noteworthy theories and related studies on spiritual and educational leadership are discussed.
### Table 9

**Nash’s Religious Narrative Types**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Orthodox Believers</td>
<td>• At the core of their belief is there is an unimpeachable, immutable, final truth that can only be found in a particular book, institution, prophet, or movement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainline Believers</td>
<td>• A large group that prefer a life of traditional worship that balances traditions, standards, self-discipline, and moral conscience with a degree of personal freedom, biblical latitude and the <em>joie de vivre</em> of close community life.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Wounded Believers     | • Those who define their religious experience mainly as a reaction to the physical and mental abuse that they have suffered at the hands of hypocritical, over-zealous clergy, lovers, parents, relatives and friends.  
  • They ask, if there is a good, all-loving God, why has there been so much unbearable pain in my life? |
| Mystics               | • These people feel the transcendent is best experienced, not through idle chatter or abstract concepts, but by way of meditation, mindfulness, and, above all, a pervasive calmness. |
| Social Justice Activists | • Believers must be responsible for building the Kingdom of God in the here-and-now, rather than waiting for paradise to come.  
  • They advocate an activist faith dedicated to the liberation of oppressed peoples, equal rights, and social justice for all, and radical social transformation marked by full democratic participation in decision-making. |
| Existential Humanists | • Believe all of us need to confront our human finitude, and make a conscious choice to create ourselves through our daily projects, that is, throughout courageous strivings to make meaning in an absurd universe.  
  • The stark truth is that God has forever disappeared—if he ever existed in the first place—and now it is up to us to get on with our lives. |
| Postmodern Skeptics   | • This group also is deeply suspicious of religious claims to absolute truth (as are existential humanists).  
  • They also reject the existence of an un-situated, context-free self or soul. An informed sense of contingency, irony, doubt, and a willingness to repudiate religiously grounded, patriarchal systems of social domination are what make us truly human and our lives truly worth living. |
| Scientific Empiricists | • Hold that we are utterly alone in the universe, beyond final Divine revelations and interventions, and left to our own human devices, accompanied by the findings of science, to create a better world for everyone. |
Career

Super (1980) defined career as “the combination and sequence of roles played by a person during the course of a life-time” (p. 282) and as “the constellation of interacting, varying roles” (p. 284). Gouws (1995) suggested that choice and decision-making processes come into play whenever a person assumes a new role or undergoes or anticipates a role transition. Lips-Wiersma (2002) offered, “career is a lifelong process including the process of making career transitions” (p. 499).

A major concern related to making choices in life and career, according to Super (1980), is that both self-knowledge and knowledge of the critical characteristics of the role being chosen are needed. Although this makes sense, it is easy to understand that neither of these is easily attained.

Career development. Super (1980) described an age- and stage-based psychosocial theory of career development. The stages are summarized in Table 10. Importantly, during periods of transition, the stages recycle, and this allows for continued growth, exploration and establishment in new career opportunities (Evans, 2011).

Throughout his writing, Super (1980) emphasized that individuals most certainly are able to change careers with success (as preferences, self-concepts and environments change), which is likely to increase satisfaction with work in the long run. The visual model he created for his theory is called Super’s Life-Career Rainbow (1980), and it is a complex map using roles to show career and life development over a person’s lifetime. Of central importance is the idea of recursive problem solving and decision-making about work and life as related entities.
Table 10

Super’s Stages of Career Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Variables</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stage 1: Growth (age 0-14 years)</td>
<td>• Try out different experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Develop an understanding of work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 2: Exploration (age 14-24 years)</td>
<td>• Investigate career options</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Become aware of interests and abilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Develop skills necessary to enter a career</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 3: Establishment (age 25-44 years)</td>
<td>• Become competent in a career</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Advance in the chosen career</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 4: Maintenance (age 45-65 years)</td>
<td>• Continue to enhance skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Remain productive while planning for retirement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 5: Decline (age 65 and older)</td>
<td>• Adjust work to physical capability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Manage resources to remain independent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As noted elsewhere in this paper, special education administrators have already made changes in their career as educators, and may have had prior careers, as well. A review of the literature provided useful ideas about how workers develop their professional identities and how they make meaning of their work.

**Professional identity development.** Šverko and Vizek-Vidović (1995), in their summary of the literature, noted that work has four distinct functions: (a) Economic—people work to earn a living for themselves and to support others; (b) Social—it enables people to meet, interact and be with one another; (c) Social status and prestige—people’s position in society depends largely on what they do for a living; and (d) Psychological—work is an essential source of identity, self-esteem and self-fulfillment.
In her study of student and novice professional psychologists and political scientists transitioning from higher education to working life, Nystrom (2008) found that professional identity is “a dynamic relationship between different life spheres” (p. 1). Three different types of professional identity were identified, including (a) non-differentiated (i.e., life spheres are not separate), (b) compartmentalized (i.e., there is separation between spheres of life, often driven by attention to professional sphere), and (c) integrated (i.e., using strategies to maintain harmony, sustainability and work life balance), which exemplify different relationships between the private, personal, and professional life spheres. She concluded that the three forms of professional identity are sequential, and move from an individual focus to a more relational and integrated way of reasoning. With an understanding of professional identity development, the next area to define is meaning.

**Meaning**

Meaning can be defined in several different ways. For the purpose of this study, meaning denotes something significant and/or symbolic to the participant. As Starratt (2003) described, meanings may be “attached to or embedded in events, circumstances, information, and symbols” (p. 28). Furthermore, making meaning requires people to relate a topic to their sense of values (Starratt, 2003). Kuehlwein (1996) cautioned, however, that no one way of making meaning is correct in any absolute sense. With these ideas in mind, a deeper investigation about a framework for meaning making at work is needed to address the questions asked by this study.
An early thought in the development of the research questions for this study pivoted on how the experience of spirituality (especially in terms of “calling”) might be different for the special education administrators than it was when they were practitioners, working directly with P–12 students. Thus, the theme of exploring spirituality across the career cycle needed to find a place in the theoretical framework.

An excellent source surfaced in the work of Marjolein Lips-Wiersma, Associate Professor of Organisational Behaviour and Corporate Responsibility at the University of Canterbury in Christchurch, New Zealand. The participative psycho-biographical study she conducted using narrative interviews over a two-year span resulted in findings grouped in the categories of purpose, sense-making, and coherence. The system she consequently developed for analyzing meaning is The Holistic Development Model.

Based on her data, she posited that spirituality is one of the determinants of career behavior (Lips-Wiersma, 2002). Lips-Wiersma wondered “whether and how purpose, sense-making, and coherence are affected by spiritual belief, and how these three concepts in turn affect career behavior” (p. 501). She found that spirituality inspires a desire to serve others and positively relates to career coherence, or the finding of meaning and purpose in a career.

The figure constructed by Lips-Wiersma (2002) as a result of her data analysis has spiritual coherence at the center. There are four purposes for career surrounding this coherence, including (a) developing and becoming self, (b) expressing self, (c) serving others, and (d) unity with others. There is an element of tension between being and doing (sense-making), and another element of tension between self-orientation and other
orientation (coherence or wholeness). While balancing these tensions, individuals seek to avoid loss of equilibrium.

Lips-Wiersma (2002) suggested an avenue for further research that is addressed in this study. While she made it clear that career managers should not be “spiritual guides,” she said it is necessary to address spirituality with individuals in a way that “safeguards the authenticity of the beliefs of the individual and at the same time encourages her or him to engage with spiritual belief as one of the factors influencing career choice and transition” (p. 517).

This study is interested in the spiritual meaning special education administrators make in their work, including, but not limited to, career choices. Thus, the findings of Lips-Wiersma’s (2002) study support the possibility there will be worthwhile findings to consider using her grounded theory as a component of the conceptual framework of this study.

**Stress Associated With the Demands of Work**

Job stress generally refers to the physiological and psychological reactions of individuals to conditions encountered at work (Kahn & Byosiere, 1992). A survey of the extant literature indicated that years of conceptual and empirical research have identified a wide variety of job and organizational stressors, including long hours and heavy workloads (Fox, Dwyer, & Ganster, 1993), conflicting or ambiguous demands (Katz & Kahn, 1978), work and family conflict (Frone, 2000), and organizational politics (Perrewé, Ferris, Frink, & Anthony, 2000).
According to Zellars, Perrewé, and Brees (2010), stress in the workplace is associated with numerous health problems for employees, including headaches, weight control problems, sleeplessness, gastrointestinal problems, heart disease, compromised immune systems, and psychological disorders. Challengingly, it is difficult to identify all the sources of stress and the exact conditions under which job stress will occur. Individuals in the same organization and position may experience and/or perceive environmental stimuli differently (Perrewé & Zellars, 1999).

Coping with work stress. For the purpose of this literature review, the exploration about coping is truncated, due to the specific inquiry about how spirituality helps special education administrators cope with the demands of work. The field of coping and stress management is vast, and it is important to stay on course with the information that will be most helpful for the consumer of this study.

Gouws (1995) observed that a common understanding of coping is

To deal successfully with tasks, challenges and the like . . . we can define coping as the degree of success of the cognitive, behavioral and emotional efforts to master, change, tolerate, or otherwise manage role demands that tax or exceed a person’s resources. (pp. 38-39)

Coping behavior can take many forms, depending on the person, situation, and context. Some scholars have proposed links between spiritual identity and coping capacity (Šverko & Vizek-Vidović, 1995). When looking at role demands, specifically, Gouws (1995) identified four main features:

1. Identify the demands placed on self by self and others
2. Determine what resources are available, both internal (such as personal values, interests, energy, knowledge, etc.) and external (a potential support system).

3. Cope through behavior, itself, through balance, integrating roles, controlling the time when stressors are addressed, etc.

4. Resist stress through mastery of skills that inoculate one from stress and promote health and fitness.

Zellars et al. (2010) shared those with an overall negative affect report greater job-related stress than their peers with a positive affect, those with a positive affect are optimistic and are less likely to have work exhaustion. They also determined those with an internal versus external locus of control are more satisfied with their job, more involved in their work and report less job stress. Given these underpinnings, it was necessary to see what the literature would yield in terms of spirituality as a mitigating force against the destructive effects of stress.

**Spirituality as a mechanism for coping with work stress.** Wheatley (2005) wrote it is essential to attend to a leader’s personal spiritual health as a prerequisite for physical and emotional health. She suggested some practices to maintain a sense of focus and peace: start the day off peacefully, learn to be mindful, slow things down, create personal measures, expect surprise and practice gratefulness.

In their research, Zellars et al. (2010) found that spirituality is an effective mechanism with which to cope with workplace stress. Specifically, spirituality moderates the relationship between personality and perceptions of stressors such that
spirituality will reduce the likelihood that events will be perceived as stressful for those most likely to view their environment as stressful (e.g., external locus of control or high in negative affect). Additionally, they found that attributing stressful events to a Higher Being reduces felt stress. Thirdly, their results supported the statement that spirituality moderates the relationship between perceptions and attributions of stressors and spirituality (a) reduces the likelihood that stressful events without obvious causes will be perceived as random and unlucky, and (b) increases the likelihood that those stressful events will be perceived as having coherence and purpose. Fourth, they stated that spirituality increases the likelihood that transformational coping (both emotion-focused and problem-solving) will be used to reduce felt stress rather than emotion-focused or problem-solving mechanisms alone. Finally, they determined that if spirituality enhances one’s sense of security and connectedness, then under stressful conditions, spirituality increases psychological and physical wellbeing through transformational coping. As a springboard for the third supporting question of this study, Zellars et al. (2010) suggested that research could be expanded by examining how spirituality influences perceived control over job stressors and resulting coping behaviors.

Promoting workers’ health involves the workers, their families, their organizations, and the larger society (Oman & Neuhauser, 2012). Since healthy workers are a key element in an organization successfully pursuing its mission, it is relevant to better understand ways that religious/spiritual involvement (RS) might lead to better health, and Oman and Neuhauser (2012) suggested four classes of mechanisms that are widely recognized:
1. Health behaviors. RS groups may see the body as an instrument of God’s service, thus leading to healthier habits of eating, exercise, etc.

2. Psychological status. RS involvement may foster psychological states of joy, hope and compassion, thus reducing load on organs.

3. Coping. RS involvement may foster more effective ways of dealing with stressful events and conditions by attributing things to the sacred, rather than the limits of personal powers.

4. Social support. RS involvement may foster stronger social ties and support.

(p. 65)

In addition to improved health for workers based on their own, individual RS, the authors also explained that increased workplace spirituality could also result in improved health for workers who are not engaging in RS thoughts or actions (Oman & Neuhauser, 2012).

**Spirituality at Work**

According to Giacolone and Jurkiewicz (2010), interest in spirituality continues to grow, both in the United States and globally, and “the search for meaning has extended well beyond the personal to the professional arena” (p. 3). There is a solid body of research and theoretical literature about spirituality in a variety of professional careers, including nursing (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000; Dyson et al., 1997; Grant, O’Neill, & Stephens, 2004; McSherry & Jamieson, 2011; Ravari, Vanaki, Houmann, & Kazemnejad, 2009), social work (Larsen, 2011), business (Bolman & Deal, 2001, 2008; Fairholm, 1998; Krishnamakur & Neck, 2002; Laabs, 1995; Mitroff & Denton, 1999; Zohar, 1997), nonprofits (Alexander, 2010; Scott, 1994), public administration (King, 2007; Lowery,
2005), psychology (J. E. King & Crowther, 2004), and across a variety of careers (Lips-Wiersma & Mills, 2002; Metzger, 2008). Some of the literature around spiritual leadership refers simply to the workplace or organizations (Duerr, 2004; Heaton, Schmidt-Wilk, & Travis, 2004; Kinjerski & Skrypnek, 2004).

Encouragingly, there also have been many research projects carried out in the area of spirituality and education. Higher education studies and related literature were prevalent, ranging from the spirituality of college/university presidents (Groen, 2001; Niece, 2009; Walker & McPhail, 2009) to spirituality in educating adults (English, 2005; Fenwick & English, 2004; Lauzon, 2001; Love & Talbot, 1999; Rendon, 2000; Rogers, 2003; Tisdell, 2000, 2003, 2008). In terms of the P–12 education empirical and theoretical literature, the spirituality of teachers (Berger-Drotar, 2011; Fraser, 2007; Marshall, 2009; Palmer, 1993, 2007); principals (Blanton, 2007; Branson, 2007; Holloman, 1999; Karadag, 2009; Kessler, 2001; Keyes et al., 1999; McEwan, 2003; P. B. Miller, 2002; Musick, 2010; Woods, 2007), and superintendents (Scheff Kohn, 2008) have all been addressed.

While the literature is replete with studies and commentaries on spirituality in various fields and in other subsets of the field of education, none were found that focused on whether attention to the spiritual side of special education administrators could be a remedy for the problems faced in P–12 education. Educational leaders often bear the brunt of society’s dilemmas and problems, and communities often demand that leaders fix everything (Walker & McPhail, 2009). Especially because features of spiritual leadership have perceived benefits in other vocations, I have interest in understanding the
experiences of special education administrators. Before pressing ahead, it was important to understand existing background in the field of exploring spirituality in the work setting.

**Spirituality in the business world.** While educators are sometimes reluctant to be compared with workers in the business world, the concern with fiscal matters and the fact that the business world has been much studied in this area make it appropriate.

**Spiritual intelligence.** One well-known topic in the area of workplace spirituality is spiritual intelligence, or SQ (adopting the nomenclature of intelligence quotient, or IQ), developed by Danah Zohar and Ian Marshall in the 1990s. It built on the earlier conception of “emotional intelligence” by social psychologist Daniel Goleman. Zohar and Marshall (2001) brought together an array of recent research that showed evidence based on the new quantum science that there is “an ultimate intelligence based on a third neural system in the brain”—a spiritual intelligence. They described SQ as the intelligence with which we address and solve problems of meaning and value, with which we place our actions and lives in a wider, richer, meaning-giving context (e.g., the workplace). As authored by Zohar and Marshall (2001), there are 12 principles or qualities of spiritual intelligence: self-awareness, spontaneity, being vision- and value-led, holism (seeing larger patterns), compassion, celebration of diversity, field independence, humility, tendency to ask fundamental “why” questions, ability to reframe, positive use of adversity, and sense of vocation.

Quantum science posits that the world is all of one piece, holistic, and that human beings are extensions of that underlying ground state of Being (Zohar, 1997). Zohar
commented on the relationship between quantum science and servant leadership, stating that four essential qualities would need to be present:

1. A deep sense of the interconnectedness or life and all its enterprises
2. A sense of engagement and responsibility, a sense of “I have to”
3. An awareness that all human endeavor, including business, is a part of the larger and richer fabric of the whole universe and
4. Knowledge of what they ultimately serve. They must, with a sense of humility and gratitude, have a sense of the Source from which all values emerge. (p. 153)

In response, Emmons (2000) wondered if spirituality is an intelligence, and he juxtaposed two ways of approaching the construct. First, he stated that one approach is to study spirituality’s “passive, static, and trait-like qualities, similar to possessions (like beliefs), or actions (as in rituals), that change little or at all over time” (p. 12). He identified spiritual attributes that have much in common with the definitions of spirituality provided in a prior section of this literature review, including: a broad worldview, intention to live with integrity, intention to develop sacred relationships, belief that there are multiple levels of reality that are not readily apparent, confidence that life is deeply meaningful, confidence that one’s own existence has purpose, sense of responsibility to life itself, sense of inner truth, greater capacity to love, recognition of divine presence in everyday activities, deep awareness of human suffering, pain and death, integrating factors within personality, desiring meaning and purpose, having a source of yearning, desiring to make a difference, desiring to create a meaningful world,
desiring inner peace, desiring truth, having a strong sense of community, and having a
strong sense of social justice.

Conversely, Emmons (2000) posited that spirituality could be conceived of as
“dynamic, a set of skills, resources, capacities or abilities that are evolving and
developing and interact with the external environment” (p. 12). He also provided a list of
qualities of spirituality in action: acting on positive attitudes and relationships with the
world, acting virtuously, living out one’s deep personal values, acting with altruistic love,
affirming what is essential through service, acting with authenticity, having the ability to
live with inconsistencies and contradictions in one’s life, accepting life and others on
their own terms, transcending material and physical aspects of existence, experiencing a
heightened state of awareness, utilizing spiritual resources to solve difficulties, embracing
the experiences that life provides as opportunities for growth, seeking personal
integration, self-actualization, living in the moment, going beyond one’s self-interests,
and needing to contribute to the betterment of others. I was intrigued by the concept of
thinking about spirituality as active and evolving, and kept Emmons’ ideas in mind
through the processes of data collection and analysis.

*Spiritual audit of corporate America.* Mitroff and Denton (1999) conducted a
landmark study from which they compiled the items that gave participants the most
meaning and purpose in their lives. Asked via survey what gave them the most meaning
and purpose in their jobs, participants from various types of organizations chose the
following answers (ranked from first to seventh): the ability to realize my full potential as
a person, being associated with a good or ethical organization, interesting work, making
money, having good colleagues, service to future generations, and service to my immediate community.

Contrary to most authors on the subject of spirituality, Mitroff and Denton (1999) found that people do not hold widely varying definitions of spirituality. They found:

1. In contrast to conventional religion, spirituality is not formal, structured or organized
2. It is not denominational
3. It is broadly inclusive and embraces everyone
4. It is universal and timeless
5. It is the ultimate source and provider of meaning and purpose in our lives
6. It expresses the awe we feel in the presence of the transcendent
7. It is the sacredness of everything, including the ordinariness of life
8. It is integrally connected to inner peace and calm
9. It provides one with an inexhaustible source of faith and willpower
10. Spirituality and faith are inseparable (pp. 22-25)

Based on their data, they concluded that the respondents’ basic desire was to find ultimate meaning and purpose and to live an integrated life, which is a constant, never-ending task (p. xv).

**Spirituality of the organization.** While the focus of this study is on the spirituality of the individual, a few frequently cited writings about spirituality in organizations bear mentioning. Krishnamakur and Neck (2002) wrote there is evidence of an empirical connection between workplace spirituality and enhanced individual
creativity, ethical honest behavior, a greater sense of personal fulfillment on the part of employees, and increased commitment to organizational goals.

Mitroff and Denton (1999) formulated five organizational models for proceeding with opening up to spirituality in the workplace. They are (a) Religion-based organization (complete takeover of an organization for the worship of a deity), (b) Evolutionary organization (sustained hard work brings about change with the organizational principles being constantly reexamined), (c) Recovering organization (use the principles of Alcoholics Anonymous to conduct spiritual audits and take corrective action where needed), (d) Socially-responsible organization (founded by a person with strong spiritual principles/values and applying them to the business for the betterment of society as a whole), and (e) Values-based organization (leaders are guided by philosophical values, but reject religion and spirituality strongly [the authors found there are underlying spiritual values even when these leaders deny them]).

Bolman and Deal (2008) took an interesting tact when they provided four metaphors for moral organizations. They identified The Factory (excellence and authorship: be yourself, have fun, use humor), The Family (caring and love: use compassion and attend to the collective wellbeing), The Jungle (justice and power: direct energy and intelligence toward productive use and give power to employees), and The Temple (faith and significance: the organization is doing something worthwhile). In the Temple analogy, a spiritual leader is needed who can help people see the meaning and significance in their work, as well as faith in themselves and the organization.
In their long-term goal to understand how spirituality can contribute to productive organizations, Ashmos and Duchon (2000) created and administered a questionnaire to almost seven hundred informants. The questionnaire used a seven-point Likert scale to measure constructs such as conditions for community, meaning at work, inner life, blocks to spirituality, personal responsibility, contemplation, work unit community, positive work unit values, organization values, and individual and the organization. Based on their data, they concluded, “spirituality in the workplace involves inner life, community and meaningful work” (p. 142).

Pfeffer (2010) enumerated four dimensions that people seek in a workplace associated with building the spirit. Since special education administrators are managers and contribute greatly to workplace culture, these dimensions are noteworthy. They are (a) interesting work that permits individuals to learn, develop, and have a sense of competence and mastery; (b) meaningful work that provides some feeling of purpose; (c) a sense of connecting and positive social relations with coworkers and, (d) the ability to live an integrated life, so that work roles and other roles are not inherently in conflict and work roles do not conflict with the worker’s essential nature and who the person is as a human being. Pfeffer’s (2010) observations are closely aligned with Lips-Wiersma’s (2002) view that spirituality influences career purpose, sense-making, and coherence. She wrote that it inspires the four purposes of developing and becoming self, unity with others, expressing self, and serving others. Perceived career coherence is influenced by spirituality as individuals align themselves with perceived spiritual orderings outside themselves (Lips-Wiersma, 2002).
Finally, Helgesen (1990) reported the findings of workplace research in her book, *The Female Advantage: Women’s Ways of Leadership*. Through her study of successful women, she determined that successful organizations led by women tended to be “webs of inclusion,” rather than traditional hierarchies. She chose the metaphor of a web because the organizational structures were organic, yet held together by clearly articulated values. They were able to reconfigure for different situations and achieved transformation based on the processes used.

Helgesen (1995) expanded upon her initial theory by describing her conceptualization of the purpose, architecture and process of the web of inclusion. The elements of purpose and process are listed in Table 11.

In terms of architecture, the web is symbolic of an integrated, never-ending process, built from the center out:

The architect of the web works as the spider does, by ceaselessly spinning new tendrils of connection, while also continually strengthening those that already exist. The architect’s tools are not force, not the ability to issue commands, but rather providing access and engaging in constant dialogue. (Helgesen, 1995, p. 13)

The ideas and theories about spirituality in organizations discussed in this section, including Krishnamakur and Neck (2002), Mitroff and Denton (1999), Bolman and Deal (2008), Pfeffer (2010), and Helgesen (1995) were purposefully chosen because of their relevance to the research question pertaining to how special education administrators make meaning and career choices as related to their spirituality. Overall, there are
Table 11

*Purpose and Process in Helgesen’s Web of Inclusion*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principles guiding reflective human action</th>
<th>Core features guiding meaning-making</th>
<th>Processes used to achieve success</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Accept chaos</td>
<td>1. Authenticity</td>
<td>1. Open communication-freely flowing information supports morale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Share information</td>
<td>2. Ethical sensibility</td>
<td>2. Blurred distinction between conception and execution-feedback is used to modify the task as it is being completed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Develop relationships</td>
<td>3. Spirituality</td>
<td>3. Lasting networks that redistribute power-connections built through task completion are maintained for the next one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Embrace vision</td>
<td>4. Domains of action</td>
<td>4. Constant reorganization-webs are permeable and allow for new ways of connecting people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5. Expansion to the world outside-collaboration is not limited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6. Acceptance of trial and error-discover what works and operate effectively in crises</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

tangible patterns of openness, learning, connection, and meaningful purpose running through the various authors’ works.

As a student of educational leadership with a strong interest in spirituality, a major theme in this literature review is the intersection of those two topics. Thus, the final section of this chapter provides a review of the related research in the area of leadership informed by a spiritual sensibility.
Leadership

Prior to describing what is known about spiritual leadership, it is appropriate to comment on leadership, in general. From a historical perspective, Fairholm (2011) explained that the first generation of leadership theories (mid-1800s–1949) was characterized as trait theory that relied on who the leader was in terms of traits, personality, and character. In the second generation of leadership theories, in the 1950s and 1960s, more emphasis was placed on what leaders did, in terms of both overt and interpersonal behaviors. An exploration of reciprocity in leadership, in the environment, situation, and group relations, characterized the 1970s and 1980s, and comprised the third generation of leadership theory. The fourth generation of leadership theory is grounded in values and connectedness, and is the current focus of leadership study.

Definition

Campbell-Whatley and Lyons (2013) wrote that defining leadership has been difficult, and that more than 350 definitions have been given. Cambron-McCabe, Cunningham, Harvey, and Koff (2005) agreed that leadership is an elusive concept, and hard to define. However, if several definitions are reviewed, certain commonalities arise. Table 12 lists some examples from the literature.

After defining the term, it was possible to explore theories of leadership. Although there are far too many leadership theories to be discussed in this context, a selection of theories that have a spiritual sensibility have been selected for review.
Table 12

*Definitions of Leadership*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Definition of leadership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Matusak (2004, p. 880)</td>
<td>Leadership is an orienting set of questions and options for confronting the hardest of problems without getting killed, badly wounded, or pushed aside.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sher (2004, p. 1265)</td>
<td>The ability of people to use every aspect of experience, including cognitive capability, thoughts, feelings and imagination, for thinking through or offering new insights into the situations they are in.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wheatley (2009, p. 142)</td>
<td>Leadership is provided by anyone who is willing to help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Komives (2011, p. 354)</td>
<td>Leadership is socially constructed. One cannot touch, taste or see leadership. Common views of leadership evolve with shifting social perspectives of constructs such as relationships, gender roles, power, and social capital . . . Perspectives on leadership and views of organizational dynamics interact and have changed over time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kouzes &amp; Posner (2002, p. 30)</td>
<td>Leadership is the art of mobilizing others to want to struggle for shared aspirations.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Spiritual Leadership**

Palmer (1994) wrote, “Spirituality, like leadership, is a very hard concept to pin down. These are probably two of the vaguest words you can find in our language, and when you put them together you get something even more vague” (p. 27).

Undaunted, Harter (2004) penned,

Leadership *implies* spirituality. Leadership, like spirituality, is a relationship grounded in a purpose, and that purpose reflects the aspirational character of its participants . . . Spirit inspires leaders to realize a vision and permits them to inspire followers to do the same. In this way, leaders experience spirit within themselves and evoke spirit in others. (p. 1478)
Through her engagement with a variety of spiritual traditions, Wheatley (2005) derived eight principles that are ubiquitous and describe why leadership is spiritual work:

1. Life is uncertain—leaders encourage people to recognize and accept change.
2. Life is cyclical—leaders help people walk through the chaos and look for the new insights and capacities that always emerge.
3. Meaning is what motivates people—leaders help people reflect about why they are doing the work, and for whom.
4. Service brings us joy—leaders remind followers that happiness comes from serving others and selfishness leads to sorrow.
5. Courage comes from our hearts—leaders let their hearts open to help deal with challenges.
6. We are interconnected with all life—leaders consider the web of oneness and future impact when making decisions.
7. We can rely on human goodness—leaders know that the badness in the world needs to push us to rely even more on human goodness
8. We need peace of mind—leaders need to help people work from a place of inner peace, even in the midst of turmoil.

Recognizing that most leaders, including educational leaders, receive formal training in the field, Matusak (2004) observed that while leadership development programs are proliferating greatly, many are focused on the traditional ideals of (a) energy and ambition, (b) the image of the ‘hero’ as leader, and (c) skills of analysis and motivation with emphasis on external skills such as visioning, public speaking, team
building, conflict resolution, and so forth. Because those who consistently excel in leadership have a sense of purpose, a deep commitment, a feeling that their work is meaningful on behalf of a greater cause, and act in accordance with their deeply rooted values and spirituality should receive more emphasis.

Several prominent theories of leadership associated with spirituality were reviewed in order to provide a context for this study, including servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1970), transformational leadership (Burns, 1978), leading with soul (Bolman & Deal, 2001), enlightened leadership (Sokolow, 2002), spiritual leadership (Fairholm, 2011), and The Five Exemplary Practices of Leadership (Kouzes & Posner, 2002).

**Servant leadership.** Greenleaf developed the concept of servant leadership in the 1970s, indicating it is comprised of four elements: (a) values, (b) direction, (c) competence, and (d) spirit (Greenleaf, 1970). At its foundation is the idea that the best leadership is provided, not by those who seek leadership roles, but rather those with a compelling vision or goal and a desire to serve others first (Greenleaf, 1977). He wrote:

> The servant-leader is servant first . . . It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead . . . The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant-first to make sure that other people’s highest-priority needs are being served. The best test, the most difficult to administer, is: Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, freer, wiser, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And, what is the effect on the least privileged in society; will they benefit or, at least, not be further deprived? (p. 7)
Summarized by Bowen, Ferris and Kolodinsky (2010), the 12 characteristics of servant leaders are integrity, vulnerability, discernment, awareness of the human spirit, courage in relationships, sense of humor, intellectual energy and curiosity, respect for the future, predictability, breadth, comfort with ambiguity, and presence. Furthermore, servant leaders are able to (a) articulate goals, (b) inspire trust, (c) know how to listen, (d) are masters of positive feedback, and (e) emphasize personal development (Bowen et al., 2010). According to Komives (2011), “the key question Greenleaf asked was, Are those whom the leader serves better off through their engagement with the servant leaders and do they rise to leadership themselves?” (p. 357).

While servant leadership has positive qualities for spirituality in the workplace, especially because of its hallmarks of honesty, trustworthiness, and admission that the leader is not perfect or all-knowing, Wheatley (1992) cautioned that in order for it to be effective in today’s chaotic times, there must be a common vision and purpose, free-flow of information, and a helper mentality.

Bowen et al. (2010) made the connection that servant leadership has considerable overlap with the principles of transformational leadership. Transformational leadership was originally conceived by James MacGregor Burns in 1978.

**Transformational leadership.** According to Komives (2011), Burns’ work in the same decade as Greenleaf’s developed the seminal idea of transformational leadership. He acknowledged that all relationships include transactions (i.e., how things get done [Avolio, 2004]), but true leadership is focused on improving the human condition through being grounded in ethical and moral principles. Conger (2004)
observed, in Burns’ 1978 theory, that both the leader and follower had something to offer the other, and the nature of what was exchanged was more nuanced than prior theories had described.

Burns’ idea of transformational leadership was that leaders engaged followers for a two-fold purpose (a) to achieve something of significance (visionary change agents) and (b) to “morally uplift” them to be leaders themselves (Avolio, 2004). This mission was accomplished via the leader getting to know the followers’ aspirations, capabilities, needs and desires and then adding intellectual stimulation through the leader challenging followers’ basic thinking, assumptions, and models (Avolio, 2004).

Bernard Bass is known for expanding on Burns’ work in the subsequent decade, and he clarified many of the terms used by Burns when he described the transformational process. Prominently, he distinguished between “first order change” (changes of degree) and “higher order of change” (alterations in attitudes, beliefs and needs).

In the 1990s, Avolio and Bass worked together on expanding the idea of transformational leadership from the individual to the group level, resulting in Burns extending his original definition to include collective/shared leadership (Avolio, 2004). Additionally, the co-researchers described four components of a transformational leader: (a) charisma, (b) the ability to inspire, (c) individualized consideration, and (d) the ability to provide intellectual stimulation (Conger, 2004).

Later, Bass teamed with Riggio to theorize about transformational leadership and stress (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Their findings were supportive of transformational leadership’s usefulness. In small groups, teams and large organizations, transactional
leadership can be a source of conflict, burnout and stress, whereas transformational leadership is more likely to help ameliorate those same conditions. The evolution of this theory, shared among several researchers, seems an example of transformational leadership in and of itself, lending validity to its claims of effectiveness.

**Leading with soul.** Bolman and Deal (2001) developed ideas about “leading with soul” (p. 11). They reminded their audience that the heart of the leader—embodying courage, spirit and hope—is an essential component to add to the “heads and hands of leaders.” They defined leading with soul as “know[ing] ourselves and our faith at the deepest level…[and] reclaiming the enduring human capacity that gives our lives passion and purpose” (p. 12). Perhaps most useful is their observation about leadership development:

> We need a revolution in how we think about leadership and how we develop leaders. Most management and leadership development programs ignore or demean spirit. They desperately need an infusion of spiritual forms such as poetry, literature, music, art, theater, history, philosophy, and dance. Even that would leave us far short of the cadre of leaders of spirit that we require. Leaders learn most from their experience—especially from their failures. Too often, though, they miss the lessons. They lack the reflective capacity to learn on their own and have not been fortunate enough to find a spiritual guide who can help them sort things through to find their own spiritual center. (p. 17)

From these ideas, Bolman and Deal (2008) reframed leadership, using five concepts. First, in the Structural frame, the leader is an analyst or architect, and the
leadership process is analysis and design. Servant leadership that supports and empowers employees is the chief characteristic of the Human resource frame. The Political frame characterizes the leader as an advocate or negotiator, with advocacy and coalition building being the tools utilized. Finally, the Symbolic frame has a leader with prophetic or poetic qualities who inspires and helps employees make meaning of their work.

**Enlightened leadership.** Enlightened leadership is based on wisdom and exists along a continuum from unenlightened to enlightened (Sokolow, 2002). The wisdom is the divine spark coming from deep within and grounds the leader in spiritual principles that lead to doing the right things, the right way, for the right reasons.

Sokolow (2002) stated that enlightened leaders (including education administrators) spend most of their time and energy trying to make life better for those around them, and because they have a highly developed internal compass connecting them to divine energy, they are continually able to grow and learn from their experiences (including mistakes). Furthermore, they are guided by and practice specific principles or spiritual truths. Through this practice, “the access [they] have to the divine source of wisdom that resides deep within increases” (Sokolow, 2002, p. 33).

While enlightened leaders follow many principles, the eight described in Table 13 are the most universal, according to Sokolow (2002).

Sokolow (2002) provided an important interpretation of his eight principles when he wrote:

The principles of enlightened leadership are already a part of all of us. They are not something new that we must learn. Rather, we simply need to be reminded
Table 13

*Sokolow’s Principles of Enlightened Leadership*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principle</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Principle of Intention</td>
<td>We all affect eternity by our thought patterns. Intention serves as a powerful force in attracting people, material resources and other energies that can help us transform our intentions into reality. Enlightened leaders are aware of their intentions and focus them on serving others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Principle of Attention</td>
<td>We make choices about how to spend our time. Enlightened leaders have insights that guide them in deciding where best to turn their attention, which in turn shapes our reality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Principle of Our Unique Gifts</td>
<td>Each person is unique and also important to the whole. Enlightened leaders recognize others’ gifts and facilitate the process of sharing them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Principle of Gratitude</td>
<td>Gratitude is a form of energy that has the capacity to attract and empower. Enlightened leaders are grateful to the people around them and they show it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Principle of Unique Life Lessons</td>
<td>Life is a series of unfolding lessons that help us grow. Enlightened leaders are able to contend with their own lessons and help others identify and work through their lessons.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Principle of a Holistic Perspective</td>
<td>Parts affect the whole and the whole affects the parts. Thus, it is in our enlightened self-interest to devote ourselves to the connected world. As complex beings comprised of body, mind, and spirit, all three aspects must be nurtured. Enlightened leaders know that there is a reciprocal connection among all things and help others see it, too.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Principle of Openness</td>
<td>Information comes to all of us from the universe. Enlightened leaders try to be open to all aspects of themselves, the environment, others, and the divine.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Principle of Trust</td>
<td>Trusting is not easy and must be tempered by wisdom. Enlightened leaders default to trust, as it lets people grow and learn as they err.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
that they reside deep within us in the spiritual aspect of our being. These principles can help us manifest divine wisdom in fulfilling our sacred public trust as educational leaders. (p. 36)

**Spiritual leadership model.** Fairholm (2011) described the Spiritual Leadership Model. It included five leadership perspectives: (a) leadership as management (efficient use of resources), (b) leadership as excellent management (continuous improvement process), (c) values leadership (foster self-led followers), (d) trust culture leadership (build the work culture), and (e) spiritual leadership (focus on whole person followers).

Fairholm (2011) commented that spiritual leadership is the new wave of leadership. He wrote, “Real leaders have always led from the spirit, but it is essential now due to the challenges of a global, information-rich, technologically-sophisticated, culturally-diverse workplace, one peopled by workers who are intelligent, demanding, and self-aware” (p. 163). He characterized real leadership as a voluntary relationship between a leader and followers who are united in values and trust each other enough to risk themselves in participation in joint activity. Spiritual leadership (Fairholm, 2011, pp. 205-209) is comprised of seven competencies as summarized in Table 14.

**The five exemplary practices of leadership.** The *Leadership Challenge* by Kouzes and Posner (2002) has been widely read and used in a variety of leadership settings. It is evidence-based and has been developed and refined over time through nearly two million participants around the world completing the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI).
## Table 14

**Fairholm’s Seven Competencies of Spiritual Leadership**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competency</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Leaders’ Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td>Communicating with someone to inform, persuade, and/or inspire then to joint action.</td>
<td>The primary teaching method used is coaching. Spiritual leaders live in a healthy manner and make choices to take care of their bodies, minds, hearts and spirits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serving</td>
<td>Servant leaders serve the real needs of followers, and these can only be discovered by the leader focusing attention on each follower.</td>
<td>Leaders demonstrate their spiritual proclivities by putting those they serve first and letting everything else follow.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trusting</td>
<td>Expressing confidence in or reliance on some quality or attribute of a person, a thing, or the truth of a statement.</td>
<td>Trust cannot be coerced, it must be earned. Full and constant communication encourages trust.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowering</td>
<td>Being willing to enable rather than simply delegate.</td>
<td>Empowered people respond with commitment. Granting workers the practical autonomy to step out and contribute directly to the joint work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspiring</td>
<td>Stops doubt and impels people to change without thinking.</td>
<td>Re-energize followers and bond them together in a joint enterprise. Use symbols—words, ideas, information, and deeds—to convey a sense of connection, excitement, and commitment to goals or methods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visioning</td>
<td>See self and group in terms of traditions and future potential</td>
<td>Spirituality has been defined by organizational development consultants in terms of universal principles such as unity, interconnectedness, love, compassion, energy, and intuition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task Competence</td>
<td>Real leaders know the details of the work being done.</td>
<td>A values-focused vision activates both mind and feelings. Leaders need to understand themselves—with or without follower input—in order to create a vitalizing vision.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Do not have to be experts in any of the details, but they need to know intuitively how to do it and when it is done well.
Through their studies, they have found, over time, that the four most enduring qualities followers seek in a leader are honesty, forward-looking, competent and inspiring (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). Additionally, they posited two Laws of Leadership:

1. If you don’t believe the messenger, you won’t believe the message
2. You build a credible foundation of leadership when you DWYSYWD—Do What You Say You Will Do (pp. 38, 40).

They wrote, “Leadership is about relationships, about credibility, and about what you do. And everything you will ever do as a leader is based on one audacious assumption: that you matter” (Kouzes & Posner, 2002, p. 329). The structure of their theory is known as The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership, which are presented with two commitments each. Each commitment is supported through action steps a leader may use to integrate the commitment into practice. Table 15 contains a summary of The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership.

I first learned about The Leadership Challenge in 2007 when I was taking classes toward my pupil services administration license. I needed a book to read for a leadership class, and I asked my assistant superintendent for a recommendation. He recommended the Kouzes and Posner, saying that reading it had been a kind of spiritual experience for him. I, too, was deeply affected by the contents of the book, and although I have been exposed to many leadership guides since then, this is the one that resonates. I elected to make it part of the conceptual framework for this study because (a) its ideas have been essential in my perspective on leadership, and (b) although the authors do not tout it as spiritual, per se, its ideas are clearly rooted in the definitions of spirituality, (c) it
Table 15

*Kouzes and Posner’s Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practices</th>
<th>Commitments</th>
<th>Examples of ways to take action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Model the Way</td>
<td>1. Clarify values by finding your voice and affirming shared values.</td>
<td>Find your own words for talking about what is important to you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Set the example by aligning actions with shared values.</td>
<td>Keep your commitments; follow through on your promises.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspire a Shared Vision</td>
<td>3. Envision the future by imagining exciting and ennobling possibilities.</td>
<td>Ask “What’s next?” about every project long before it is completed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Enlist others in a common vision by appealing to shared aspirations.</td>
<td>Show you listen to what others say by incorporating their inputs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge the Process</td>
<td>5. Search for opportunities by seizing the initiative and looking outward for innovative ways to improve.</td>
<td>Seek firsthand experiences outside your comfort zone and skill set.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. Experiment and take risks by constantly generating small wins and learning from experience.</td>
<td>Remind people of the progress they are making every day and that setbacks are only temporary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enable Others to Act</td>
<td>7. Foster collaboration by building trust and facilitating relationships.</td>
<td>Extend trust to others first, even if they haven’t extended it to you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8. Strengthen others by increasing self-determination and developing competence.</td>
<td>Ask questions; stop giving answers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage the Heart</td>
<td>9. Recognize contributions by showing appreciation for individual excellence.</td>
<td>Create an environment that makes it comfortable to receive and give feedback—including to you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10. Celebrate the values and victories by creating a spirit of community.</td>
<td>Repeat this phrase at every celebration: “We are in this together.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
encompasses the tenets that are contained in the theories that self-identify as being spiritual in nature, and (d) it has an underlying tone of spirituality, evidenced though sentiments about spiritual leaders setting people’s spirits free and enabling them to become more than they thought possible.

After providing background for this study through the review of leadership theory, in general, the next section addresses educational leadership, specifically.

**Educational Leadership**

The concerns of educational leadership today go beyond the managerial roles of the past and reflect the concerns of the larger culture: morality, ethics, purpose, and responsibility (Collins & Kakabadse, 2006; Giroux, 2004; Starratt, 1995, 2003). For example, Fullan (2002) listed four aspects of educational leadership required for deeper and more lasting reform:

1. Making a difference in the lives of students
2. Committing to reducing the gap between high and low performers in the school district
3. Contributing to reducing the gap in the larger environment; and
4. Transforming the working (or learning) conditions of others so that growth, commitment, engagement and the constant spawning of leadership in others is being fostered. (p. 15)

Coining a provocative phrase, Starratt (1995) called for an “existential accountability” among educational leaders. Starratt made another guiding statement
when he wrote the only choice for educators is in the “search for a humbler grounding of human hope in a new understanding of who and what we are” (pp. 29-30).

Dantley (2002) provided additional support for spiritual awareness for educational leaders. In his writing, he called for purpose-driven leadership, grounded in critical theory and prophetic spirituality, which “legitimates the realm of spirituality as a genuine voice in the educational leadership discourse” (p. 351).

Expanding on the path of critical theory, Shields (2013) explained that “educational leaders have a responsibility to ensure that students are adequately prepared—not only to pass mandated tests—but also to take their places as well-informed, caring, and engaged citizens” (p. 5). She stated that a new approach is needed in order to accomplish these goals, and that transformative leadership is “a way of taking into account the material realities, disparities, and unfulfilled promises of the work in which our students live, and of working to ensure more equitable and inclusive opportunities for all” (p. 6).

Transformative leadership is a continuation of Burns’ work on transformational leadership and his idea that power relationships are central to comprehending the true nature of relationships. Shields (2013) argued that transformative leaders need not only be concerned with what happens within their schoolhouse walls, but with what happens in the wider local, national, and global communities as well. To accomplish this aim, leaders use dialogue, focus on relationships, develop transparent ways to share information and challenge inequitable practices (Shields, 2013). In order to do so,
leaders must have courage, be authentic, and “have integrity that comes from knowing one’s inner self” (p. 22).

According to Shields (2013), the seven key tenets of transformative leadership theory include: (a) the mandate to effect deep and equitable change; (b) the need to deconstruct and reconstruct knowledge frameworks that perpetuate inequity and injustice; (c) a focus on emancipation, democracy, equity and justice; (d) the need to address the inequitable distribution of power; (e) an emphasis on both private and public (individual and collective) good; (f) the necessity of balancing critique with promise; and (g) the call to exhibit moral courage.

Rogers (2003) asserted that “exceptional leadership incorporates a spiritual dimension; that leadership is transformed when infused with the spiritual” (p. 23). Further, a “school with spirit” would involve “school leaders shift[ing] from a centralized concept of power to approaches that help individuals and groups to self-organize” (Lantieri, 2001, p. 9). These ideas are encouraging in the face of the challenges in special education today, and a survey of the related literature helped inform this study.

**Special education leadership.** Although there is not a plethora of resources related specifically to special education leadership, several sources were found. In some cases they addressed the spiritual aspect of leadership explicitly, others more implicitly.

Bays and Crockett (2007) began by recognizing the importance of leadership in the ultimate impact of leadership on outcomes for (special education and other) students. They indicated that providing leadership in special education is especially difficult, due to the shared responsibilities of principals and special education administrators (Bays &
Crockett, 2007). Data collected via interviews, observations, and participant journals resulted in conclusions that principals frequently dispersed supervision of special education programs (especially procedural and compliance issues, planning professional development, and providing services/personnel/resources) to the special education director. This practice allowed principals to function as the overall instructional leaders in their buildings while capitalizing on the expert knowledge of the special education directors (Bays & Crockett, 2007).

In a book chapter on the evolving role of educational leadership for general and special educators, Campbell-Whatley and Lyons (2013) sounded “a clarion call for leaders to effectively address the struggles of providing an appropriate education for all students and to become more proactive and responsive to meeting the spirit and letter of the law” (p. 3). They suggested that proactive leadership in the transformational approach was the way to improve special education in schools today.

Since the early 1980s when Burns’ book, Leadership, became popular, transformational leadership has been increasingly advanced by scholars of leadership theory (Campbell-Whatley & Lyons, 2013). Since transformational leaders are committed to going beyond the call of duty and they seek to develop a commitment to be of service to the greater good in their followers, Campbell-Whatley and Lyons argued it is highly appropriate for (and is strongly needed by) all school leaders (but especially those who serve learners with special needs).

Additionally, Lentz (2012) also used Burns’ transformational leadership philosophy as a foundation for his suggestions for special education administrators. He
believed that the encouragement provided by Burns (1978) for leaders and followers to see a new social environment that would provide an essential redirection for educators toward mobilizing all members with mutual values and goals (Lentz, 2012). Furthermore, Lentz saw potential for use of transformational leadership in special education because:

The leader and the team (i.e., the Individualized Education Program team) naturally experience a process that lasts over time and creates exciting possibilities for all students. The transformational leader sees all persons on the team as integral to the process, and input from all is required, important and sought after in respectful ways. (p. 15)

Capper, Keyes, and Theoharis (2000) summarized their search of the literature for spiritually centered leadership, indicating they had found four predominant themes: (a) the leader’s personal awareness; (b) the significance of relationships both with and among others, recognizing and fostering people’s need to connect with each other; (c) a belief in the presence of a divine being; and (d) a sense of purpose or mission conveyed by the leaders’ description of their work as an extension of and intertwined with their spiritual beliefs. (p. 514)

When researchers asked participants to make connections between their leadership and their spirituality, spiritually centered leaders did not solely attribute their leadership behaviors to qualities or skills within themselves. Instead, they routinely engaged in personal reflection, sought after and cultivated nurturing relationships with
others, and “viewed their work as a spiritual expression—a connection with the mysteries of humanity” (Capper et al., 2000, p. 518).

Since there is not a large body of research in the area of special education administration, and virtually none in the sub-area of spirituality in special education administration, this literature review includes studies of related fields, such as higher education leader and school principal spirituality.

**Higher education and spiritual leadership.** There have been studies involving spiritual leadership and higher education administrators. One study (Parish, 1999) included a mix of education administrators. The results of some of the studies are summarized here for a sense of current research in the related field and are used as a resource for making informal predictions about possible outcomes of this study.

Thom (1993) conducted a longitudinal study over a five-year period with presidents of institutions of higher education in order to find out what they believe makes them successful leaders. While he did not find agreement about a set of “profound, necessary, scientific conditions” (p. 108), he did find that these leaders have a spiritual outlook on their relationships with their workers, and strive to provide mentorship for them with regard not only to more traditional aspects of work, but also with imbibing meaning from their work.

Through his data analysis process, Thom (1993) found that effective leaders (a) believe in themselves as leaders, (b) believe in the value and intrinsic goodness of others, and (c) believe in the choice of an altruistic versus self-serving leadership philosophy.
Parish (1999) conducted a qualitative study of a diverse group of women leaders in Southern California. Of the 12 participants, half were educators (three principals, two central office administrators, and a dean) and another was a Board of Education member (thus the results are relevant to the proposed study of P–12 education administrators). According to Niece (2009), the study explored factors that inspired women in education to become leaders and sought to ascertain whether their spirituality was inspirational in the accomplishment of that goal. The following conclusions were reached: (a) women leaders in education practice spirituality in their work by incorporating trust, integrity, compassion and courage; (b) the experiences of women leaders contain values that can be used by all other leaders; (c) successful women leaders have become what the most important people in their life think they will become; (d) women leaders are committed to integrating “female” values of trust, character and integrity, coupled with caring, love, and knowledge; (e) the spiritual educator usually has a passion for people, a commitment to educate, a love of tradition, and a gift of hospitality; and (f) ethics of leadership are consistent with spirituality of many different religious traditions.

A qualitative case study was conducted by Niece (2009) examining the roots and qualities of spirituality in the lives of six college/university presidents (both male and female). Her research question asked, “How do presidents of colleges and universities experience and enact their spirituality when leading?” (p. 97). She found that leadership themes fell into two categories, secular and spiritual, both of which linked to meaning and purpose in the leaders’ work. On the secular side were the ideas of the Golden Rule, responsibility, fairness and focus on doing a good job. The meaning and purpose of these
constructs were related to beliefs and values, as well as commitment to family, community, and job.

In the spiritual domain, mindsets uncovered by Niece (2009) included deeper care for the human condition, being other-oriented with faith-in-action, obedience to a higher order, and service to social justice causes. The meaning and purpose of these leadership elements related to beliefs and values derived from religious doctrine, and connection (in part) to a transcendent being.

In the introductory chapter, I suggested that in the absence of studies about special education administrators, K–12 principals would be a comparable population about whom to learn. In the empirical literature, several studies were found addressing spirituality in the identity of school principals. Familiarity with their findings is a valuable resource for conducting a study on the spirituality of special education administrators.

Principal spirituality. In her dissertation on principals’ perceptions of spirituality on their leadership, P. B. Miller (2002) wrote, “Principals are facing challenges that reflect the impact of increasing social complexity upon our public institutions. Bureaucratic preoccupations with initiatives threaten to dehumanize and crush the spirit of our schools” (p. 80). The findings of her exploratory study indicated (at least on a preliminary level) principals perceive their high spiritual orientation helped them to maintain balance, keep a positive focus and find meaning in their work.

Furthermore, they were able to identify specific practices related to self-awareness, relationships, and a sense of mission by which their spirituality influences their leadership.
They were less able to cite specific practices related to their belief in a divine power, and several explanations were offered: (a) a hesitancy grounded in the history of separation between church and state, (b) a belief that the existence of the transcendent is separate from belief in a divine power or (c) “the belief in a divine power is so personal and esoteric as to limit our ability to articulate how it translates into specific spiritually-centered leadership practices” (P. B. Miller, 2002, p. 81). Miller’s research questions sought to describe the nature of principals’ spiritual leadership. In my study, I went further, and sought to find out how special education administrators’ spirituality influences and empowers them in their work.

In 1999, Keyes et al. built a study on Reitzug’s work on the construct of principal empowerment. Keyes et al. found that for elementary principals, spirituality was at the core of their leadership. Since no such study has been done with special education administrators, a research opportunity existed in this direction.

Another study with school principals (Hollomon, 1999) found themes the researcher did not expect. Principals, through their responses, indicated spirituality is critical to connecting heart, mind, and soul. The participants spoke of the importance of spirituality in their own lives and in their beliefs about their work. Perhaps most importantly, they related that spiritual qualities were key to their ability to reach new levels of knowing and understanding about their work in the schools.

Finally, Musick (2010) studied the role spirituality plays in the lives of principals working in diverse or difficult elementary schools. She sought to develop a grounded theory around spirituality and school leadership that would be useful to first year
principals as they search for meaning beyond the struggles of the job. Additionally, she hoped her findings would be helpful for veteran principals questioning their effectiveness or continued longevity.

Musick’s (2010) findings indicated (a) school principals employ spirituality in the course of their professional lives; (b) principals’ fundamental purpose is to make a difference in their students’ lives; (c) wholeness, moral authority and transformative leadership reflect spiritually-centered school leadership; and (d) these factors all contribute to principals’ longevity in the profession. One participant of Musick’s study remarked there should have been a component of spiritual school leadership as part of her principal preparation program.

Although leadership may be hard to define, I feel well-informed about the ideas in the field of spiritual leadership after reviewing the extant literature on servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1970), transformational leadership (Burns, 1978), leading with soul (Bolman & Deal, 2001), enlightened leadership (Sokolow, 2002), spiritual leadership (Fairholm, 2011), and The Five Exemplary Practices of Leadership (Kouzes & Posner, 2002).

Additionally, the review of theoretical leadership ideas (particularly those with a spiritual bent) in the field of education provided context for this study. Because there has been so little written on the intersection between special education administrator leadership and spirituality, and in order to gain a wide perspective, the related fields of special education, higher education, and principal spirituality were included in the review.
Based on the review, it is clear that many P–12 administrators do, in fact, perceive a significant spiritual component in their work. Further, scholars have been writing about the spiritual aspect of leadership for at least 40 years, with emphasis on sharing, communicating, empowering, and valuing everyone in the organization. With these contributing factors established, the leadership strand of the literature review is in place.

**Summary of Conceptual Framework**

In sum, the literature review aimed to shed light on the key areas related to the research questions of this study. Those key areas are special education administration, adult development, work life, and leadership. Where possible, existing relationships among any of those elements within the literature were examined, as well.

Taken together, the five theories chosen—Theory of Felt Connection (Sinnott, 2005), Ego Development Stages (Cook-Greuter, 2000), The Holistic Development Model (Lips-Wiersma, 2002; Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2011), the Seven Stages of Personal Consciousness (Barrett, 2010), and The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership (Kouzes & Posner, 2002)—comprise a body of work related to adult spiritual development and work life. When added to the background about P–12 special education, the foundation to support the purpose of this study is set.

I found the strategy of creating a graphic organizer for my conceptual framework helpful (see Figure 1). This diagram is a culmination of my initial ideas about the study, the review of the literature that supports each area, and consideration of how my research questions move the discussion from the problem statement to the point of determining the methodology for the study.
Specifically, the internal processes experienced by participants are viewed through the ideas presented in the Theory of Felt Connection, the Ego Development Stages, and the Seven Stages of Personal Consciousness. In the center, the Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership, the Holistic Development Model and the elements of special education administration form the basis for examining the participants’ experience of work. Finally, on the right, are the outcomes in terms of the supporting research questions for the study.
Conclusion

When I began this literature review, I appreciated the guidance my advisor provided about what broad areas would need to be explored in order to become well-versed in the fields related to my research aims. Since then, I have been on a fascinating journey, letting the writing of venerable masters, seasoned researchers, and fellow novice doctoral candidates teach me about special education administration, adult development, work life, and spiritual/educational leadership. It has been a valuable experience, indeed.

Throughout the reading and writing process, I have kept in mind the dual purpose of the literature review. The first is to become familiar with the extant literature and to create the conceptual framework for the study. Additionally, “a later goal, after the research is nearly done, will be to relate the specific research findings back to this theoretical literature” (W. L. Miller & Crabtree, 1999b, p. 94).

In order to conduct scholarly research, a comprehensive plan must be constructed. In the next chapter, I describe how I investigated special education administrators’ experience of spirituality in their work life.
CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The aim of the study is to explore, via qualitative inquiry, the spiritual experience of purposefully selected special education administrators in the context of their work life. Bogdan and Biklen (1998) outlined five characteristics of qualitative research: (a) it is naturalistic, (b) it requires gathering of descriptive data, (c) it is concerned with process, (d) it involves inductive analysis, and (e) it results in the discovery of meaning. These characteristics provided initial guidance as I planned my study.

In order for a study to be coherent, the ontological (what can be known about the world) and epistemological (how it can be known) stance or “theoretical position/perspective” (Mayan, 2009, p. 25) must be well matched to the methods chosen to explore the research questions.

Methodology is an encompassing term for both the theoretical position/perspective and the method used to delve into the research questions (Mayan, 2009). Alternatively, Hatch (2002) called the nexus of stance and method as a “research paradigm” (p. 11). Both aspects are addressed in describing the rationale for this study.

Theoretical Position

The theoretical position for this study is interpretive constructivist. Rubin and Rubin (2005) commented that under this paradigm, the meaning participants attribute to what they experience is what is important. It is anticipated that the participants in this study will have a variety of experiences, will see those experiences in different ways, and will describe them uniquely. Hatch (2002) lent further support of the constructivist
stance being used for this study in that it allows multiple realities to be constructed (ontology) and recognizes that knowledge is a human construction (epistemology).

Interpretivists argue that it is possible to understand the subjective meaning of action (grasping the actor’s beliefs, desires, and so on), yet do so in an objective manner (Schwandt, 2000). Schwandt suggested the meaning that the interpreter reproduces or reconstructs is considered the original meaning of the action, which reflects the subjective consciousness or intent of the actor from the inside. The psychological reenactment that occurs through getting inside the head of the participant is an empathic identification referred to in the literature as *Verstehen* (Schwandt, 2000). Mayan (2009) provided further reinforcement when she noted that interpretivists are interested in the lived experience of the participants.

**Method**

The method employed in this study is descriptive qualitative. W. L. Miller and Crabtree (1999a) indicated that in qualitative or “field” research, the “researcher is personally engaged in an interpretive focus on a natural, often human, field of activity, with the goal of generating holistic and realistic descriptions and/or explanations” (p. 5). Mayan (2009) wrote that a descriptive qualitative method is appropriate for research that will stay close to the data collected to provide summary and description. Furthermore, the descriptive (also referred to as “basic, fundamental, and surface”) qualitative study, according to Sandelowski (2000, p. 335), does not require researchers to move far from or far into the data. Studies using this method also do not require moving into highly abstract interpretations of data, and that is what sets this method apart from others, such
as phenomenology, grounded theory, or ethnography (Sandelowski, 2000). Kapuscinski and Masters (2010) wrote, “The qualitative approach is recommended . . . to capture data regarding the experience of spirituality that may be valuable in applied contexts” (p. 201).

That being said, because I am interested in the stories participants tell about their experiences and how they construct meaning in their lives, the narrative inquiry method has a place in the description of this study (Schram, 2006). It should be noted, though, that not all tenets of narrative inquiry are present and the structure of the interviews will be guided more by the researcher than by the sequential telling of the participant. As endorsed by W. L. Miller and Crabtree (1999b), in order to seek deeper collective interpersonal understanding, only the “grand tour” questions will be standardized, and they may change from interview to interview, based on the iterative process of qualitative research design.

Threads of naturalistic inquiry are also present in this study. I chose to interact with the participants in their natural state, with no pre-selection or manipulation of variables, and no a priori commitment to any one theoretical view of the target phenomenon (Sandelowski, 2000).

Additionally, phenomenological overtones are extant in this study, in keeping with Sandelowski’s (2000) observation that “some qualitative descriptive studies have a narrative or phenomenological hue as researchers might seriously attend to certain words and phrases, or moments or experience, but not produce narrative or phenomenological renderings of the target phenomenon” (p. 337).
As described, the methodology for this study has a theoretical position of interpretive constructivism, and a descriptive qualitative method. Through the use of these complementary methodological components, it is hoped the experiences of the special education administrators will be heard, understood, and synthesized into themes that will be interesting, understandable, and useful. Because the primary purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of the participants, a descriptive qualitative approach was believed to be the best overall fit.

Data Collection Methods

Recruitment of participants. For the purpose of this study, a definition of special education administrator was provided in the first chapter. Briefly, he or she is a person who has worked as a practitioner in the field of special education, has an administrative license from the Ohio Department of Education, and is employed by a public school district as a Director of Pupil Services, Director of Student Services, Director of Special Education, Special Education Supervisor or other administrative position involving special education.

In a pilot study I conducted on this topic during the spring semester of 2012 (which included a variety of types of P–12 administrators), four participants were selected. Initially, my methodology for this full study called for 10 or more participants. On the advice of my committee, I revised my expectation to 7-to-10 purposefully selected participants as a starting point. Nevertheless, I knew that I would need to continue interviewing until my data reached a saturation point. Saturation, according to Mayan
(2009), occurs “when no new data emerge, when all leads have been followed, when negative cases have been checked, and when the story or theory is complete” (p. 62).

In this study, the knowledge I sought was not knowledge about the job, itself, but rather knowledge about personal experience. In order to be sure the participants are seasoned in the aspect of the work life of a special education administrator, I looked for co-researchers who have been administrators for at least two years. Since the domain of interest is experience of spirituality, I shared the nature of the study with potential participants prior to seeking their consent to be involved. It is likely that many administrators selected randomly would not have much to say about this topic, and equally likely that many administrators would simply not care to discuss it with a researcher.

Several factors were considered when attempting to engage participants for this study. Based on suggestions made by my study group in a prior class, I decided that participants should not be people with whom I work on a regular basis. It was suggested, based on the personal nature of the topic, it could create unnecessary tension. On one hand, if the participant was shy to share his or her thoughts based on our existing relationship, then the depth of the interview could be lacking. On the other hand, if emotional things were shared during the interview, the participant could be embarrassed afterward, making a normal work relationship awkward.

Selection of participants. Creswell (2007) noted criterion sampling is useful when all cases meet a particular criterion (e.g., being special education administrators). Maxwell (2005) indicated four goals of purposeful selection are (a) achieving
representativeness, (b) adequately capturing the heterogeneity of the group, (c) deliberately examining cases that are likely to answer the research questions, and (d) establishing a basis for comparisons between settings or individuals. Participants were sought with the idea of purposeful sampling in mind. Mayan (2009) described bias in qualitative sampling as a strength, and that idea led me to seek participants who would be able to give me the most and best insight on my topic. Rubin and Rubin (2005) also provided guidance about choosing participants, stating that interviewees should be experienced, knowledgeable, and have a variety of perspectives.

Evolving beyond the form of snowball sampling (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Creswell, 2007) I used in the pilot study (asking education professionals I know well if they knew any administrators to suggest for my study and, if so, to approach them about participating, and provide me with an introduction), I used a sampling approach designed to result in a participant group that could provide a rich variety of perspectives.

I decided the most efficient way to find these participants would be to work through the Ohio Association of Pupil Services Administrators (OAPSA). I made preliminary contact with the president of the organization in December 2012 at a meeting of this group and followed up the face-to-face contact with an email describing my study. I also wrote an outline of the content I hoped to convey in a brief, introductory presentation to the organization in May 2013.

The president of OAPSA supported my requests, and the board approved a short presentation about my study as part of the May 2013 business meeting. The board also
consented to send an email through the group’s listserv after I had obtained Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for my study.

I shared a Prezi with the attendees of the May 6, 2013, business meeting outlining my study, asking them how they defined spirituality, and the specifics about what would be required if one chose to volunteer for the study. I also handed out candy with a sticker attached, asking them to please watch for an email about my study after it was IRB approved and to consider participating if they felt they experienced spirituality in their work.

An important feature of recruiting and securing research participants is assuring the protection of their rights (Creswell, 2007; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Prior to the initiation of this study, the Kent State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved my research protocol on October 2, 2013 (Appendix A Protocol #13-424). The approved informed consent and audio recording forms (Appendices B and C) described procedures for maintaining confidentiality, the activities involved in the study, the purpose of the study, the risks and benefits associated with it, and the participant’s right to drop out of the study at any time.

It should be noted that at the time of the IRB proposal and creation of consent forms, the title of the study was Special education administrators’ experience of spirituality at work: Making meaning, serving others, and handling it all. Through the process of conducting the study, the title was modified.

After receiving IRB approval, I contacted OAPSA’s secretary and sent her the body of the email (Appendix D) to send to the membership (approximately 300
members). The email was sent to the members of OAPSA on October 8, 2013. In order to provide a sense of what I was asking, the consent form for the study was posted on OAPSA’s website for potential participants to access.

Via email, seven interested people made contact. I emailed each of them with potential dates/time for a phone call so that I could explain the details of the study and set up the first round interview. Phone calls were set up easily with six of the seven participants and each verbally agreed to participate in the study during the phone call. Interviews were also set up with each of these participants, and each agreed to write a personal narrative prior to the interview.

One of the people who contacted me initially did not reply to my email in response. I emailed her subsequently and also left a voicemail on her office number. She did not get back to me, so as of November 10, 2013, I decided to move on and not pursue her further.

A special education administrator in the district where I currently work also approached me. She offered to volunteer for the study; however, I followed my guideline of not engaging participants with whom I currently work. It was hard to turn her down, but I do believe it was for the best in the long run.

Thinking back to the OAPSA presentation in May 2013, I remembered one person who had expressed interest but had not replied to the listserv email. I reached out to her via email and she agreed to participate after the explanatory phone call.

As I began to take stock of my participants, I noticed they had diversity in some ways (years of experience, size/type of school district, age), but not in others
(racial/cultural characteristics, religious affiliation). In order to try to diversify my pool, I asked to send a second email to the OAPSA listserv asking for diverse participants. Permission was granted and an email to the membership was sent on November 13, 2013 (see Appendix D).

Two additional association members contacted me. I connected with one of them easily and she agreed to be the eighth participant in the study. She also referred me to another potential participant. I contacted the person she recommended and, although we did email back and forth, we never reached the point of a conversation to discuss the details of the study and the last contact was on November 24, 2013.

Similarly, the other person who contacted me via email after the second listserv request emailed with me twice, but we never connected by phone. An email she sent me on December 5, 2013, indicated she would contact me but she never did. I just left it alone, deciding she had changed her mind about participating.

Reflecting as to why some people volunteered for the study and others did not (and why some initially reached out and did not follow through), I believe there are two explanatory main factors. First, many special education administrators may not be interested in the topic of spirituality at all; it may even be aversive to them for a variety of reasons, or they may prefer to keep their beliefs private. Second, the special education administrators who received the recruitment emails may have felt they did not have time to commit to the study or may just not be inclined to get involved in any type of project outside their other responsibilities.
Thus, I had secured eight volunteers to participate in the study. I felt pleased with how smoothly the recruitment process had gone and with the make-up of the pool. Based on the data collected with these participants, I determined I reached a reasonable level of saturation and no additional participants were recruited during the course of the study.

Comments about the sample. In the interest of acknowledging sources of potential bias, it should be noted that I had professional relationships with four of the eight participants when I was in my role as a director of pupil services. Otherwise, I had spoken to one of them just one time prior to the study, and I connected with three of them for the very first time in October 2013.

Although a representative sample is not a goal of this descriptive qualitative study’s methodology, it may be noted that this sample is fairly consistent with the religious affiliations in our nation. According to the U.S. Religious Landscape Survey (Pew Research, 2008), 78.4% of Americans are Christian, broken down into 23.9% Catholic, 1.7% Mormon, 0.7% Jehovah’s Witness, 0.6% Orthodox, and 0.3% Other Christian. Other religions constitute 4.7% of the population, with 1.7% Jewish, 0.7% Buddhist, 0.6% Muslim, 0.4% Hindu, and 1.5% Other Faiths and World Religions. Unaffiliated status was chosen by 16.1% of Americans, with 1.6% identifying as atheist, 2.4% as agnostic, and 12.1% as nothing in particular. The question about religions affiliation was refused or answered don’t know by 0.8% of respondents.

In the sample group for this study, 75% were Christian (50% Catholic, 25% Protestant) and 25% were unaffiliated. Thus, when the Pew data and the participant group for this study are compared, the ratios are similar. I had hoped for a wider
diversity in the participant pool in terms of belief systems; however, it was not unexpected, due to the characteristics of the larger population. Nonetheless, it would have been interesting to hear from the voices of religious minorities in order to give their perspectives voice through this research. I highlight this information simply to provide context for readers who will make their own decisions about the transferability of this study.

Compensation was not offered to participants of this study; however, to provide closure to the participants’ research activities, I mailed each of them a handwritten thank you card with a $10 gift card to Starbucks as a token of my appreciation for their work on the study following the completion of the data collection phase. During both the pilot and full studies, I experienced for myself what Rubin and Rubin (2005) described, that each participant expressed they had enjoyed their role in the data-making process. Several participants emailed to say thank you for the card. Interestingly, one participant returned the gift, indicating he makes it a practice not to accept them in the professional setting. After describing the recruitment of participants, it is appropriate to introduce them to the reader.

**Descriptive characteristics of participants.** The participants in this study have a range of experiences and backgrounds. In order for the reader to better know them, a brief thumbnail description of some of their characteristics is provided in addition to a table depicting pertinent features. The order in which they are presented coincides with the order of their first round interviews (as opposed to alphabetically, etc.), as that is how I, as the research lens, have come to think about them.
Key information. In order to be concise and focused, I chose not to provide typical demographic information (age, marital status, race, etc.) about participants in a table. Instead, Table 16 provides a summary of characteristics germane to the study. In addition to Table 16, brief written snapshots are included to give a sense of the generous participants in this study.

Table 16

Participant Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Current Title</th>
<th>Stage of Administrative Career</th>
<th>Religious Affiliation</th>
<th>Initial Career in Public Education</th>
<th>Definition of Spirituality (paraphrased)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ava</td>
<td>Director of Special Education Services</td>
<td>Late</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Intervention Specialist - Cognitive Disabilities</td>
<td>God is a big part of me and my spirituality. Your belief system, however it is built, whether from the church or relationships with people or your morals, makes the spiritual side of you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stacie</td>
<td>Director of Pupil Services</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Intervention Specialist - Emotional Disabilities</td>
<td>It’s really reductionistic to make a very clear solid definition of it. There is something associated with belief in an intangible higher power and a passion for doing good.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>Director of Student Services</td>
<td>Late</td>
<td>Raised Greek Orthodox, converted to Baptist</td>
<td>Intervention Specialist - Cognitive Disabilities</td>
<td>When I was a child, religion was about traditions. I believe in God and that Jesus Christ died for our sins. I believe in eternal security and that when I die, I will go to Heaven and God will decide if I am worthy of staying.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(table continues)
### Table 16 (continued)

**Participant Characteristics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Current Title</th>
<th>Stage of Administrative Career</th>
<th>Religious Affiliation</th>
<th>Initial Career in Public Education</th>
<th>Definition of Spirituality (paraphrased)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barb</td>
<td>Assistant Superintendent for Special Services</td>
<td>Late</td>
<td>Raised Methodist, converted to Catholic</td>
<td>Intervention Specialist - Learning/ Behavior Disabilities</td>
<td>Spirituality is grounded on basic right and wrong—what I was taught in religion. It is believing there is more to life than just me and what I want.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heidi</td>
<td>Director of Special Education</td>
<td>Early</td>
<td>Raised Catholic, not currently affiliated</td>
<td>Intervention Specialist - Specific Learning Disabilities</td>
<td>It is hard for me to wrap my head around what spirituality is. There is a force that helps me do the best I can. That force—in combination with God, fate, religion, faith and past loved ones—have proven there is a bigger plan for me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wendy</td>
<td>Director of Pupil Services</td>
<td>Early</td>
<td>Methodist</td>
<td>Intervention Specialist - Emotional Disabilities</td>
<td>Spirituality is my belief in God through my religion. My primary belief is that you achieve perfection when everything you do is motivated by love, so I try to do that.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>Director of Student Services</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Speech/Language Pathologist</td>
<td>Spirituality means being one with God and treating others with respect and kindness. It also means being mindful, being in the moment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nora</td>
<td>Director of Student Services (Retired)</td>
<td>Late</td>
<td>Raised Christian, not currently affiliated</td>
<td>School Psychologist</td>
<td>I definitely believe in God, and it seems like the core tenets of most major religions are the same. That lets me feel like I can connect with others, because we share a god. And God is love. I am a person of strong faith, but I don’t get into religion.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Thumbnail sketches of participants.** In the hope of conveying to the consumer of this research much of the same input with which I, as the investigator, had to work with, impressions of the participants are shared. These impressions include some information about the participants’ physical appearance in order to give the reader a sense of being there. Additionally, I hoped to encourage readers to form mental pictures of the participants in order to make them more real; thus making the meaning generated from the study more tangible. It was important, however, that I refrain from providing too much detail in order to preserve the anonymity of the participants. Additionally, I included a significant statement from the personal narrative written by participants about their career and spiritual development as part of the introductions, again, to give a feeling of where they were on this topic entering into the study.

**Ava.** When we met for our interview, Ava wore a natural-toned sweater with a long scarf and minimal makeup and jewelry. This physical appearance was in tune with her connection to animals and nature.

Her office was spacious with wooden floors and had an uncluttered feeling in spite of its place in a very old elementary school building. In her narrative, she wrote, “I think the most important thing I learned from that period was to be really firm in my commitment to services and never break (bend, yes) under pressure from others.”

**Stacie.** Stacie wrote,

I do trust the Lord and have faith that He has put me on this path for reasons that will remain unknown to me. Since this realization, I have become calmer, more
serene, and less likely to be frustrated by events at work, no matter how bad they get.

Interestingly, Stacie provided the lengthiest narrative and second round interview in the participant pool.

Our interview was in a conference room adjacent to Stacie’s Board of Education office, and she showed me her office with many purposefully placed totems to remind her of important things prior to us sitting in the office’s conference room. She was sharp and quick-witted, and her polished appearance, including a black suit jacket, blue and black patterned top, slim black pants, ankle boots, and a crystal beaded necklace reflected her personality.

Karen. I found Karen at her office in a brick building housing Special Services and preschool in her district. The large, open area was carpeted in burgundy and divided here and there by cubicles. Her office was glassed in and roomy, with a dark, wooden desk and a comfortable-looking gray plush office chair.

Karen wore her hair short and had on a burgundy blazer, silver pendant, and several nice rings. Her fingernails were also short, and nicely manicured. It was the first time we had met, and her eye contact with me increased as the interview continued. In her pre-interview narrative, she wrote, “I think God led me onto the path of [becoming a special educator] . . . When I close the door off to God, I make poor decisions; I need to remind myself every day.”

Barb. In her personal narrative, Barb shared, “I feel God’s presence and my spirituality grow when I am helping others and when my actions enable others to do their
jobs more effectively.” On the day of the interview, she showed me her office (which was small but nicely decorated and featured pictures of her family) situated in her district’s Board of Education building, but then we went to an adjacent conference room because she said she preferred not to sit across a desk from me for this interview. She was slender, wore little-to-no makeup, and had short-ish light brown hair. She was dressed in a black V-neck top with a white jacket and spare jewelry.

Heidi. Even though a last-minute venue change resulted in the need to move to a nearby restaurant, the interview with Heidi somehow began on time. There was a quiet spot at the back where we could hear the piped in music and received coffee service from the waitress, but were otherwise undistracted.

Heidi had mid-length blond hair and she wore a navy blue sweater jacket. Throughout the interview, she made steady eye contact and seemed very comfortable sharing her thoughts. In her written narrative, she wrote,

The moment I had my first special education class, I knew that this was what I was always meant to do . . . I knew I needed the experience of teaching, but that I was meant to be a director.

Wendy. “I believe in showing Christ’s love by serving others, and try to hold true to that when I work with students, staff and parents.” This succinct, yet rich quotation from Wendy’s written narrative is characteristic of her style. She provided the shortest narrative and first round interview; at the same time, there is no dearth of substance in her contributions.
Wendy’s small, tidy office is located in the modern brick Board of Education office in her district; on the walls hang several plaques for awards of recognition in her field. She had longer, straight hair and wore a brown suit jacket on the day of the interview. She had an even affect (albeit with a dry sense of humor), made very direct, steady eye contact, and exhibited calm non-verbals as we talked.

*Mark.* The most marked characteristic about Mark was his ready sense of humor, and there was a great deal of laughter during our interview. Second only to his sense of humor was his hospitality, as he made every effort to be sure I was comfortable.

He wore glasses and a dark suit with a blue tie, and we met in his spacious office in a building that houses regional education offices. His office contained a large desk, circular table, welcoming décor, and large windows, and we sat at the table for our interview (which was the lengthiest first round session).

Mark’s proclivity towards strategic planning and thinking is illustrated in comments from his personal narrative.

I framed my own vision statement, ‘I serve.’ These simple two words have formed the basis of my actions . . . Making sure I treat others with respect, even those who are angry, has helped to keep things moving forward . . . and forged relationships.

*Nora.* As a retiree, Nora no longer had an office, so we arranged to meet in my office, which was convenient for her. School was closed at the time, so we had total privacy. She found my elementary school building without difficulty and arrived on
time. She was dressed comfortably in jeans and a sweater, and had on glasses and silver earrings.

According to her narrative describing the intersection of her career and spiritual development, she wrote,

God has paved a path for me to do what needed to be done with my life; to serve, to grow, to learn to do for others without judgment, and to always keep children at the center of all decisions.

Since this study is interpretivist constructivist by design, it not only seemed appropriate to introduce myself (as I did in the first chapter), but also to provide some orienting information about my co-constructors. It is hoped that the reader has a starting place for understanding these participants’ experience of spirituality in their work lives while still honoring their anonymity. After describing the co-creators of this research, the next step is to detail the collection of the data for the study.

Data collection. Mayan (2009) provided an intriguing perspective on data collection when she wrote that it would be better thought of as “data making or data generation” (p. 66). She emphasized that qualitative data is not a preexisting entity, but rather something that results from the researcher’s interaction with the data sources.

The strategy of triangulation reduces the risk that the themes found during the analysis phase will be biased by only using one specific source or method (Creswell, 2007; Hatch, 2002; Maxwell, 2005). In order to make it more likely the data generated through this study will be useful, a personal narrative, two rounds of semi-structured interview, and participant journals were employed.
In early phases of planning this study, the use of an observation in the field was proposed. The observation would have taken place during a meeting led by the participant. Due to concerns that (a) a single observation could be misleading and may have led to inaccurate generalizations about participants’ “normal” behavior and (b) the unfeasibility of adding multiple observations to the study due to time and travel constraints, this idea for data gathering was dropped from the plan. While this may have some impact on the strength of the study, I feel the data collection methods remain solid in their revised form.

A small remnant of this idea remains in the study though meeting the administrators in their offices. Although conducting the interview in the person’s natural habitat falls far short of anything that could be considered a field observation, the hope was to gain an increased ‘sense’ of the participant by seeing the space in which he or she works. I also hoped it would help participants feel relaxed and confident. This strategy is supported by W. L. Miller and Crabtree’s (1999b) suggestion that maximum narrative competence in interviews will occur in a “grass hut” setting, where the grass hut is a comfortable, familiar location, rather than a sterile site (p. 100).

As proposed, several data generation sources were used in this study: (a) written personal narratives, (b) two rounds of semi-structured interview, and (c) participant journals. The aim of engaging in multiple forms of data gathering is an important facet of establishing the credibility of the study. Known as triangulation, this structure increases the likelihood of achieving the most accurate interpretation of the participants’ experience. Moreover, by working with participants over a month-long period, I sought
to bolster the credibility of the study through prolonged engagement, a construct to enhance credibility. Credibility is discussed in detail later in this chapter.

**Personal narrative.** According to Hydén (1995), “A life narrative brings to the fore a frame through which purpose and direction in a person’s life may be made visible” (p. 69). By telling one’s story, Lax (1996) indicated a person is able to reflect on his deeper meanings and values in relation to his career. Narrative is also a safeguard to internal validity, brings rigor to doing research in the subjective, and is designed to elicit purpose, sense-making, and coherence (Lips-Wiersma, 2002). Additionally, Mayan (2009) surmised that the central tenet that draws researchers to narrative is how stories and storytelling make meaning in our lives, and that personal stories, when analyzed in sufficient depth, represent a larger collection of social experiences. Polkinghorne (1995) described the narrative form as “an expression of a higher-order of meaning-making, one that reveals and integrates seemingly disparate aspects of a person’s life into a unified whole” (p. 144).

Although not a part of my pilot study, given the literature about the strength of narrative within a qualitative study of this nature, I decided to request a personal narrative related to participants’ spirituality and experience of becoming/working as a special education administrator. As a means of exploration, I wrote my own personal narrative that comprises the introduction to this dissertation. This practical experience helped me crystallize exactly how to proceed with the participants’ narratives.

Participants were introduced to the idea that they would be asked to write a personal narrative through the consent form and the initial telephone conversation about
the study. After scheduling the initial interview, I sent an email to each participant containing the following prompt: “In one thousand words or less, describe the formation of your spirituality and how you came to be a special education administrator. Please be sure to emphasize any connections you see between your career development and your spiritual development.”

Each of the eight participants sent me a written personal narrative prior to the first round interview. Although they ranged in length from 164 words to 1,229 words, each one directly addressed the prompt and allowed me to begin to know my study’s participants. In the data analysis section of this chapter, I describe how I analyzed the narratives, both before and after gathering the other data.

I read the narratives before I met with the participants. When we met for the first interview, I asked them about their experience of writing it and what themes they saw. By involving the participants in the analysis of their own stories and the development of concepts, it ensures that the interpretations of the data surpass the limited worldview of the researcher (Lips-Wiersma, 2002). Lips-Wiersma stressed the importance of this technique when addressing concepts of spirituality, as spirituality is very personal, and important interpretations could be missed if the researcher’s own spirituality was used as a lens or standard.

These essays definitely served their primary purpose, which was to give me an entry point for the first round interview and to help the participants begin to think more deeply about the topic of our study. Chronologically, the next data source was the first round interview with each participant.
**Semi-structured interviews.** The semi-structured style of interview was chosen because I have enough of an idea about the phenomenon of special education administrators’ experience to develop questions, but I did not know enough to predict others’ answers (Mayan, 2009). Additionally, they allowed for the potential of “arriving at new interpretations, achieving a deep understanding and a rich narrative, and presenting strong and vivid evidence of conclusions” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 200). Rubin and Rubin endorsed this method when they wrote, “Research based on depth interviews also helps us understand our work lives” (p. 4), virtually prescribing that they be used for this study.

As a person with five years of experience as a special education administrator, I have somewhat of an insider role in this study. Finding balance on the insider-outsider continuum was another reason for engaging participants who have few, if any, additional connections to me. During the process, I kept in mind Mayan’s (2009) observation that it is easier for insiders to build rapport, based on common frames of reference, but that it can be more awkward to ask questions related to things taken for granted in the field.

When developing the interview questions (Appendices D and E), I thought of Maxwell’s (2005) guidance to ask interviewees real questions, “the ones to which you really want to know the answer, rather than contrived questions designed to obtain answers to abstract questions” (p. 92). Maxwell provided additional direction when he stated that questions should be written so as to elicit specific responses, rather than generalizations. Depth interviews (which primarily use open, direct, verbal questions) concentrate on the “figure at the expense of the ground,” and focus on co-constructing
understanding of the topic of interest, rather than on the context of understanding (W. L. Miller & Crabtree, 1999b, p. 93).

I also considered W. L. Miller and Crabtree’s (1999b) comments about the partnership between interviewer and interviewee:

The questions/transmissions are complex, ambiguous, and jointly constructed from within the context of the discourse. Both the interviewer and respondent have multiple social roles as interviewer and interviewee. These different roles influence the many different motivations each has for engaging in the interview. Some of these transactional goals include requests, performance/expression, politeness, persuasion, attention, exerting authority, therapy, ritual and/or reference to specific knowledge. (p. 91)

I was conscious of these factors as I headed into the interview sessions.

Further, the questions I posed specifically asked for stories and examples in order to elicit rich data (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). I hoped the questions would tap into the concept of vividness described by Rubin and Rubin, in that participants would be emotionally-vested in what they had to say.

Via the process of establishing the conceptual framework for this study, I reviewed the interview protocols for several studies exploring the concept of spirituality. Thus, I was able to use questions asked in other studies to inform the creation of my depth interview questions.

In preparation for my initial interviews, I found particularly helpful Rubin and Rubin’s (2005) five stages of a depth interview relationship. The first stage is
introduction, and that was taken care of through the email summarizing the nature of the research to OAPSA members.

Second, I asked initial questions that were ‘easy’ and allowed the participants to speak comfortably. I also hoped they would recognize there were not right or wrong answers; that I was interested in their personal stories and that there was space for them to speak at length. I also attempted to show empathy by engaging in active listening through brief comments, follow-up questions, and non-verbal signals such as eye contact, body posture, and facial expressions (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). W. L. Miller and Crabtree (1999b) discussed the use of “floating prompts” to help keep the stories flowing. Seven recommended prompts are: (a) silence, (b) the attentive lean, (c) the eyebrow flash, (d) affirmative noise, (e) the echo prompt, (f) the reflective summary, and (g) recapitulation (or summarizing), and I used them during the interviews.

The third step involved asking the tougher, or more sensitive, questions. To some degree, I emphasized this step more in the second round interview than the first, to give the participants time to acclimate to talking about the abstract topic of spirituality. W. L. Miller and Crabtree (1999b) stated the desired details and nuances are drawn from the participant by utilizing mini-tour questions or probes. Commonly, these include category questions which “seek elaboration and/or clarification of all the parts, settings, relationships, activities, and relative worth of the domains being discussed, and include the ‘what else,’ ‘when,’ ‘where,’ ‘how,’ ‘why,’ and ‘why important’ questions” (p. 98). Contrast questions, such as “What is the difference between ___ and ___?” are also
useful, according to W. L. Miller and Crabtree (1999b), and I worked hard to quickly build finesse with asking follow up probes during the interview phase of the study.

Fourth, Rubin and Rubin (2005) recommended toning down the emotional level. Based on the questions, settings, and participants, I accomplished this simply by asking if there is anything else the person wanted to share that I had not asked. That way, if he or she felt a need for transition from the more-intense questions, he or she had the opportunity.

The final step in both the first and second interviews was closing the encounter and leaving open the ability to make further contact. I followed W. L. Miller and Crabtree’s (1999b) suggestion to linger for five to 15 minutes after the voice recorder was turned off. This was a time for small talk and set a tone for participant empowerment and good relations. It was also a time when final insights sometimes came to the participants, and was a nice opportunity for me to say thank you.

First round interviews. The first round of interviews occurred between October 21, 2013, and November 27, 2013. In documenting the interviews I conducted with participants, it seems pertinent to describe the setting, the method of recording and transcription, the content and the affective elements of the dialogues, as well as my process for note-taking and obtaining informed consent. By doing so, I strive to provide a satisfactory account of what the interviews were like.

Setting. The in-person settings were described in the thumbnail sketches of the participants. As hoped, participants seemed comfortable in the settings and, at times,
objects in the room were used to provide evidence for statements made. They also
provided privacy and a good sound environment for making recordings.

Recording and transcription. Each of the first-round interviews was recorded
using the SmartRecorder app on my iPhone. The shortest interview was 41 minutes long
and the longest lasting was one hour and 27 minutes. I did not experience any recording
difficulties.

After recording each interview, I sent it as an email attachment to Verbal Ink, a
transcription company. Within days, I received an email with an invoice and a transcript
in the form of a Microsoft Word document. There was one interview recording Verbal
Ink initially could not open, but after re-trying several times, they eventually did open
and transcribe it.

I would have liked to have transcribed the interviews myself; however, when I
weighed that against how long that would have made the process stretch out, I elected to
use the service, instead. In order to assure accuracy, I listened to the recordings and
simultaneously read the transcripts, editing errors as I went along. This proved to be very
important due to infrequent, but sometimes critical, mistakes in the transcripts.

Content. The questions in Appendix E provided the framework for each of the
in-person interviews. The questions were designed to elicit answers targeted toward the
purpose of the study. In some cases, the questions were posed in order, although in other
interviews, I followed the flow of the conversation and asked questions when the time
seemed right. When this occurred, I always took a moment near the end of the interview
to be sure I’d covered everything. The only exception to asking all the questions was that
question seven was not asked of a retired participant, as it involved giving a current example.

Throughout each interview, I asked follow-up questions and said, “Tell me more” when it seemed appropriate. This means that each interview had a consistent foundation, but also was allowed to expand to suit the experience of the individual participant.

*Affective elements.* In each situation, I was mindful to begin with small talk and easier questions, giving the participant a chance to warm up. During the interview, I tried hard to listen attentively and use prompts effectively to keep stories going. As a novice researcher, I know there were missed opportunities for delving deeper, and I also recognized times when I interrupted the speaker. That said, the interviews were conversational and pleasant. At the end of each interview, I toned it down by asking the participants if there was anything they wanted to add, going over the next step of the process and lingering for a few minutes after the recorder had been turned off. I also used this transition time as the opportunity to schedule the second round interview with each participant.

*Note-taking.* During the interviews, I took just a few notes, jotting down key words on my copy of the interview script. Following the interview (either immediately afterwards in the car before leaving the site, when I got home, or one case, the next morning), I made notes about my impressions of the participant, his or her office and any other reminders about interesting ideas. These notes were utilized in memo writing, which is described later in this chapter.
Consent. As indicated, the informed consent document was posted on the OAPSA website when the initial recruiting email was sent. Additionally, during the phone conversation to arrange the in-person interview, I verbally reviewed key elements of the consent form and asked if participants had any questions or concerns. Some participants signed and returned the informed consent form prior to the first interview; I asked for a hard copy signature at the beginning of the session for those who did not.

The audio recording consent form was provided as well, and all participants agreed in writing to be recorded. Further, all agreed for me to use the original recordings for this research project.

The second interviews were conducted via telephone about three weeks after the initial meeting. These interviews were shorter, and were geared toward re-opening the conversation, reviewing the journal entries, member checking early interpretive ideas, and diving deeper into the essential questions of the inquiry.

Participant journals. Journaling is a common form of data collection in narrative research (Creswell, 2007). Based on the basic descriptive method and underlying goals of this study, participant journals were a good fit for data gathering.

Between the first and second round of interviews, participants agreed to do some journal writing about their experience of spirituality in their work. The purpose of introducing journal writing to the study was (a) to provide another source of data, (b) to give participants the opportunity to reflect on current events occurring in their work life, and (c) to provide a springboard into the second round interview. Hatch (2002) suggested (a) be clear with participants about writing expectations, (b) give clear
direction about journal topics, (c) process journal data in an ongoing way, and (d) give participants credit for keeping up with journals.

To guide them—and to achieve some consistency among the participants—I provided journal entry guidelines to each one in hard copy form at the end of the first round interview (Appendix G). The guidelines posed three questions and the request was for participants to respond to each question at least one time for a three-week period.

As with the written personal narrative, the length and style of the writing differed dramatically; however, each participant (with the exception of the retired participant who was not asked to journal) wrote and shared their journals. All journals were typed and sent to me via email as a Word document, an Adobe PDF, or the body of an email.

For the first few participants, I simply asked that journals be provided to me prior to the second round interview. For later interviews, I requested that the journals be provided weekly, and I appreciated being able to follow along, rather than waiting until just before the interview to assimilate what the person had been experiencing and to make notes to start the second round of interviews.

*Second round interviews.* The last compulsory part of the study for participants was to engage in a second round interview with me, and they occurred between November 20, 2013, and December 16, 2013. These interviews were all conducted by telephone. In two cases, the initial time chosen needed to be rescheduled. The use of mobile phones, including texting, to fine-tune the interview time based on the events of the day was very helpful.
Content. As with the first round interview, I had prepared a set of semi-structured interview questions and planned to start the interview with asking for participant reflections based on their recent journal writing. The retired participant, Nora, was excused from the second round interview.

After the second round interview with my first participant, I decided to significantly re-write my questions. I felt I was not providing enough direction to the interview and that there would be little added to the data based on the questions I asked.

The revised questions relied less on the journals and linked more pointedly back to the research questions, attempting to come at them slightly differently than in the first round. I found that the revised questions (Appendix F) made for fuller dialogue than the ones I created in my initial effort.

These second round interviews also played a role in establishing the credibility of this study through the process of member checking. By reflecting back to participants during our conversation what I had heard in the first round interview and read in their journals, I looked for affirmation that I had accurately heard and summarized their thoughts.

Recording, transcription, note-taking, and setting. The technology used for these interviews was similar to that in the first interview. For some of the interviews, I used the desk phone in my office and put the caller on speaker, thus allowing me to make a recording with the SmartRecorder app on my iPhone. When I was away from my office and needed to use my iPhone to talk with the participant, I put it on speaker and recorded
the conversation with the Smart Recorder app on my iPad. These interviews were much shorter, and ranged in length from 11 to 28 minutes.

Again, I took only a small number of notes, staying very present in the dialogue with the participant, knowing I could depend on the recordings and transcripts created by Verbal Ink for details. Participants reported being in their offices, at home, and, in one case, raking leaves, while we conducted the interviews. Following the interviews, I made brief notes about impressions from the interactions.

*Affective elements.* I ended each conversation by thanking the participant and indicating I would be in touch about an optional member checking group meeting after I had engaged in substantial analysis of the data. Each participant wished me luck and indicated they looked forward to learning about the results of the analysis.

In a qualitative study involving eight participants and several data generation sources, it is imperative that there be a well-planned and executed system for organizing the data and cataloging the glimmers of understanding that arise for the researcher as the data collection process intertwines with the early analysis of the data. In the case of this study on the spirituality of special education administrators within the context of their work lives, several researcher tools were used.

*Researcher reflections and journaling.* From the onset of this project, I took very seriously the mission of discovering something meaningful through the research. I took to heart the recommendations from the literature and my dissertation director to think about the study as often as possible, not waiting until after the data were gathered to begin the mindwork. I also viewed the process—my first real research project—as a
learning experience, and I did not hesitate to admit to and reflect on perceived shortcomings. Four structures were used for keeping track of the progress of the study: a data collection chart, a data collection binder, a researcher journal, and peer debriefing.

*Data collection chart.* Very early in the data collection process, I recognized that a graphic organizer would be helpful in order to keep track of what elements of the study had been completed with which of the participants. I sketched a chart with the participants’ names across the top and a list of objectives down the left side, including pseudonym, received narrative, received consents, interview #1, blogged interview #1, received transcript #1, coded transcript #1, received journals, coded journals, interview #2, received transcript #2, and coded transcript #2. Initially, I was marking boxes with a checkmark to show they were completed, but then started recording the date completed for additional information.

Although this homemade chart does not look at all professional, it was a great graphic organizer to help me see what was done and what was yet to be completed. In addition to its essential role of keeping track, I also found an emotional benefit in that, as the squares on the chart filled with dates, I was encouraged by my progress.

*Data collection binder.* During the literature review phase of my dissertation in the fall of 2012, I created a large, three-ring binder to begin storing dissertation-related items. I would three-hole punch resources of value and use a small Post-It note to make a tab for easy reference. I continued to add to this binder from time to time during the period of studying for my comprehensive exam and preparing to defend my research proposal. After my proposal was approved and I received IRB approval, I moved ahead
on participant recruitment as described and created tabs for each participant as he or she agreed to join the study.

The binder has tabs for each of the eight participants, and in each section, the materials are in the same order: signed informed consent, signed audio consent, written personal narrative, interview #1 questions with my notes, interview #1 transcript, the participant’s journal writings, interview #2 questions with my notes, and interview #2 transcript. By keeping the same order in each section, it is easy for me to quickly turn to the source to which I’d like to refer.

*Researcher journal.* Schram (2006) indicated that part of the responsibility of a researcher is to monitor and account for the influence of changes that occur during the project on the interpretation of the data. Furthermore, Bogdan and Biklen (1998) advised not hesitating to speculate about ideas in my journal.

As a main support of the audit trail for qualitative research, the reflexive researcher journal was an essential tool in my data collection (and, later, data analysis) process. Initially, I’d imagined keeping a spiral notebook-style researcher journal. I planned to record interview reactions, personal reflections, mistakes, and successes (Mayan, 2009). I thought I would then use those handwritten chronological notes to write informal memos about data arising from my sources.

I started to do so, and then found myself recognizing shortcomings in this system. I saw it would be difficult to locate things I had written within the notebook. I also found myself reluctant to write things out by hand, when keyboarding is a more-comfortable
medium for me. To solve these issues, I decided to use this as an opportunity to start my first blog (http://mfergus8.wordpress.com).

The process I used was to make brief reminder notes on paper whenever a thought struck me, or at more predictable times such as following an interview. Approximately one time per week, I would expand on my notes through making entries on my blog, categorizing them as interview notes, process memos, or content memos. I often included my thoughts about decisions I made and conclusions I drew and why I did so.

Advantages of the blog, besides providing a learning experience for me, were that I could access it from any computer with an Internet connection and it made my journal transparent, since anyone who wished could subscribe to it. Further, by categorizing my entries as process, content, or interview-related (in addition to being able to search the blog by date), it was easy to find comments I wanted to reference. It has also been a good exercise to think about what evidence I can attach to the blog, such as diagrams, links to articles and videos, and so forth.

Because I wanted to frequently reference some of my memos (especially those about emerging content) I printed many of the blogged memos and hung them on the wall of my home office. I read them regularly and sometimes made notes in the margins for future reference.

Peer debriefing. Peer debriefing, as noted by Lincoln and Guba (1985), “serves as a method of critique—‘keeping the inquirers honest’” (p. 243), by asking questions, probing for bias, and challenging interpretations. During the pilot study, I engaged in reflection about data generation through regularly occurring face-to-face and online
conversations with a small group of classmates in Qualitative Methods. By sharing ideas and concerns with this group of peers, as well as hearing and problem solving about theirs, my insight about the research process deepened.

During the creation of a dissertation, a great deal of the researcher’s time is spent alone with the data. In order to counteract the possibility of missed ideas or to monitor for bias, I have engaged in a form of peer debriefing with my dissertation director and with a friend who is a qualitative researcher.

Approximately every other month, I have met informally with Dr. Kurt Stange to share my process and emerging results. He asked questions about both, and made suggestions to address my questions. The outcome of these conversations was often a feeling of cognitive dissonance for me, as I had new and challenging ways to think about the work I was doing. Still, these dialogues have been very helpful as I made my way as a novice researcher.

More formally, I have had advisory sessions with my dissertation director, Dr. Catherine Hackney, throughout the process. In these sessions, I shared my research progress and what I have written for her review and feedback. She also has viewed my blog between phone or in-person conferences to see the thoughts and processes I use as I work. Her guidance has been an important structure for helping me define the scope of my project.

With the review of the recruitment of participants, some details about the participants, the data collection methods/systems used for keeping track of data, and emerging understandings provided, it is hoped the reader has a clear sense of the basic
structure of the study and is satisfied that it is well wrought. The next section describes the techniques used for data analysis.

**Data Analysis**

In determining the approach to use for data analysis, I thought about my research questions, theoretical position, research method, and data collection techniques. I also reviewed plenty of professional literature in order to understand the feasible constructs available to me. I found Hatch’s (2002) words instructive as I came to better understand data analysis:

> Data analysis is a systematic search for meaning. It is a way to process qualitative data so that what has been learned can be communicated to others. Analysis means organizing and interrogating data in ways that allow researchers to see patterns, identify themes, discover relationships, develop explanations, make interpretations, mount critiques, or generate theories. It often involves synthesis, evaluation, interpretation, categorization, hypothesizing, comparison and pattern finding... Researchers always engage their own intellectual capacities to make sense of qualitative data. (p. 148)

**Organizing and connecting the data.** Induction is the method of inquiry primarily associated with qualitative research. Inductive reasoning begins with small pieces, which are moved around until they begin to shape a composite story, theory, or description (Mayan, 2009).

According to W. L. Miller and Crabtree (1999a), organizing is the first phase of the actual analysis process, and it refers to how the researcher enters and arranges the
data so that it answers the research question. As this is a basic interpretive study, I borrowed data analysis techniques from various approaches in order to create one that best suits my purpose. The basic steps in the process included: (a) identifying categories through a review of the literature; (b) immersing myself in the sources of data; (c) coding and categorizing the source materials, thus turning them into data; and (d) forming themes that address the research question for this study.

To conduct this research about special education administrators’ experience of their spirituality within their work lives, I used a process to examine the data repeatedly in order to find the commonalities. Thus, inductive reasoning was the underlying mode of analysis.

**Categories.** Because I had some ideas about what kinds of data would emerge from the participants (based on my pilot study and review of the experimental and theoretical literature), I began with some categories, or typologies (Hatch, 2002). W. L. Miller and Crabtree (1999) referred to this as the template organizing style, with the template being “derived from theory, research tradition, preexisting knowledge, and/or a summary reading of the text” (p. 21). Maxwell (2005) noted that organizational categories are broad and can often be established prior to interviews or observations. The use of initial categories gave me a place to start with coding and, I believe, helped keep the number of initial categories from becoming too many to manage, a pitfall described by Sipe and Ghiso (2004). Additionally, because we are inexorably influenced by our prior knowledge, this was a way to use my background productively (Erickson, 2004; Sipe & Ghiso, 2004).
Specifically, initial categories were derived from the conceptual framework described in Chapter 2. The pre-identified categories, thus, were (a) felt connections within self, between self and others, and with the transcendent; (b) placement on the ego development stage continuum (self-aware, conscientious, individualistic, autonomous, construct-aware, uniative); (c) purpose, sense-making, and coherence of career behavior; (d) level of personal consciousness (transformation, cohesion, inclusion, unity); and (e) qualities of the five exemplary practices of leadership (model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, encourage the heart).

Additionally, as anticipated and welcomed, many categories emerged during the coding process. Following Maxwell’s (2005) guidance, I created substantive categories as well as theoretical categories.

Substantive categories are primarily descriptive, in a broad sense that includes description of participants’ concepts and beliefs; they stay close to the data categorized, and don’t inherently imply a more abstract theory . . . Substantive categories are often inductively developed through a close ‘open coding’ of the data. (Maxwell, 2005, p. 97)

Theoretical categories, according to Maxwell (2005), place the coded data into more general or abstract researcher-developed categories.

In order to expect to have significant findings at the completion of a study, the researcher must systematically develop and apply substantive and theoretical categories (Maxwell, 2005). These structures will not only help keep track of high volumes of data, but also will assist with finding a way to account for unique data and make it less likely
data will be overlooked (as could happen if only organizational or pre-determined categories were utilized; Maxwell, 2005).

Initially, I felt insecure about suggesting the use of different organizing methods, and felt I needed to make a choice. At the same time, it seemed the blended strategy would work well in this application. I felt better after I found support for my decision to combine the two in W. L. Miller and Crabtree’s (1999a) acknowledgment that “it is important to remember that multiple styles can be used during the course of the research” (p. 24). They emphasized the iterative, recursive nature of the data gathering and analysis process, and indicated the use of various tools may be needed to gain the most useful new understanding.

**Immersion in the data.** According to Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (2011), the initial step in qualitative analysis is reading the interview transcripts, observational notes, or documents that are to be analyzed. Maxwell (2005) advised, “reading and thinking about your interview transcripts and observation notes, writing memos, developing coding strategies and applying these to your data, and analyzing narrative structure and contextual relationships are all important types of data analysis” (p. 96). He wrote, “During this reading or listening, you should write notes and memos on what you see or hear in your data, and develop tentative ideas about categories and relationships” (p. 96). This idea was echoed by Thorne, Kirkham, and MacDonald-Emes’ (1997) recommendation that the researcher “engage in repeated immersion in the data prior to beginning coding, classifying or creating linkages” (p. 175).
With the preliminary understandings about the participants’ experiences beginning to form, the next phase of the analysis was immersion in the data. It took the form of listening, and reading, with coding and thinking to follow in detail.

In order to imbibe the data sources, I made sure I had repeated exposure to each source prior to doing any coding. Naturally, I was present during the interviews as they were being conducted. Within a week or so of conducting the interview, I would listen to the recording of the interview.

**Listening.** For the first four interviews, I listened to the interview while doing other things (driving, walking), and for the last four initial interviews and all of the second round interviews, I listened while proofreading the transcripts. I found this to be very effective and found that I felt connected to the participants by listening to the interviews with earbuds in, rather than using the speakerphone feature.

**Reading.** The next contact I had with the data was to read each first-round interview transcript, underlining interesting phrases, and making notes in the margins. During this period, which ran from November 10, 2013, to December 13, 2013, I also began writing memos about some of my initial thoughts about the data.

Participant journal entries were sent to me starting on November 19, 2013, and continuing through December 15, 2013, so there was an overlap in the earlier journals and the later first round interviews. I read the journals, underlining key phrases and making notes about follow-up questions I wanted to ask in the second interview.
I implemented the same routine for the second round interview transcripts as I had with the first. The period during which I read and began to absorb these documents ran from December 26, 2013, to January 3, 2013.

**Coding and categorizing.** Ryan and Bernard (2000) wrote, “Coding is the heart and soul of whole-text analysis. Coding forces the researcher to make judgments about the meanings of contiguous blocks of text” (p. 780). Maxwell (2005) described coding as the main categorizing strategy in qualitative research. Rubin and Rubin (2005) discussed a recognition stage in the analysis process, where the researcher finds concepts, themes, events and topical markers in the data sources. These elements need to be coded with labels.

Especially in terms of data analysis, structures were appropriated from several different sources to create a process unique to this particular study. In the early planning stages, I thought I would borrow from the grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Charmaz, 2006). I was attracted to Charmaz’s (2006) constructivist grounded theory, with its assumptions of the relativism of multiple social realities, recognition of mutual creation of knowledge by the viewer and the viewed, and aim toward interpretive understanding of participants’ meanings, rather than other, more objectivist forms of grounded theory. However, when it came time to actually engage in data analysis, it did not feel right.

Subsequent thoughts—and conversations with my dissertation director—surfaced the idea of the constant comparison method. Thus, I explored this method and learned that constant comparison is described as a postpositivist, grounded theory strategy in
which the researcher “engages in a give and take between inductive and deductive thinking . . . and requires incessant immersion and microscopic familiarity with the data” (Hatch 2002, p. 26).

Hatch (2002) wrote, “Constant comparison starts when the first hypothetical categories are identified and continues throughout the analysis (that’s what makes it constant)” (p. 171). Primary features of constant comparison are (a) it guides the user to identify negative cases, or those that do not fit the hypothetical categories; and (b) is to take place constantly (Hatch, 2002).

As a beginning researcher, I appreciated Hatch’s candor when he wrote, “I prefer to be more precise (and honest) in characterizing my own search for negative examples by framing it as the application of the principles of ‘analytic induction.’” (p. 171).

Glaser and Strauss’ (1967/2008) constant comparison method also described reaching what they labeled “saturation,” a point at which “no additional data are being found whereby the sociologist can develop the properties of the category” (p. 61). Their constant comparison method is the archetype for looking for “negative cases, cases which do not confirm the current formulation” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967/2008, p. 104). Again, Hatch (2002) conveyed a practical view when he opined,

You will rarely reach a place you might characterize as data saturation, but if your analysis indicates that the elements in your domains are repeated over and over again, that is good evidence that the relationships expressed are ‘really’ in the data. (p. 170)
He also acknowledged, however, that there are also relationships that will not appear frequently in the data, but are, nonetheless, powerful (Hatch, 2002). Though my domains or categories were not as stringently set as they would be in a grounded theory study, I am still interested in discrepant cases and nonconfirming data as a lever to lend credibility to the findings. When this type of data arose, I included it, especially when it was very different or weighty in nature.

Although I saw why my proposed analysis plan could be perceived as having roots in the constant comparison method, the more I learned about it, the less it meshed with the ontology and epistemology at the foundation of this study. Further, the methods associated with postpositivist research are not present in my study in any form (i.e., rigorously defined qualitative methods, frequency counts and low level statistics [Hatch, 2002]). Thus, I felt it was appropriate to custom design an analysis plan for a strong match.

Even though I designed a novel analysis routine, I also wanted to anchor my process to recommendations from respected authors in the field of qualitative research. In addition to Maxwell’s (2005) ideas about substantive and theoretical categories discussed in Chapter 3, I found support for my method from three sources: latent content analysis (Mayan, 2009), responsive interview coding (Rubin & Rubin, 2005), and interpretive analysis (Hatch, 2002).

*Latent content analysis.* Mayan (2009) admonished that many novice researchers commonly report using a particular analytical technique while actually conducting a
content analysis. She also stated that the most fitting analytic technique for a descriptive qualitative study is content analysis.

Although Mayan (2009) described several types of content analysis, one, in particular, struck me as most appropriate for my application:

Latent content analysis is the process of identifying, coding, and categorizing the primary patterns in the data. The researcher examines the meanings of specific passages or paragraphs within the data and determines appropriate categories . . . Latent coding is important to the qualitative researcher because it allows coding of participants’ intent within context. (p. 94)

Specifically, Mayan (2009) laid out a system of reading the data, re-reading and highlighting the data and making margin notes regarding anything striking. At that point, data could be coded, categorized, and summarized to see if everything in the category fit. By considering the intent of the participants when coding data, there is an opportunity for real meaning-making (Mayan, 2009; Seidel, 1998).

*Responsive interview coding.* According to Rubin and Rubin (2005):

The objective of [responsive interviewing coding] is to discover variation, portray shades of meaning and examine complexity. Analysis involves systematic coding and extracting of information from the transcripts rather than looking for confirmation of your initial ideas. (p. 202)

This appeared to address the concerns I had that reliance on pre-determined categories, drawn from the conceptual framework, would create flat results. I appreciated
how the authors bridged the gap between grounded theory open coding and responsive interview coding at the heart of my struggle:

You can use an open coding framework without all the assumptions of grounded theory, coding as you go, rather than preparing a list, refining the concepts, and then marking them in the text. In this hybrid model, partway between the responsive interviewing formal coding schema and grounded theory models, you need not code every passage or term, but select only those concepts and themes that are most-closely related to your research question. (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 223)

The stages in the responsive interviewing model include (a) recognizing the concepts, themes, events and topical markers (names of people, places, artifacts, etc.) that need to be coded; (b) clarifying what is meant by the participants by systematically examining the transcripts; (c) coding transcripts with labels, actually marking them in the text; and (d) sorting the data by grouping them into a single computer file.

*Interpretive analysis.* Hatch (2002) communicated:

Interpretation is about giving meaning to data. It’s about making sense of social situations by generating explanations for what’s going on within them. It’s about making inferences, developing insights, attaching significance refining understandings, drawing conclusions and extrapolating lessons. (p. 180)

He also acknowledged that to some, the idea of formalizing strategies to get at the artistic, creative side of qualitative research seems counterintuitive. At the same time, he suggested the need for a framework for interpretive analysis to give inexperienced
researchers a chance to learn how to construct meaning from data. He also encouraged these novice researchers to “apply the process directly, modify them to suit different preferences or adjust them to suit individual studies” (Hatch, 2002, p. 180).

The steps Hatch (2002) provided as interpretive analysis include:

(a) read the data for a sense of the whole, (b) review impressions previously recorded in research journals and/or bracketed in protocols and record these in memos, (c) read the data, identify impressions, and record impressions in memos, (d) study memos for salient impressions, (e) reread data, coding places where interpretations are supported or challenged, (f) write a draft summary, (g) review interpretations with participants, and (h) write a revised summary and identify excerpts that support interpretations. (p. 181)

With the wisdom gained from close reading of the ideas of Hatch (2002), Rubin and Rubin (2005), and Mayan (2009), I continued my work with analyzing the sources of data I had collected. Ironically, as I moved further away from the principles of grounded theory, I felt more grounded in my methods.

Coding written narratives. In looking at the data, I also thought about the tenets of narrative research, in that pragmatic analysis of narrative allows a researcher to find common themes in the stories told by participants (Polkinghorne, 1995). According to Ollershaw and Creswell (2002), holistic-content is a narrative approach for understanding the meaning of individuals’ stories. Restorying is the process of gathering stories, analyzing them for key elements and them rewriting the story to place it within a logical sequence, the purpose being to provide a causal link among ideas (Ollershaw &
Creswell, 2002). Schram (2006) stated that the aim of narrative inquiry is to understand how people structure the flow of experience to make sense of events and actions in their lives.

Borrowing from the narrative inquiry stance, I analyzed the written personal narratives using the first step of the problem-solution approach (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). Each participant provided his or her written narrative to me as requested, prior to the first round interview. I read each of the narratives and color coded them with different highlighters as described, denoting character, setting, problem/goal, actions, resolution, thinking/intentions, and references to time.

I departed from the process annotated in Ollerenshaw and Creswell (2002) in that I did not try to make them into a story as would be the direction in a full use of narrative inquiry. Instead, I simply used the essays to get to know them as persons prior to interviewing them. Reflecting on the process, the color-coding seemed to keep me very focused on what I was reading, rather than being tempted to skim the narratives. In some cases, it also helped me recognize connections among participants. I think this modified, pared-down approach to the narratives is probably what I meant to do in the first place, but perhaps I succumbed to the trap that everything had to be analyzed with equal levels of scrutiny when I wrote my initial plan.

**Coding interviews and journals.** I began my coding process by denoting each coded comment as pertaining to one or more of my research questions. I used the letters A, B, and C to signify the first, second, or third supporting research question. Again, those questions were: (a) How is the spirituality of special education administrators
related to the meaning they make of their work, including their career choices; (b) How does special education administrators’ spirituality enable them, as leaders, to serve and support others; and (c) How do special education administrators access their spirituality as a resource to help them cope with the demands of work and continue to nurture their own development?

Next, I developed a code list from the five theories that comprise my conceptual framework, with 25 numbered codes, one each for the key elements or stages in the authors’ works. This portion of the process was the closest to the grounded theory approach to coding in my analysis. Reflecting on this facet of the analysis, I found it very difficult to code Cook-Greuter’s (2000) work and somewhat difficult to code Barrett’s (2010) ideas, as well.

Conversely, it was very easy to code Sinnott’s (2005) Theory of Felt Connection (likely due to its parallels with my research questions), and it was also common to find data to code for the elements of Lips-Wiersma and Morris (2011) and Kouzes and Posner (2002).

During the time period when I was coding, I posted summaries of the theories on the wall of my office for frequent review. I also made additional notes on the paper that exhibited my code list, clarifying what the codes meant as I worked.

As I read the data, I also developed and numbered 83 additional, novel codes—known as latent codes—as I analyzed the interview transcripts. Again, as I worked my way through the interviews, I sometimes made clarifying notes next to the label for the code on the paper list I created as I worked. I later used both the conceptual
framework-based and latent codes to interpret the journal entries, as well. Next to each relevant line of text (usually already underlined based on my prior readings), I wrote one or more letters (but usually just one) and one or more numbered codes (very frequently more than one).

Even before all of the data sources were coded, I began to consider how the codes could be combined, as well as how they related to one another and might be able to be combined into categories. When I had ideas that formed themselves into words, I wrote them down. When I had a few ideas on the paper, I made them into a blog entry to refer to later.

When all of the data were coded, I used small stickers in several different colors and placed them on my two code lists next to the codes. I used different colored stickers to show which ideas seemed to be related.

I considered each of the 108 codes for placement in a category. In the end, I was not able to categorize the elements of Barrett’s (2010) or Cook-Greuter’s (2000) theories. Since any piece of data that was coded to those elements was also coded to latent codes, I did not take any further action with those codes.

As I placed the stickers, I started to think about what to call the emerging categories, and I wrote them on a separate sheet of paper. I also made notes there about how I thought the category was defined, thus engaging in rudimentary memoing. I reminded myself to be sure my data analysis was headed toward answering my research questions, keeping me on track about the larger purpose of the detailed work.
The next step was typing a document that listed all of the codes within the categories. This helped me to see how they related and if any of them needed to be moved. I moved several codes and created new categories until I was satisfied that they were consistent, inclusive, and meaningful. This took many tries and iterations of the list over a period of many weeks.

After the data were coded, I created an Excel spreadsheet and entered all coded data into the file. I used columns for participant name, page number, research question, code and narrative (participant quotation from the interview or journal). If a piece of data had multiple codes, it received multiple lines on the spreadsheet.

I was then able to sort all of the data (over 1,500 lines) and more-easily see how items related. I sorted data by participant, code and, most usefully, research question. I printed these sorted spreadsheets on 11 x 17 paper for easier viewing.

*Deductive versus inductive analysis.* As I completed the process of coding interviews and journals and began to look across the data for categories, I found that the conceptual framework codes were not useful. At first this was confusing, but I realized I seemed to be engaging in a process that Mayan (2009) characterized as an error in qualitative analysis.

In summary, I was using the components of the conceptual framework to analyze the data, deductively looking for examples of that theory in the data. As I cogitated about this, I resonated to Mayan’s (2009) thoughts that this coding strategy “squashes any opportunity for new idea or notions of the phenomenon to be seen and the researcher reproduces the ordinary” (p. 93).
Rubin and Rubin (2005) provided additional support for this line of thinking with their advice not to be limited by what is already known. They emphasized that new research is doing more than simply testing the theories already posited, but, instead, to use it as a starting point (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

At this juncture, I had an “a-ha moment” about the role of the conceptual framework in the study. Part of me had believed I was looking for evidence to bolster those theories. Now, I understood that the purpose of the conceptual framework was to inform my analysis, but not to provide the skeleton for it. Thus, I had come to a new level of assimilated understanding about my stance on the continuum between constant comparison and content/interpretive analysis. Since I had also coded virtually all of the data to a latent code in addition to the codes leading to the deductive process, I simply proceeded in my analysis, relying on the codes I had developed and allowing the others to serve as background knowledge.

Stated eloquently in the words of Wolcott (as cited in Schram, 2006, p. iv), “the real work of qualitative research lies in mindwork, not fieldwork.” I found this to be true as I engaged in the process. Furthermore, the process was supported externally through memos and diagrams.

**Memos and diagrams.** According to Charmaz (2000), memo writing is the intermediate step between coding and the first draft of the completed analysis. She advocated bringing raw data into the memos in order to make precise comparisons, with the overarching purpose being to “elaborate processes, assumptions and actions presumed under our codes” (Charmaz, 2000, p. 517). Critical to the analytic process, memos help
researchers to “a) grapple with ideas about the data, b) set an analytic course, c) to refine the categories, d) to define the relationships among various categories, and e) to gain a sense of confidence and competence in their ability to analyze data” (Charmaz, 2000, p. 517-518).

Diagrams are visual devices that depict relationships between analytic concepts (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). They are not simply repositories of thought, but, like memo-writing, the creation of diagrams is an opportunity for thought about the concepts, not just the raw data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

I found tremendous value, as recommended by Corbin and Strauss (2008), in writing memos from the beginning to the end of the analytic process. As with asking probing questions in the semi-structured interviews, memo-writing is a skill that can only be learned by doing, and I wrote memos diligently throughout the analysis stage in order to take my thinking to a deeper level. It was the memos and diagrams, themselves, which helped me cut the path to the knowledge constructed by engaging in this study.

*General comments about data analysis.* After coding and categorizing the data, I reviewed the work to ensure everything in the categories ‘fit.’ Although I did not go to the lengths outlined by Mayan (2009)—writing brief summaries for each category and subcategory—I did repeatedly review them for internal (Does everything listed reflect the category?) and external (Are all categories distinct and separate?) homogeneity.

Throughout the study, I was also on the lookout for unusual responses, often referred to as extreme cases. Maxwell (2005) described the importance of pursuing extreme cases, or cases that may be critical about the research questions posed. Rubin
and Rubin (2005) also discussed seeking alternative views, and Creswell (2007) suggested use of disconfirming cases. Mayan (2009) referred to this strategy as selecting negative case examples and Kuzel (1999) wrote that including disconfirming cases provides more convincing evidence of the credibility and allows one to answer the question, “When can I stop sampling?” I found that the data collected from the eight participants was sufficient, especially because there were numerous occasions when disconfirming data resulted in amending my initial conclusion.

Mayan (2009) identified two common analysis errors made in qualitative research: (a) waiting until after data collection is complete in order to begin analyzing data and (b) using a particular, limited theory or conceptual framework to analyze the data. So as to avoid these pitfalls, I began the data analysis prior to the completion of data collection, which, in turn, informed the data collection process. Additionally, although I did use some categories found in the literature, many more were created as a result of reading the data, thus addressing Mayan’s second point.

Another caution, according to Niesz (2012), is that researchers must also resist the tendency to let the data speak for themselves. She advised the researcher to bring discursive, interpretive, analytic commentary to the concrete examples in the data in order to create persuasive interpretations. I attempted to address the findings of the study this way, and the discussion is provided in Chapter 5.

**Forming themes.** Only after a thorough treatment of coding and categorizing did I move on to forming themes. According to Mayan (2009), “Themes are thoughts or processes that weave throughout and tie the categories together” (p. 97). The goal was to
answer the research question by developing descriptive themes that offer explanations of what I had heard in the interviews and read in the participants’ journals and narratives (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

In order to excavate to a deeper level of meaning in the data, I knew I needed to look not only within categories, but also across them. Rubin and Rubin (2005) wrote, “Most qualitative interviewers work on creating middle-level theory that builds on what is learned from the interviewing and then speaks to the issues present in the literature” (p. 231). This goal seemed reasonable, was aligned to my research paradigm, and rang true for me.

In deciding how I would go about culminating this study, I was also influenced by the latter stages of Hatch’s (2002) inductive analysis model. The steps include (a) completing analysis within domains, (b) searching for themes across domains, (c) creating a master outline expressing relationships within and among domains, and (d) selecting data to support the elements of your outline (p. 162).

Given the format my data had taken in the spreadsheets, I found myself taking a step in the direction of what Hatch’s (2002) inductive analysis. He reminded me that grounded theory is the most widely known inductive approach; however, he persuaded that his inductive model is “adaptable to other qualitative research approaches across multiple paradigms, while grounded theory . . . is less flexible and fit[s] most comfortably within postpositivist assumptions” (p. 162).

Hatch (2002) emphasized, however, the “strength of inductive analysis is its power to get meaning from complex data that have been gathered with a broad focus in
mind” (p. 179). He also observed that some studies that emphasize interpretation (such as those relying heavily on interview data with narrowly defined questions) may be a better fit with the interpretive analysis model (Hatch, 2002). Again, these statements call to the fore the exact place where my study is situated in terms of theoretical position and method, and made me learn to be comfortable straddling a line and developing my own stance, even as I vacillated. I believe my perspective was well-stated by Rubin and Rubin (2005):

> The goal of analysis is to understand core concepts and to discover themes that describe the world you have examined. Your analysis is done when you can put together a theory that answers your research question and that would be accepted by your interviewees as an accurate description of their world and thoughts. (p. 245)

**Conceptualizing the whole.** When I delved into the process of searching for themes that spanned domains, I looked for similarities and differences, as recommended by Hatch (2002) and Rubin and Rubin (2005). I also sought to find out how the pieces were related to the whole by constructing “a meaningful whole that fairly represents all the parts of your analysis so far” (Hatch, 2002, p. 174).

W. L. Miller and Crabtree (1999a) offered that maps and diagrams, as well as data matrices, can be helpful in making connections, and Miles and Huberman (1994) described the use of data displays. Thinking about the value I found in the exercise of creating a diagram for my conceptual framework, I created a visual representation of my data (which eventually became Figure 3) while recursively gathering and scrutinizing it
as an added step in the analysis process. Accordingly, I have created a visual diagram summarizing the process I use for data analysis (Figure 2). I experimented with different ways of integrating the parts, including the use of artwork, creating a graphic, and using an outline.

![Diagram of analysis procedures]

**Figure 2.** Summary of analysis procedures

**Artwork.** Initially, I experimented with finding a painting that could symbolically capture my findings, using Google Images to search for prominent characteristics. In the end I abandoned the idea of finding someone else’s work as a representation of the study’s findings, and determined that producing my own graphic would be more accurate and informative for the reader. Nevertheless, I feel the act of looking at my data and
thinking about how it could fit into a piece of art was time well spent, as it was a fresh perspective that made me think creatively.

*Graphic.* In terms of a graphic, I thought about the categories generated from the data and how they fit together and related to one another. I sketched with a pencil, filling in words, and often erasing. I would write it down and think about it and then make revisions. After working within the confines of someone else’s artwork, I enjoyed the freedom this process offered. The graphic provided a good summary of the work, and an outline seemed like the perfect companion to synthesize my thoughts at this stage of the process.

*Master outline with supporting data.* Hatch (2002) shared that “many qualitative studies end at the point of describing what was in the data, resulting in reports that are thin on depth or insight, staying mostly on the surface of the phenomena being studied” (p. 171). In order to achieve richness and complexity, he described the use of an outline structure to assist the researcher in looking both within the domains (or categories) and across domains, looking for connections (Hatch, 2002). Questions I kept in mind during this phase of the project include: What does all this mean? How does all this fit together? How are the pieces related to the whole?

Furthermore, Hatch (2002) vouched:

Even though it is sometimes traumatic for students to have to pull their analyses into some understandable final form, there is great relief associated with finally having a ‘product’ from so much labor and anxiety. A master outline does not mean analysis is complete, but it signals the researcher that something of meaning
has come from the mass of data, hours of mindwork, and tons of energy associated with qualitative projects. It organizes the work to this point and provides tangible evidence that all of the effort actually leads somewhere. (pp. 177-178)

I persevered to make the most of the data I had gathered and the thinking I had done about it, rather than fall short of the goal of connecting what I’d learned to uncover deeper meaning. The hard work associated with creating an initial synthesis of the findings had a purpose, in that I needed to prepare to share them with the participants of the study.

Thinking ahead to the next, more interpretive, activity of this analysis, I utilized Microsoft PowerPoint to create a presentation that addressed each of the research questions. The applicable categories with supporting details in the form of abbreviated quotations formed the 71 slides of the file (Appendix H).

**Member checking.** As the final picture of the data was coming together, I wanted to ask the participants, “Am I representing accurately what you’ve told me?” Furthermore, this technique can strongly enrich the interpretation of qualitative data (C. Hackney, personal conversation, Dec. 4, 2012).

Thinking, again, about my stance, I noted an observation Hatch (2002) made about interpretive analysis:

Constructivists are interested in the co-construction of meaning in partnership with their participants. While it is presumed that constructivist researchers will have provided many opportunities for collaboration throughout the research
process, inviting participants to give feedback on interpretations is vital step in co-construction. (p. 188)

Without question, I knew I needed to obtain participant feedback on the findings that were taking shape as part of establishing credibility for this study. In order to do so, I offered two different conduits either as part of a group member check discussion or by receiving the PowerPoint via email and sharing comments via return email or phone call.

**Group member check.** Originally, I referred to this meeting as a focus group. A closer review of the literature suggested that a focus group is a specific method of data collection where the interaction among the members is the primary goal, and there would be a unique set of moderated questions to generate that data (Kitzinger, 1994).

Examining my rationale for getting members together, the interaction was not so much a way to generate data, but served two other purposes: (a) to authenticate the accuracy and completeness of my findings and (b) to ask if participants had any additional ideas to surface after reviewing the preliminary findings—including any emergent themes. These purposes for member checking are supported in the literature by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Creswell (2007). Thus, I came to think of this event as a group member check, rather than a focus group.

From the beginning of the study, I shared with participants that there would be an opportunity for a group meeting near the end of the study for this purpose. When it came time to actually schedule the meeting, I used the Meeting Wizard application to offer several dates and times and narrow it down to the one that would allow the greatest number of members to participate. In the end, three participants attended the two-hour
meeting on March 18, 2014. The discussion was recorded and later transcribed by Verbal Ink.

At the meeting, I provided a meal and shared three items in paper form: (a) the demographic table, (b) the graphic depicting the theme of the study, and (c) the PowerPoint outlining the findings (see Appendix H). Since there were three participants (Ava, Nora, and Stacie) and there are three research questions, I asked each one to review just one question by reading silently and making notes. Then, each one “presented” what she read and we discussed it, referring to the outlines when more detail was needed. This allowed us to move through the material efficiently and I believe it gave the participants a sense of ownership of the data. Within the discussion, I was also able to ask for additional information on two areas I had identified through my prior analysis of the data.

*Email member check.* Given the busy schedules of special education administrators, I had expected only a small number to be able to convene for the group member check. I sought feedback from the other participants by emailing them a slightly modified version of the PowerPoint slides and welcoming their comments.

I received replies from three additional participants (Heidi, Mark, and Wendy). No concerns were shared, and participants’ comments verified the contents of the outline (e.g., “I loved reading how the participants responded, and it is amazing how similar we are.”).

Interestingly, Harper and Cole (2012) suggested participants who take part in a member checking group may receive benefits similar to those experienced in group therapy, “especially in normalizing the phenomenon being experienced. Even if they
never meet, they can feel a sense of relief that their feelings are validated and that they are not alone” (p. 510).

**Revisions.** I listened to the recording and read the transcription of the group member check. Outcomes were that virtually all of my proposed findings were affirmed by the participants. Expansion on some ideas was also provided, and one major clarification related to the visual representation came about.

As recommended by Hatch (2002), revisions to the interpretations, where necessary, were made as a result of the group member check. As a direct result of the input provided through the member checking process, I made a significant refinement to the themes (and the graphic depicting them) I had initially suggested to the participants. The discussion brought out nuances in several of the sub-themes and gave more weight to sub-themes, which I integrated into the analysis process. Careful reading and coding of the transcript from the group session provided several rich quotations and even inspired the title of this dissertation.

At that point, I commenced writing about my findings and conclusions. During this stage, I wrote with the confidence gained through painstaking engagement with the data, yet also bore in mind Mayan’s (2009) assertion that “writing with some tentativeness and impermanence removes some of the issues of representation as you leave room for the group to change or refute your account” (p. 135).

**Corroborating and legitimating the data.** In qualitative research, verifying data has a different connotation than in the quantitative genre. W. L. Miller and Crabtree (1999a) indicated the act of corroborating or legitimizing the data is better understood as
finding similarities in the perspectives voiced in the texts, striving for internal consistency of interpretation, and exploring the interpretations to the empirical world as experienced by all participants.

Rigor and trustworthiness are other terms used in conjunction with this concept. Researchers strive to design a study (a) that is of interest to themselves, (b) that has foundations in the extant literature, and (c) that addresses a question others would like to better understand. Yet, in order for the study to be worthwhile, it also needs to be trustworthy. “The basic issue in relation to trustworthiness is simple: How can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences (including self) that the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to, worth taking account of?” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290).

Schwandt (2000) stated that interpreters must employ some kind of method that allows them to step outside their historical frames of reference, so as not to misinterpret the original meaning.

In quantitative or positivist research, the constructs of reliability, generalizability, and validity are used. For this constructivist, qualitative study, I chose, instead, to use the terms credibility, transferability, and dependability/confirmability (Mayan, 2009). The topics covered in the sections to follow have been referred to in preceding areas of this chapter. They are addressed here to provide additional clarification.

**Credibility.** According to Mayan (2009), credibility assesses whether the findings make sense and if they are accurate representations of the data. This sentiment was echoed by Maxwell (2005) in his statement that if a researcher is only using one specific
method for data collection, he or she is subject to the limitations and biases of that method.

**Triangulation.** In order to increase the credibility of my study, I utilized multiple data sources through the process of triangulation. As described earlier, I requested a written personal narrative, conducted two rounds of semi-structured interview, and reviewed a minimum of three journal entries for each participant. By finding continuity among the different lenses, my findings, hopefully, will be seen as more robust.

**Member checking.** In addition to triangulation, I engaged in member checking. Member checking is the act of sharing interpretations and findings with the participants or co-creators (Hatch, 2002). Merriam (2002) described member checks as “tak[ing] your tentative findings back to some of the participants (from whom you derived the raw data through interviews or observations) and ask[ing] whether your interpretation ‘rings true’” (p. 26). Candib, Stange, and Levinson (1999) provided support for this practice when they stated, “Researchers must be willing to join with study participants to understand the phenomena under study from alternate perspectives” (p. 353).

I used several levels of member checking in this study, in deference to the importance W. L. Miller and Crabtree (1999c) gave the process of seeking critical feedback. They opined, “The solo analyst is a great danger to self and others” (p. 142).

The first two instances of member checking occurred with individual participants during the first and second round interviews. I asked them what they saw when they read their own narrative (first interview) and journals (second interview). By hearing from the source what was meant, the likelihood of accuracy is enhanced. Additionally, a critical
group member checking meeting at which I presented themes and received feedback that guided the process of finalizing the interpretation of the study.

**Prolonged engagement.** A third strategy to increase credibility was prolonged engagement at the site. While the face-to-face time for this study was limited to one interview, I lengthened the contact time to approximately five weeks through participant journaling and a second round interview. Maxwell (2005) suggested that repeated interviews can help rule out premature theories. Through this extended, recursive method of gathering data, it is more likely that the participants will have opportunities to fully express their experiences related to the research questions.

When categorizing data, it can seem problematic when pieces appear to be outliers. These elements are negative or discrepant cases, and a key feature of credibility is to rigorously examine this data to determine whether the categories need to be modified to include it (Maxwell, 2005). Researchers must be wary of discounting data that simply does not seem to fit, as it undermines the claim that the phenomenon has been fully analyzed and explained by the conclusions drawn. In my analysis, I expanded and molded my categories to encompass all of the data and convey the fullness of the participants’ responses.

**Transferability.** Transferability assesses the applicability of the findings to other settings (Mayan, 2009). While it is not in keeping with qualitative interpretive research to be concerned with replicability, it is important for the researcher to provide the description necessary for others to be able to judge if it is transferable (Berger-Drotar, 2011). Geertz’s (1973) idea of “thick description” (p. 6) has become the standard in this
area, and in Chapter 4 I included textured accounts with longer quotes lifted directly from transcripts, narratives, and journals, rather than from memory or jottings, in order to provide evidence that participants made statements that support my claims. When paired with the analysis I provided, it is hoped readers will see the findings I posit as plausible, and potentially even useful for understanding a similar population, topic or scenario (Mayan, 2009).

**Dependability/confirmability.** Mayan (2009) described confirmability as an evolution of Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) term reflexivity, and indicated it is used during the data collection and analysis phase as a way to ensure the findings are logical. Dependability is the ability, after the fact, to review how decisions were made during the research process (Mayan, 2009). The audit trail for the study addresses systems used to gain awareness of my own position vis a vis the research questions.

**Personal narrative.** No discussion of reflexivity would be complete without some statements about the researcher’s position related to the research and how she plans to be aware of the connect as the study unfolds. W. L. Miller and Crabtree (1999b) wrote that a researcher must be willing to bring out preconceptions (or biases) by exposing their inner thoughts and emotions to themselves, by inventoring past incidents, associations and assumptions related to the research area. Evocatively, they shared:

The self-exploration helps tune the research instrument, the interviewer, for playing his or her part in the interview act, for being a better listener, for heightening intuition, and for knowing how to use self-disclosure wisely. It also
prepares a reservoir of empathy when the respondent shares similar thoughts and emotions. (p. 95)

In the introduction, I shared a personal narrative about my spirituality and my experience of it in my own career path. By way of describing who I am and how my personal beliefs relate to the study, I attempted to provide the reader with the sense of my interest in the topic, as well as a perspective on my trustworthiness as an investigator. Because I have a strong relationship with the topic of this research, it was important for me to watchful for personal bias influencing all aspects of this study. That said, it is likely some of my potential bias about this project has been mitigated by my withdrawal from the field of special education administration in July 2013.

Bracketing. Bracketing is a construct of the phenomenological genre, and refers to researchers “explor[ing] their own experiences, in part to examine dimensions of the experience and in part to become aware of their own prejudices, viewpoints and assumptions” (Merriam, 2002, p. 94). Given my recent former employment as a special education administrator, I felt strongly that I needed to engage in bracketing activities in order to surface potential bias.

Hence, I not only created my own written narrative (shared as the introduction to this paper), but also was interviewed by a peer, using the same first round interview questions as I planned to ask the study’s participants. I listened to the interview recording and read the transcript prior to interviewing anyone myself with the intention of being better able to suspend my judgments and preconceptions—known as epoché (Schram, 2006).
As a direct result of the bracketing interview, I was conscious of my tendency to conclude that participants were describing connections, even when they may not have said so. It also alerted me to the fact that my spiritual notions are both similar and, in some ways, quite different from those of many of the study’s participants.

*Researcher reflections.* Two strategies were used in order to give space for my own reflections about my decision-making during the study. As indicated, I utilized a blog-format researcher journal, and I wrote candidly about my reactions in that format. Additionally, near the end of Chapter 5, in the section on researcher reflection, I explored possible personal biases, my preconceived ideas and values, and the possible effect I may have had on participants.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have presented a descriptive qualitative study from the theoretical position of interpretive constructivism. Through the data collection process using personal narratives, semi-structured interviews, and journal entries, I worked with my co-researchers (i.e., the special education administrators who participated in the study) to answer the research question about how they experience spirituality in their work.

I endeavored, in this section, to externalize the thoughts and processes I used to derive meaning from and with the studies’ participants in order to allow the reader to determine the merit of the study. In terms of data analysis, I did not rely on any one, established method, but, instead, created a customized method (drawing from the responsive interview coding, latent content analysis, and interpretive analysis procedures
for support) specifically geared toward teasing out the information I sought with this study.

The data analysis plan was implemented through recursively working with the data, first coding it, then categorizing it, then finding themes that exposed deeper meaning. By providing details about the data collection process used for this research, I have illustrated the strategies used to corroborate and legitimate the data in terms of credibility, transferability, and dependability/confirmability to that end.

By detailing the similarities and differences between my data analysis method and other strategies for inductive and interpretive research, it has strengthened my comprehension of exactly what I did to draw meaning from the data. Again, I strived to be forthcoming about my methods in order to engender confidence in the rigor and trustworthiness of the project. The next section contains the research findings for the comprehensive research question and the three sub-questions.
CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Conversation with the Lord transcends all time and space, and seems to be sustained even when I am not conscious of it or making any effort. It permeates me. I breathe it in my soul. And though I may still become anxious, if I stop and breathe and just listen, I know I can hear and even feel the voice of the Lord from within me. It brings me peace and reminds me of my blessings. It gently chides me for being too self-sufficient and offers me an opportunity to let the Lord’s will be done instead of mine. It nudges me to be thankful. Now, the key is for me to stop drowning out His voice with my own internal doubts and frustrations so I can enjoy his peace amidst the turmoil that seems to define my job as a director of pupil services. (Stacie, journal entry, 2013)

The longer quote from Stacie is highlighted to provide a preview of the thought-provoking ideas to be shared in this section. Before diving into the data, however, an introduction is appropriate.

Introduction

In the first three chapters of this paper, I provided a rationale for engaging in this research and established the specific research question and sub-questions to be addressed. Further, an extensive review of the relevant literature was conducted in order to provide context for the study. Finally, a detailed description of the methodology of the study was written to guide the entire data collection and analysis process.
To recap, the purpose of my study was to explore special education administrators’ experience of their spirituality in the context of their work life. Specifically, I wondered (a) how spirituality relates to the participants’ career choices/the meaning they make of their work; (b) how their spirituality enables them, as leaders, to serve and support others; and (c) how they access it to cope with the demands of the work.

It is my belief that now is the time for original research in this area based on the tenuous status of the American educational system (especially in regards to special education), as well as the well-documented contemporary interest in spirituality. Because I wanted to find out whether there are useful insights for the field of special education administration grounded in the realm of spirituality, I gathered data through written personal narratives, two rounds of semi-structured interview, and a set of journal entries authored by special education administrators who describe themselves as having a spiritual outlook in their personal and professional lives. I analyzed the data using a blend of recursive content analysis and interpretive analysis processes, eventually yielding categories and themes.

These themes provide an answer to the essential question of this study and represent an integration of the three supporting questions. For the sake of clarity, I organized this section thematically to answer the main research question. When it is useful to the description, the supporting questions are referenced.
Themes in Graphic Form

As depicted in Figure 3, eight themes comprise the experiences described by the participants in this study. At times, they are not completely distinct and they flow into one another. They include: (a) the Ultimate at the center, (b) students with disabilities as the focus of the work, (c) thought processes, (d) enacting core values, (e) fulfilling collaboration, (f) resilience to uncertainty and change, (g) work as part of an integrated life, and (h) appreciation of the grace of the Ultimate/reliance on the support of the Ultimate.

With the exception of the first two (the Ultimate and students with disabilities being the grounding factors), these themes also have a “shadow” or paradoxical side, as depicted by the jagged lines on the bottom half of the figure. The elements experienced as obstacles are: (a) feeling inadequate, (b) being required to implement policies/laws, (c) frustration due to skill and/or will deficits of parents and staff members, (d) feeling overwhelmed by omnipresent change and isolation, and (e) work dominating and pushing life out of balance. As indicated, the motifs are encapsulated by the influence of the Ultimate, and that layer of the figure does not have a shadow side. For the sake of clarity, the themes, subthemes and specific examples of the findings are also provided in Table 17.
Figure 3. Special education administrators’ experience of spirituality in their work
Table 17

*Special Education Administrators’ Experience of Spirituality in Their Work*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Sub-themes/Paradoxes (when applicable)</th>
<th>Specific Examples/Paradoxes (when applicable)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Path of service</td>
<td>First career</td>
<td>Optimism, keeping calm, feeling inadequate</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Move to administration</td>
<td>Filtering thoughts, things seem worse, sticking with values</td>
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<td>Divine intervention</td>
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<td>Preparation for leadership</td>
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<td>The future</td>
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<td>A higher power permeates</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students with disabilities at the center</td>
<td>Positive personal qualities</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Reflective metacognition</td>
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<td>Productive thought processes</td>
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<td>Enacting core values</td>
<td>Trust</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Repair mistakes</td>
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<td>Honesty</td>
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<td>Working within parameters</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Direct assistance to families</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Productive partnerships</td>
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<td>Fulfilling collaboration</td>
<td>Listen carefully</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Mentors</td>
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<td>Persistence</td>
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<td>The Golden Rule</td>
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<td>Skill deficits</td>
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<td>Will deficits</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Perceptions of others</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Secreted spirituality</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Resilience to uncertainty and change</td>
<td>Self-regulation strategies</td>
<td>Body-focused, being in nature, consuming adult beverages, slowing down, church-based, spiritual reading, prayer, music, meditation, little reminders, communication</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Letting go</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Continued learning</td>
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<td>Dealing with the unpredictable</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Doubt</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Feeling lonely and misunderstood</td>
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*(table continues)*
Table 17 (continued)

Special Education Administrators’ Experience of Spirituality in Their Work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Sub-themes/Paradoxes (when applicable)</th>
<th>Specific Examples/Paradoxes (when applicable)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work as part of an integrated life</td>
<td>Difficulty dropping work</td>
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<tr>
<td>Appreciating the grace of the Ultimate/Reliance on the support of the Ultimate</td>
<td>Work dominating life</td>
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<td>Work as part of a whole life</td>
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Presentation of Themes

Following my data analysis scheme, the themes are closely linked to the data to reveal meaning about the essential research question for the study: How do special education administrators experience spirituality in their work?

In order to further enhance the rigor of the study, specific quotes from the sources of data are included. It is important that the consumer of qualitative research be able to make a judgment about whether the findings are transferable to other settings. Thus, “thick description” (Geertz, 1973, p. 6) is provided via longer, direct participant quotes to buttress my analysis of the data. Other evidence of quality, such as credibility and dependability/confirmability, was addressed in detail in Chapter 3.

Each theme is presented below with a description of the pattern I discovered in the data, support for my discovery via direct quotes, and summaries of participants’ responses, as well as explanations of how the patterns were discovered, when applicable. All salient data are accounted for in the findings, and discrepant cases and non-confirming data are
also included.

Prior to delving into the themes of these leaders’ current experience, I dealt separately with their experiences of spirituality as they entered the field of education and as they later became administrators. In this study, I refer to this progression as their path of service.

**Path of Service**

Although most of the lines of inquiry in this study were open-ended, the element about career choice had a fairly clear-cut answer for each participant. The data around their path of service fit neatly into four areas: first career, the move into administration, preparation for leadership, and future plans.

**First career.** The table provided earlier (Table 16) showed the first careers of each of the participants as special education teachers, school psychologists, or speech/language pathologists. The reasons cited by participants for picking their initial careers included a desire to help or serve others and/or social reasons (e.g., joining in with friends).

**Move to administration.** As anticipated, the reasons for leaving their initial careers and switching to an administrative role were related. A main rationale given for seeking the change was to expand the reach of the help and service they were able to provide to others. For example, Wendy stated,

[Teaching special education] was like being a life coach, and then I realized how much I really liked working with families, and so that’s why I decided to become an administrator. It was a natural transition to the next step for me.
Barb said, “maybe I can have a bigger effect than what I had in one classroom in [one district], if I can do it right.”

Another reason why these administrators shifted into administration was for the opportunity to work with particular leaders. Barb said, “I was really interested in working with the superintendent in [that district], so I jumped.”

There was an interesting overlay on the transition from practitioner to administrator in that several participants made the change reluctantly and were convinced by others to do so. Nora remembered, “They approached me about becoming a coordinator and I said ‘no.’ When they came back and asked again [after seeing who might be my new boss], I said, ‘Yeah.’” Similarly, Mark said,

I knew I would eventually get into administration, I just didn’t think I would do it as young as I was at the time. They said, “Now you’re the program coordinator,” and I said, “but I don’t wanna be,” and they said, “But we can move you and it would be much better if you were cooperative.”

**Divine intervention.** Several participants believe they have been “called” to serve as special education administrators and that it is the work they are meant to be doing at the behest of a higher power. Heidi related a poignant story about how she was at a difficult place in her life when she saw a quote by Helen Keller, “When one door of happiness closes, another opens, but often we look so long at the closed door that we do not see the one that has opened for us.” Heidi was deeply affected when she read it, and she viewed the fact that she saw and read that quote at that particular moment in time as a
divine intervention that moved her toward her current career. She said, “I felt like the force of God was speaking to me and really allowing me to see myself.”

What was absent from the participants’ comments (as pointed out by Stacie during the member checking meeting) was a sense that they had made the choice to move into administration in order to earn a raise or prestige. She did indicate that she would feel less inclined to do the work if it weren’t well-paid, and this may suggest that compensation played some role in the choice but was not vocalized by other participants.

**Preparation for leadership.** Although leadership development is closely linked with personal development—and moving from a small, personal focus to a larger, unifying focus is the trajectory in adult identity development—none of the participants experienced a spiritual component in their university leadership preparation programs. Interestingly, Nora expressed that she felt her school psychology training had done more to prepare her than her actual education administration coursework.

Participants described taking classes toward a license (rather than just taking random compulsory continuing education hours), with the idea that they might someday work in administration. Stacie commented that although her doctoral program did not address spirituality directly, one of her professors was clearly spiritually-grounded, and he introduced some perspectives and materials that allowed students to expand their thinking in that direction to the degree they were willing and interested.

All eight of the participants said they would have welcomed personal spiritual exploration as part of their leadership preparation program, or at least have been neutral
toward it. Wendy shared, though, that it would have surprised her for it to have been addressed at the public university she attended.

For two of the participants, the leadership preparation period was an intense, crammed experience that they feel they could not have accomplished alone. Heidi said, “There was definitely some force pushing and guiding me to be able to do [the program] so quickly. I look back and think, ‘How did I do that?’”

**The future.** As the participants were asked to project into their professional future, the most noteworthy theme was that they want to remain within the field of special education. Wendy and Heidi, for example, both said special education is their calling and they couldn’t see themselves working in another area of education, including rising to the superintendency. In fact, none of the participants, in spite of already being cabinet-level administrators, aspires to become superintendent. Another common thread among participants (Mark, Barb, Stacie, Heidi, and Wendy) was the desire to teach special education or leadership classes at the university level.

**Thematic Findings**

Now that the path of service for special education administrators has been described, the stage is set for examining the themes present in their current experience. As stated in the overview, the Ultimate is the anchor at the center of these leaders’ experience. They also conveyed that the Ultimate is not bounded by any limits.

**A higher power permeates.** Woven through the personal narratives, interview responses, and journal entries, it was clear that the participants do, in fact, experience spirituality as part of their work lives. This experience is not limited to a single aspect of
their jobs, but is the connection they bring to as many elements of their work as possible. This intention was crystallized during the group member checking session, and Stacie’s words described it best, “I think it starts and ends with God . . . it permeates . . . I’m in God and God’s in me, and so there’s no boundaries. To think of it in human terms, it’s like my skin . . . everything’s permeable, and it flows back and forth.”

Thus, this flowing of energy coming from and going to the higher power is a critical factor in understanding the participants’ experience. Another vital point about their experience is the central passion for working on behalf of children.

**Students with disabilities at the center.** Each and every spiritually inclined special education administrator expressed that focusing on what is best for kids is the central purpose of their work. When their work isolates them from children—whether it be direct contact with them or even just hearing about benefits to them—it is a real challenge for them to feel fulfilled by their work.

Prized by participants are those occasions when they can see the direct benefit to children. Ava described the meaning she found on one such occasion, “It is gratifying to hear about progress for [older] kids we have had since preschool . . . I feel a sense of accomplishment when I’ve done something nice for a student.” Stacie said, “There needs to be joy in every kid’s day,” and Wendy mentioned, “I really enjoy working with parents and teachers to brainstorm ways to improve student success . . . my spirituality is carried out through the work I do with families and students.” Barb commented,
I feel like my main goals in this particular job role are to remove barriers and help my teachers do what they need to do. I feel very empowered when I am able to go in and problem solve and get people together and resolve an issue.

Additionally, these special education administrators seek opportunities to have face-to-face contact with students to see for themselves how kids are doing. For example, Stacie spends time in the preschool classrooms she supervises and Wendy and Karen are glad that the size of their districts allow for regularly occurring visits to classes for students with moderate-intensive disabilities. These experiences help the participants reconnect with and refresh the main purpose of their work, thus giving them renewed vitality to continue their challenging work.

Moving outward from the center, the next theme is the thought processes in which the participants are engaged. The thought processes include personal qualities the participants possess, reflective metacognition, filtering thoughts, and sticking with values. These thoughts play an important role in the perspective they bring to their work, which, in turn, shapes their experience.

**Productive thought processes.** A critical element for these purposively selected special education administrators is their thought processes. There was significant overlap among the research sub-questions of making meaning, serving/supporting others, and coping with the demands of work in this theme.

**Positive personal qualities.** Several patterns were found in the data about positive personal qualities, with optimism being the most significant, due to the frequency with which it was mentioned.
Optimism. The participants were optimistic about their work through feeling productive, being excited when good things happen for students, and viewing their colleagues in a positive light.

When coping with the demands of work, Karen expressed, “I choose to be optimistic every day, and that is my connection to God.” Mark tied optimism to leadership when he said, “People look at leaders differently. And we almost have a moral obligation to be—I don’t know what’s the right word. Happy, isn’t it? Positive? . . . Optimistic. That’s it.”

Part of staying optimistic is being able to take setbacks, such as verbal attacks by upset parents, in stride. These participants work at a job that they chose in order to help, so their heart is involved. When things don’t go smoothly, they try to separate themselves by not taking the problems personally. In the data, the leaders mentioned this strategy as something they share with other staff members. For example, Ava contributed, “That’s part of what I think I do well with my staff now is I can pull them along and guide them in that direction to hopefully not take a lot personally.” Heidi had a lot to say about this:

I share with [the staff] like hey, I’m frustrated too and I’m really working hard to not take it personally—and it’s easier said than done, I understand that—but you’re not gonna be able to be sane in this job if you don’t figure out a way to separate it . . . Take the job seriously, but not personally . . . When I was a teacher, I had to learn that skill. I continually kind of coach myself because it’s not just an automatic. I care too much about the job to just be always detached
from it. I do take it personally, so there are times where I have to just coach myself: remember this, remember that. It’s the same things that I tell my staff, right?

Other positive personal qualities included showing your true self, patience/tolerance, compassion/kindness, respect, being able to focus, having a strong work ethic, being less judgmental of others, humility, empathy, gratitude, and keeping calm.

*Keeping calm.* The quality of keeping calm bears elaboration as it was a point where different respondents gave different answers. Wendy described,

> There were many times I was close to losing my patience with staff this week. I know there was a force larger than myself helping me control my anger and help them correct mistakes. I was able to be positive and encouraging when I felt like biting their heads off!

Conversely, Stacie shared, “I keep going back to this calm thing, ‘cause it’s so not me . . . I’m the opposite, and sometimes I feel like I’m modeling ‘It’s okay not to be a perfectly calm person.’” Among other participants, calm demeanor was generally present, making this an apparent instance of non-conforming data.

*Feeling inadequate.* The shadow side of the personal qualities theme is that these leaders sometimes feel inadequate to meet the tasks before them. Ava said, “You have to be able to look at everything, process it, and not let it suck you dry.” Some of them also perceive evil in the world that is insurmountable. Finally, although they expressed themselves wryly, two of the participants admitted to very high expectations for
themselves and a self-deprecating manner, which may compromise their feeling up to the challenges of the job at times. Heidi commented,

I don’t accept excuses from myself and I have a hard time sometimes accepting them from other people. Maybe that’s why I’m good at special ed, because I don’t look at it as an excuse. You have to do it a different way.

Heidi’s comment about how one looks at things being important provides a smooth transition to the next sub-theme: reflective metacognition.

**Reflective metacognition.** Just as optimism is the chief personal quality found among these participants, reflective metacognition is another ubiquitous characteristic within the theme of thought processes. These leaders engage in thinking about their words and actions in their work, frequently considering whether they match their beliefs and intentions. For example, Wendy stated, “When I notice I’m getting elevated, I recompose myself to work towards being motivated by love.” Stacie described a thought she had, “I think there was metacognition going on, ‘Are you holding true or being a brat?’” Ava contributed, “I love reflecting on things, looking back and saying, ‘Here I was.’”

The part with which my co-researchers struggled is finding the time and energy to engage in this thought process. Wendy observed:

I really need to do that more, just sit down and think about the people I work with and why I’m doing what I’m doing. The surprising thing is how little I reflect on what I do. I mean it doesn’t seem like in the average day I reflect as much as I should or could about why I do what I do or why I make the decisions I make.
Several specific sub-types of metacognition became apparent in the data, including filtering thoughts, recognizing that things seem worse beforehand, and sticking with values.

Filtering thoughts. A significant component of this theme was the participants’ decisions to filter their thoughts. They described their formidable self-discipline not to say everything they think. Simply, Ava expressed, “You can’t say those things in a meeting [with parent attorneys].” Karen lent a sense of wry humor when she described herself, “I’m typing and I say, nope, I’m going to delete that.” Wendy shared a clever strategy for filtering her thoughts,

If I answer the phone and the person is upset, I take a minute to compose myself by asking them to hold while I get paper and pen for taking notes . . . [I] am able to take a step back and put the filter on and recognize the person for where they’re at, and perhaps they don’t have the same experiences that I do . . . or the same training.

Things seem worse beforehand. A third thought process in which the participants engage relative to their spiritual experience at work includes knowing by lived experience that things often seem worse beforehand than they actually turn out to be. Heidi explained, “My life experiences have proven that things aren’t as bad as they seem and you can get through it.”

Sticking with values. In the first round of interviews, I asked a question about whether participants believed spirituality was the same as or different from core values.
In each case, the participants of this study expressed there is a welded relationship between the two.

They noted that acting morally and ethically were non-negotiables in their work lives, and their responses were interesting. Mark set the baseline when he said, “You have to have [ethics, morals, and values] to be a productive member of society. Let alone be a spiritual person.”

Wendy’s response portrayed the integration of the constructs for her.

I try to do good works and good deeds, and I do feel a moral, ethical reason to do that. But I think I have been in my religion too long, then, to be able to separate morals and ethics from it. And so I don’t know if I weren’t a religious person, would I do those things anyway? I can’t answer that.

Ava also talked about the intersection between the two:

I think that you’re being true to yourself, that you know yourself and you’re not playing games or putting on facades . . . You’re being up front with people and what you see is what you get. I think that I do—it’s your morals. It’s what you believe about being fair and honest to people . . . I think it’s the way you embrace all those other things that kind of forms the person. You know, with your belief system, from whether it’s your church or just your own personal relationships with people, or what’s morally right to you, I think that makes the spiritual side of you to some degree.

Although most participants’ expressed spirituality was intertwined with values, ethics, and morals, one participant put a finer point on it. Stacie said,
Ethics is sometimes a contextual thing. By context I mean it could be the situation. You know there are situational ethics where people do in a situation the best they can or there’s also certain tenets people hold onto ideologically. They have a belief system that they do not view as their morals. The fact that I say it is their morals is very disquieting because they want there to be absolutes. So I think those are all subsets of what I might call spirituality. The spirituality to me is clearly a much more overarching, broadened and less concrete term than some of those. (2013, Interview #1)

Deeply held values also guide the participants’ reflective thoughts, and Mark explained by saying, “I did a bit of experimenting with Buddhism, and how you treat people matters. How you live your life matters. What you put out there comes back.” Nora said, “Find out what is most important to you and get it done.” This relationship between thoughts and actions is a good bridge into the next theme, which is enacting core values.

**Enacting core values.** In this study, enacting core values revolved around the meaning participants make of their work and how they serve and support others. Qualities of empathy, humility, and service were apparent in their descriptions of the prevalent aspects of this theme. As described in the prior section on sticking with values, they know what is important at their core and they consciously attempt to make their actions match their beliefs. Demonstrating trust is the first way they enact those core values.
**Trust.** The special education administrators who participated in this study seek others’ input and give others authority to act, demonstrating the core belief of trusting others. Quotes from several of the participants vibrantly illustrate this mode of operation. Ava said, “I do not micromanage . . . I give people leeway and freedom in how they do things.” Nora shared, “I would like to think of myself as building capacity in others and being collaborative and then establishing systematic implementation on those things.” Mark commented, “Ninety to ninety-five percent of the time, I’m going to come to [the teaching team] and bring things to the table for them to decide together.” The active intent to give others authority in important decisions is one way a leader shows and builds trust. Related to going first with giving trust to others is a person’s response when he or she has made an error.

**Repair mistakes.** When the research participants were asked about how they access their spirituality to support others in their work lives, a subtheme about the fact that they will make mistakes became apparent. They acknowledged that they are not perfect and that mistakes are inevitable. The enactment of their values and integrity was described when participants in this group shared that they are strong advocates of attempting to repair the situation/relationship. For example, Heidi said, “I’m going to make mistakes, but I need to apologize and go back and fix it.”

**Honesty.** Making amends after committing an error is one specific kind of honesty. These administrators emphasized honesty as a core belief and gave examples of how they personify it in their daily work lives. They engage in timely, open dialogue with others, showing that they value the contributions of others in their leadership
disposition. These conversations occur one-on-one and in meetings. For example, Mark shared his perspective about the teacher evaluation process: “When we are not honest with the people we are evaluating, we give them a false sense that they’re okay when they’re not.” Barb shared her take on the value of practicing honesty, in spite of it being difficult when she said, “And it’s taken years to get better at, you know, but that’s where I feel the greatest joy, when I can knock down those barriers and get that resolved . . . by talking with the team.”

Contrary to the benefits of being honest, some of these leaders have heard from others that they can be too direct in their honesty. For example, Heidi said,

I mean one thing I tell my staff straight out all the time is I’m tough. I have high expectations, and I’m sometimes brutally honest. And I know people don’t always like honesty. For me, let’s put the problem on the table and let’s solve it and move on. I’m big on that.

A similar sub-theme, perceptions of others, is described in a later section of this chapter.

*Working within parameters.* The special education administrators in this study explained that there is one main obstacle to enacting their core values. They recognize that in order to enact their core value of helping students, they need to work within the context of the field of special education and the milieu of their school district.

Participants described some difficulty with this. During the member checking session, Nora noted that she has seen the requirements from the state continue to increase and become less student-focused and more bureaucratic. In his second round interview, Mark stated similar frustration when he said,
I found a long time ago that if I can create the situation in which people can discover things for themselves, they’re more apt to sustain the change rather than if I come in and say, “Do it this way.” . . . And sometimes I can’t. Sometimes there’s just the stupid law.

Stacie poignantly described the paradoxical side of the theme of acting on core values:

It’s very hard to find a piece of your passion for children and helping them, with what we are asked to do [by the state legislature and board of education]. And it’s so difficult, and that’s why I think I’m turning more and more to the spirituality, saying, “Lord, help me to do this job and help me to have the courage to stand against some of these things” . . . that bit of rebellion is almost all that’s left of the passion and the spirituality of doing the right things for kids. It’s not empowering and doing, it’s being a kind of roadblock and protecting staff and children and families from [bureaucratic] things, which is a whole different role . . . The things I’m good at and I got into the field to do and made myself better at by being educated and learning more are such a small part of what I actually have to do.

**Direct assistance to families.** Back on the positive side of the theme where participants are able to enact their priority to work with others to assist students, the special education administrators who participated in the study are able to provide direct assistance to families. Mark related an experience he had at a meeting: “The best thing was the support I could provide to families because of my knowledge.” Stacie talked about helping a family member when she worked in an urban district; “When [the student] was hospitalized, I went with the grandma to the hospital to help her
understand.” These authentic, helpful occasions provided a great deal of meaning to the administrators and allowed them to feel they were honoring their passion for improving the lives of students with disabilities. The last subtheme in this section is specific to partnering, not just being able to help in a one-sided way.

**Productive partnerships.** A thread of supportive partnering was apparent in the participants’ comments. For example, Mark said, “You get the right people in the right place and I provide as much support as I can.” Stacie discussed the value of “spending time with a young, newer teacher in a coaching capacity to assist her to carry forth my mission of supporting and advocating for children with disabilities.” Nora really emphasized the idea of partnering with others and a concrete example came out when she talked about her version of collaboration:

I had established a thing where—with teachers that I met with teachers one day a month and representatives throughout the district, and we would look at what are your needs? What are the kids’ needs? And we put in a very systematic way across the district—and it was great, because it wasn’t just me doing it all. It was this tremendous collaborative effort. And parents were involved, and we really had it going.

As the theme of enacting core values is summed up as involving trust, repairing mistakes, honesty, providing direct assistance to families, and engaging in productive partnerships, it leads to the next theme. The line between this and the next theme—fulfilling collaboration—is very faint. It seemed important, though, to distinguish
collaboration as a distinct theme in the research due to the nuances teased out of their narratives, interview responses, and journal entries.

**Fulfilling collaboration.** The participants gave many responses about how they interact with and collaborate with others to make meaning of their work in special education administration, as well as how they actualize their spirituality to serve and support others. For example, Wendy stated, “I feel alive in an IEP (individualized education program) meeting that’s very productive and people are working together to solve a problem a student may have.” Sub-themes include listening, relationship with a mentor, persistence, and the Golden Rule.

**Listen carefully.** In order to collaborate from a spiritual standpoint, a critical thing, according to the participants, is to listen carefully. Nora explained, “It’s easy to get defensive really quickly, so I say to myself, ‘They are mad at the situation, not me,’ and then really try and experience and understand where they are coming from.” Barb’s self-effacing comment further illustrated this point:

> It’s hard for me to shut up and be in the moment and let them get everything out, you know, and truly try to empathize and listen to what they’re feeling, not so much what they’re saying. But when I’m really, truly able to just listen to what they’re really trying to say, I think that helps guide . . . I try to be in the moment and listen and affirm that I’m hearing what somebody is asking for. Spirituality I think would come out when I’m really, truly able to patiently listen and a thought that I was going to say or an action that I was going to take, it changed because of what they said. And I feel like something is guiding me on that, you know?
Additionally, Heidi observed, “I find time for them and I really listen to what their needs are and really try to accommodate that.” There is also an attitude of patience present in the action of listening, as described by Wendy, “There are definitely some administrators who would . . . refuse to listen to [that parent] ramble on . . . [and I] just let her vent for hours and hours and hours . . . part of my job is to listen and be patient.”

**Mentors.** Some of the participants learned skills they use day-to-day through a different type of collaboration: a relationship with a mentor. Nora shared an experience about a former superintendent with whom she worked: “I was so impressed with the questions he asked that were about commitment.” Ava remembered a female boss who was “positive and supportive, but constructive.” Mark talked about how his practice is shaped by mentoring:

I had great mentors and because I had great mentors it’s important for me to mentor and they showed me [how]. One who was director, who is now superintendent, his way matched my way . . . “Look. We have this problem. Let’s sit down and figure it out together. And move forward.”

While some mentors were professional, others came from participants’ personal lives. Mark said, “My mother was kind, but not a pushover.” Heidi indicated, “I have a strong work ethic . . . my father and brother are the same way.”

**Persistence.** One quality associated with a strong work ethic is persistence, and that was a frequently cited theme in terms of these special education administrators making meaning of their work as well as serving and supporting others. The examples of persistence shared often dealt with not giving up on people, and that is why they are
described in this section on collaboration. Barb said, “Maybe that’s where spirituality comes back, where you’ve looked hard at that person and you say, okay, there is still value, there is still something they bring to the table . . . [even though] they can’t do it all.” Nora commented, “I’m sure [my words] fell on deaf ears, but you keep at it.”

Another sub-theme in persistence gelled around the internal thought process regarding others when the relationships are difficult. Remembering a difficult time at work, Stacie said, “I thought, what is best for me, for them, and the kids is to come to peace. It is not to hold grudges. It is not to have this overarching resentment. I gave them each a hug.” Barb’s angle was explicitly spiritual: “If you try to look at them as children of God, it changes how you respond to them.” Mark’s description relied on his professional training. “I do my own mini FBAs (functional behavior assessments) on people to find out what their motivations are.” Heidi described how she persists when she said, “The belief that I am doing the right thing helps when [angry parents] are on the attack.”

**The Golden Rule.** The final thread in the light side of this theme is participants’ belief in the Golden Rule. Nearly all of the participants brought up the idea of treating others as you want to be treated. Stacie commented, “I try very hard to say to myself if that were me, how would I want somebody to talk to me or approach me?” Barb echoed, “[It] is morals and ethics and just, you know, the Golden Rule kind of thing, whether you’re religious or not, about treating people the way you’d want to be treated, you know?”
As with the majority of the elements of special education administrators’ spiritual leadership, there are obstacles to them enjoying an effective collaboration with others. They include skill deficits, will deficits, negative assumptions on the part of others, and not discussing their spirituality at work.

**Skill deficits.** While it is natural that students with special needs and their parents may not have the skills necessary to be strong collaborators, special education administrators expect the teachers and related services people with whom they work to possess the necessary skills to work with the students and problem-solve the scenarios. This is not always the case, however. Mark related, “We have a staff member who is a hot mess . . . So he’s one I pray about a lot, even invoke St. Jude, patron saint of lost and hopeless causes, open his mind and heart so I can help him.” Wendy expressed frustration about this too,

> We have a couple teachers at the high school who I don’t think they believe in disabilities; I think they think that kids are lazy and making bad choices . . . that just always sends me through the roof . . . [I think to myself] I have to deal with you all day . . . But I know I can’t say that.

Stacie shared an example of teachers trying to please a parent and ending up failing to implement an effective program. That leads to the second impediment to fulfilling collaboration: deficits in will.

**Will deficits.** Not everyone working in public schools is as interested in working with students with disabilities as these special education administrators. Heidi described:
I guess the problem becomes when it’s not just the parents I’m dealing with. All of a sudden I’m dealing with staff members that have either done things wrong, have made the situation worse, or feel that I’m not supporting them, or don’t understand when I’m trying to come to some sort of a compromise . . . One thing I tell the teachers all the time is that I will do anything to help you and support you as long as you’re following what I’m telling you to do, because I’m telling you policy and procedure. If you go against that intentionally, don’t expect me to support you.

Perceptions of others. Another hurdle they face is the view of administrators held by practitioners such as teachers. For example, Mark noted, “The staff has a negative view of leadership, and they believe there is a conspiracy behind everything.” Barb explained, “I can be pretty authoritative, and I’ve been told scary at times, because I’m pretty clear about what my expectations are.” Heidi added,

A lot of people are threatened by the success that I’ve had. They’re threatened by the fact that I can put my mind to something, that I can do it. They are. They’re jealous and they’ve told me it is intimidating to them.

Secreted spirituality. One last obstacle that was represented in the data was the reluctance of these leaders to be open about their spirituality at work. Stacie carefully sensors herself in terms of saying to someone under stress “I’ll be thinking of you,” instead of what she really means, which is, “I’ll be praying for you.” Wendy and Mark both mentioned that personal spiritual or religious beliefs are inappropriate for a public school setting. Karen, who is nearing the point of retirement, said,
[I] haven’t said too much at work about it because—I don’t know—sometimes it’s just not the comfortable thing to do or people are not ready to accept you yet.

I never really know how to put that in. I think I will at some point.

This idea that situations change over time and may give rise to the need for a different approach leads nicely to the next theme: resilience to uncertainty and change.

**Resilience to uncertainty and change.** In this area, the data clustered in the supporting research question areas of these leaders using spirituality to serve and support others to some degree, and largely in coping with the demands of work. They rely on their spiritual nature and practices to assist them with self-regulation, letting go, and continuing to function nominally when the landscape is uncertain.

**Self-regulation strategies.** These special education administrators have a variety of self-regulation strategies they use to help themselves cope with work. I am using the term *self-regulation* to describe any conscious action or activity employed by the participants in order to be and feel like their authentic selves. Self-regulation is needed in order to counteract the environmental factors that lead to the unpleasant experiences of their work life. Although not all of them are spiritual—and many of them do not occur within the workday, itself—I included them because I believe these strategies comprise a key feature of this theme and are reflective of the whole person. Since spirituality is at the core of the person’s identity, and self-regulatory activities support the ability to withstand outside stressors, self-regulation is, thus, relevant to the discussion of spirituality in this study.
**Body-focused.** Some self-regulation strategies shared by participants include so-called body-focused approaches. Stacie talked about exercise and Nora is currently knitting. Ava makes walking a distinctly spiritual experience; “The sky is just so gorgeous in the morning, and [my dog and I are] out [walking] at 5:30, so it’s still really dark—it’s a—I’m always just in awe of what’s out there.”

**Being in nature.** Other participants also listed being outside/appreciating nature as an important self-regulation strategy. Barb noted, “I have a big backyard and enjoy soaking it all in. I’d like to live by a beach.” Heidi finds sustenance in “taking care of and giving love to my animals.”

**Consuming adult beverages.** Other actions might not seem spiritual at all, such as consuming alcohol. Heidi said, “Sometimes I go home and have a couple of beers.” Nora remembered, “[When I was working], I established these little social groups . . . where we would get together like once a month . . . and we would laugh and drink margaritas and that kind of stuff.”

**Slowing down.** A fourth pattern in body-based strategies was slowing the body down and decompressing. Mark has learned, “When I get home, I know I need some time to myself.” Heidi shared, “I have had many situations lately that I have had to take a moment to deep breathe and visualize positive situations. I have had to focus myself not to get sucked in.”

**Church-based.** Self-regulation for many of these spiritually inclined special education administrators is rooted in the church. Participating in church gives them time to reflect on their spiritual beliefs and provides a conduit for connecting with the Ultimate
and other like-minded people. For some, it is also an outlet for selfless service. Ava and her husband are Eucharistic ministers, and Karen and Barb each attend weekly church services. Stacie shared one of the things she likes about mass is the rituals.

But not all of the participants are church-goers. Mark noted,

There’s a evangelical piece now that’s part of the service and people are holding hands . . . [it is one of] the reasons why I’ve stopped going—I’m so uncomfortable with that—it doesn’t feel like church to me. It doesn’t meet my definition of where I can be alone, but yet surrounded with people . . . something more formal feels right to me.

Nora observed, “Political things in the church take away from the purity of my relationship with God.” Simply put, Heidi said, “I don’t go to church on a weekly basis—I don’t buy in to organized religion.”

**Spiritual reading.** Reading and studying the Bible is an adjunct support for two of the participants. Wendy said, “Our church has a Bible study in a year type of thing I access on Facebook.” Karen reads the Bible daily, in the evening.

**Prayer.** Prayer, especially in the morning and sometimes in the evening, was the most often cited method for self-regulation and keeping core spiritual values at the fore of the participants’ lives. Mark said, “I feel centered in [morning] prayer, and I try to be grateful on the way home, too.” Barb shared, “[I pray] in the morning when I am getting ready for work, and on the way home in the car—transition time, before meals and before a stressful task.”
Formal, traditional prayers such as praying the rosary (Barb), invoking the saints (Mark), lighting candles in supplication (Stacie), repeating the St. Francis Prayer (Nora), and conducting the Jesuit Consciousness Examine (Barb said, “I review the day, give thanks on what was good, reflecting on what could have been done differently”) were common among many participants.

Informal prayer was prevalent, as well. Stacie described her process.

I read a devotional . . . and also just talk, to say I need help here or I’m kind of confused or I thought I did my best, or just confessing and asking for assistance and then not forgetting to be grateful.

Ava related, “It’s not formal, but I pray at those times. I talk. Inside, to God.” Mark described a typical prayer, “Give me guidance, let me be smart today. Let me help people; let me open up their hearts if there is something I need to get across.” Nora shared two questions she has often asked in prayer, “Could you please help this person out in whatever way is appropriate?” and “What the hell should I be doing?”

Music. Enjoying spiritually-based music is another coping strategy used by these participants. Barb described, “On the way to work, if it is going to be a tough day, I’m blasting the music, singing along . . . Music is meditation to me.” Karen said, “Music is a big part of [coping with stress]. I listen to spiritual music and the radio in the car, [and on] headsets.”

Meditation. Seated meditation was noted as a practice for one participant. Nora said,
And I meditate . . . I came upon Deepak Chopra at one point, I like him, so I’ve been doing his meditations. Listening . . . what he does is it’s an ongoing thing. You—he does a little piece at the beginning, and then . . . there’s a . . . statement for the day, but then there’s a meditation, he gives you a mantra to do and listen to and he says say it silently to yourself for 15 minutes . . . I do it every other day, not as regularly as I’d like.

*Little reminders.* Spiritual tokens remind participants of their spiritual foundation while they are at work. Wendy has a little white angel given as a gift by her mother, Karen keeps a small sign where only she can see it with a Bible verse (Fear not for I am with thee—Isaiah 43:5), Mark has a St. George medal in his car, and Stacie uses her *Jesus Calling* phone app throughout the day.

*Communication.* Communication techniques make up the last two self-regulation strategies cited by these special education administrators as they attempt to serve and support others. The use of humor was one technique used. Ava explained, “I’m pretty low key, I like to laugh and joke . . . I think my staff is pretty comfortable with me.” Stacie opined, I think what’s important is to use humor. That is probably the best gift I have because if I laugh with people and joke around and try to take things less seriously, I think it brings them to be less anxious and fearful of things.

Venting was a method utilized by several participants as a way to release pressure to be able to work with others productively. Stacie indicated:
One of my strategies to try to prevent overreacting to people because I’m really intense, is to kind of vent with my colleagues or friends . . . If people don’t know me outside of the venting situation, sometimes I think they get the wrong impression. So I realized I’ve got to stop that . . . The other side has to be more evident to people or I’m not really being true to my style. So I realized that I’ve got to make sure that I’m very consciously saying to people, “I’m venting” or “We’re getting this out.” And I model that for the staff because I tell my staff at the preschool, too, this is what you do. You go find a confidant. You dump it. But when you’re in the hallway and you’re by the desk of the secretary, you’re in the presence of anybody else, you’re handling it differently and in a very professional manner.

Barb also uses venting, but recognizes its dark side, saying,

I have a trusted colleague that I vent to about [a difficult] staff member. After I vent, it makes me feel better in some ways, but then I feel guilty and unprofessional for talking about him. I pray for patience, understanding and insight as to how to reach him. My spirituality helps me deal with the stress of continuously dealing with the same issues with the same staff year after year.”

On the same theme, Heidi related her use of venting and its limitations.

I have good people that I trust and I can vent to and you have to be able to vent and be able to say whatever you want to say . . . I have somebody at work that I confide in and I can say anything to her, but when it becomes so heavy like this I
can’t confide in anybody, because trying to explain it all to somebody when there’s so many cases on top of cases it’s just so convoluted.

As these leaders have learned the role venting can play in their self-regulation toolkit, they also are cognizant of the part played by aging and the passage of time. Although none of them actually used the word faith, that quality is evident in the quotes in this section about letting go in a variety of ways.

**Letting go.** As time passes in the career of a special education administrator, there are choices about what to let go. Ava described a change she saw in herself from her early career,

Today I could just let corrections parents make to IEPs just roll off my back . . . I think that’s part of me too, part of why I have the longevity that I have. I haven’t mired myself in past practices that I won’t let go of.

This ability to refrain from attachment also came through in participants’ comments about their job changes. Some participants commented about leaving behind comfortable jobs to seek greater fulfillment. Nora reflected about her decision to move to another district, “I think I’ve done what I can do here . . . I think somebody else needs to come in and have a different stance on this.” Heidi said,

I took an enormous pay cut when I took [an administrative] position, but it was just like I have to do this. I have to do this. I can’t stay here. I felt very, like I’m just not doing enough, that this isn’t enough for me. I know I can do so much more.

When he was considering a job change, Mark shared,
[The superintendent] said, “What is God telling you to do?” And I said, “The thing that I keep on hearing is that it doesn’t matter ‘cause you’re going to take what you do here and bring it there anyway.” . . . But it guides where I go and that’s how I found this [job]. I said, I’ve done everything I can do. I’m at my limit in terms of taking them further. God, what’s next?

Ava summed it up by saying, “There’s a level of confidence you have to have in yourself to walk away from some things that you’re comfortable with.”

**Continued learning.** While the most basic version of continued learning was mentioned when the participants shared their preparation for becoming special education administrators (e.g., Ava indicated, “I always tried to take classes that would lead to an additional license.”), they also expressed that learning can happen on a spontaneous basis and its importance in finding meaning in their work. Stacie indicated,

[I am] energized by [workshops] because I was learning something new that can help kids. So sometimes I think I go to things that maybe as a director are not a high priority, but they’re a high priority for me because I know that what I’ve learned if I share with others is going to possibly make a difference in kids.

Ava observed, “You never stop learning, and you can learn from everything whether it’s a good situation or a bad situation.” Mark added, “I continually model [being] . . . open to learning new ways of doing things.”

Wendy talked about learning as adult development, rather than learning job or leadership skills. She said,
I think a lot of [learning not to judge others] did have to do with spirituality. The more you think about it’s not our responsibility to judge other people, and you read that again and again and again and then you say, ‘Well what am I doing? Whose responsibility is that?’ And you realize it’s not mine.

Another distinct type of learning emerged in the data that was related to the passage of time. In Barb’s words,

Age is a good teacher . . . [I’ve gained] maturity from learning from my mistakes . . . As I’ve gotten older, I rely on spirituality more than I did as a young person. I don’t know if when you’re younger you’re just more self-centered and think you control everything? Then you realize there is someone bigger than you and you need that more [as time goes on]. I think partly it’s spirituality and partly it’s just learning from mistakes and, like, getting older. You can’t keep that . . . emotional level up.

Nora agreed, “As I age, I see there certainly was the hand of God in so many things.”

Ava shared,

[My experience of spirituality at work has] changed as I’ve gotten older and I’ve matured. When you’re young and you’re green and you think you know everything I don’t think you appreciate people. I don’t think you appreciate your circumstances as much as you do when you—after you’ve had some experience and you’ve—you can step back and be more objective.

Memorably, Mark waxed,
Well I think with age comes some wisdom. And I, you know, because who I am now in . . . late middle age, early old age is not who I was thirty years ago. And thirty years ago—even twenty years ago when I got in to leadership, I was a dick. Mean, I was, you know, I thought that’s how you were to lead. And luckily I had some good mentors over the years, and plus my own reading—but I just changed. As an individual.

**Dealing with the unpredictable.** Although some things about their work become comfortable or known, there are many aspects of special education administrators’ work that are unpredictable. Wendy copes with this via her spirituality, “When I go into work I have a plan, but I very rarely get to do those things. My work is influenced by spirituality because you have to be very quick.” Karen contributed,

I need to relate more to priorities of the day, getting up and saying, “God’s in control. God will lead me through this no matter what trials and tribulations—and I have many through special ed.” I have to remember that.

At times, the vacillations in the field of special education tip these leaders over the edge. Barb wondered, “When I’ve dealt with a lot of procedural paperwork and reports and just feel like I’m banging my head, where it’s, like, what the heck? What am I doing and why is this important?” Nora observed, “When you look at the policies and procedures that come out every four years, it’s ridiculous.” As Stacie said:

I think I’ve known it all along . . . It’s not so much about the spirituality, of course, but the mission and the job, it’s been a lack of fit. I think that’s common among some directors I know and have known. So much more it ends up being
about compliance and mostly dealing with dissatisfied constituents that it’s almost opposite of what we went into it for. It’s almost the yang, if you will . . . You can get somebody to do the PR-01s and you can get somebody to sit in the due process hearings, and you can get somebody to go to federal court for me next week . . . It is frustrating not being able to do proactive things because all I do is reactive things. So much goes up and down.

**Doubt.** The paradox to the faith conveyed by participants is that they also feel doubt. Participants voiced some doubts when they commented on their ability to assimilate the challenges and changes associated with their work. Heidi expressed this feeling when she said, “There’s been times where I wanted to perhaps detour off, and I think somebody’s there to kind of put me back in check, especially in times where that self doubt creeps in.”

For clarity, it is important to note that not a single participant described doubt in his or her higher power.

**Feeling lonely and misunderstood.** On one side of relationships with others, there is a closeness felt through brainstorming, venting, and laughing. On the other side, there also are contrasting emotions for the participants. They described feelings of loneliness and being misunderstood. Stacie shared, “I hung onto God for dear life because I was so lonely even though I was never alone.” Barb said, “I think people in our field have to have spirituality to stay well-grounded and not feel alone on those rough days.” Later, Stacie noted, “I think this is the only job that I’ve ever been in that people just didn’t hang out once in awhile . . . maybe go out on a payday.”
In terms of being misunderstood, Nora pointed out, “Nobody else does what we do. So nobody else really does understand.” Stacie expanded,

I find lonely to be probably the biggest [problem], and maybe misunderstood is the other [problem]. I [feel] misunderstood both professionally and personally. It’s a really big issue, whether it’s the parents misunderstanding my motives or the principal misunderstanding directives, or—I think those two things are the most distancing.

Stacie continued,

What this parent sees is an evil pupil services director with a tight fist and what I see [in myself] is a person who went into this field to help kids. And you are not letting us help your child . . . and it is very hurtful and I’ve had to learn to try and de-personalize that. It’s been very hard, because I feel like they are robbing me of my passion, my spirituality.

The coping strategies shared by participants straddle the line between work life and personal life. Similarly, the special education administrators’ responses to questions about making meaning of work, serving and supporting others and coping with the demands of work indicated their overall experience of work is blended into life. Thus, the next theme of their experience discusses that circumstance.

**Work as part of an integrated life.** This theme is unique in that data on the shadow side were more prevalent than those on the light side. Participants experience having difficulty dropping work and find that it tends to dominate their lives.
**Difficulty dropping work.** Several participants described not being able to drop work when necessary. For example, Barb shared,

You’ve got to pray for balance . . . I still go to bed at night sometimes not being able to turn a case off, you know, and I’ll pray, oh, Lord, please take them out of my head, because I need to rest, you know? Sometimes I can’t turn it off. When I can’t sleep, I try to pray for comfort and I imagine I’m on the beach and I’m floating on a cloud and all that stuff you try to do. I’ve worked enough today, I don’t need to take it to bed with me.

Heidi described a guided visualization technique she uses to encapsulate work situations to let her sleep, involving the pond in her yard, a steel box, and a breathing tube for the people inside who need to leave her alone so she can rest before dredging them up in the morning.

**Work dominating life.** Work stretching beyond the bounds of a typical contracted workday was a common theme for many of these special education leaders. Stacie talked about the work-related texts and phone calls she has at all hours with staff and attorneys: “The [lack of] job boundaries, the permeability of the job into life . . . there’s always somebody who needs something on different schedules . . . and the 260 [day contract] makes it constant. There’s no breath to recoup, recover.” Karen stated,

I feel very overwhelmed by [the Ohio Teacher Evaluation System] because it seems to have taken precedence over a lot of other things, [including my weekends]. I was feeling very stressed about it . . . I’ve been praying about it . . . It’s affecting my personal life.
Ava said, “I just know my family, and those guys at my house are important to me. I’m anxious to get home, get things going.” Mark described interactions about this issue with his wife, “I work all the time to support my family, not to get away from you.’ And it took her a long time to see that.” Looking back, Nora shared,

After sort of stepping down from being the director, I tell people, you know, it’s been—I really did go through a period of recovery. I was completely exhausted, and I didn’t realize how exhausted I was [because of my work].

*Work as a part of a whole life.* In spite of the obstacles this work places in their lives, the participants also manage to experience their work as an integrated part of who they are. They live as spiritually inspired human beings, whether at work or not, with personal and professional lives contributing to the whole. To illustrate, Nora said, “So I guess I look at being spiritual as an ongoing practice of one’s life, not just, like, on Sunday morning.” Heidi questioned how some people could act selfishly in places like the church parking lot, not even letting the message carry them farther into the week than getting right outside the church doors, saying she tries hard to always live her beliefs.

When I asked participants about where spirituality might carry over into work to a greater extent after focusing on it for this study, Ava said, “I think everything that I’m doing is so connected that I don’t know that there’s any other place that [spirituality] might spill over into.” Wendy responded,

Spirituality is just a part of me, so I don’t know that I can separate it from my job and what I do. I’m not saying I make perfect choices, I’m just saying I hope I
don’t separate church Wendy from work Wendy and I hope other people wouldn’t see it that way.

While not large in volume or number of elements, the theme of integrating work into a spiritual life was large in terms of significance, thus earning a place as a theme in this study. It was the last element to follow the pattern of having a paradoxical component. The final, encapsulating theme is how the participants experience the Ultimate in their work.

**Appreciating the grace of the Ultimate.** In their narratives, interviews, and journals, participants shared instances where they feel thankful for the influence of the Ultimate in their work. From a temporal standpoint, there is evidence that it encompasses their work lives; they report experience of the presence of the Ultimate happens before and during a variety of situations, as well as after a desired outcome occurs.

**Before.** Some of the experience of appreciation comes before any particular situation or event and is just part of the way the participants carry themselves into their day. Holistically, Nora indicated she has the sense that “God wants us to be all we can be.” Stacie acknowledged, “I must credit God with the strength I summon in the face of challenges.” Wendy shared, “My leadership absolutely has a spiritual component to it, ‘cause that’s the kind of leader Christ was, right? . . . In my belief system, we’re supposed to reflect the love of God through our work.” Mark noted,

[This project] confirmed that damn, I do a lot of praying. For guidance mostly, and really, to help me be better at helping others grow and be their best . . . It is reinforcing when the influence extends toward the light that way.
During. Based on their comments, these leaders deliberately lean on their spiritual sensibility in the challenging situations they face at work. Karen feels, “God is with me and tells me, ‘You don’t need to respond to that right now.’” Barb shared how appreciation of the Lord helps her make meaning in her work, as well as to be proactive in solving problems:

When I see God in another person, I feel good. I feel a sense of peace and calm . . . Extra attention to my spirituality has made my actions in difficult situations more effective. I find [asking for guidance] to be very helpful—just trying to keep guiding my mind and in my heart so that when I listen to people or hear something I . . . have the right spirit to answer what the issue is . . . I want to see God in everyone and there’s times when it’s really, really hard to do that, like when they’re yelling at you.

Heidi also found support during times of stress. She said, “There were definitely these voices inside me that push me when I’m struggling.” Nora shared, “I think where God comes in is [knowing] when is the right time to . . . put on the armor and stand up for what’s right for the kid.”

After. When there is a desirable outcome, spiritually oriented special education administrators tend to attribute success to a higher power. Karen shared, “That was not the way I thought it was going to go. I worried about it and when he apologized, I was like, ‘That was totally the hand of God.’” She added, “I’ve gotten districts out of due process situations by the grace of God . . . I don’t have a really big head, I know it wasn’t
me.” Stacie shared a story about winning a due process case, and described her reaction: “I kickboxed a little in my office, and then I thanked God.”

**Reliance on the support of the Ultimate.** In addition to appreciating the Ultimate in their work, these special education administrators also cope with the demands of their work by relying on the influence of a higher power. When all else fails, they rely on their connection to a higher power. For example, Stacie confided, “Spirituality is my everyday necessity and it’s my emergency resuscitation.” Heidi said, “That’s where I feel myself turn inward, maybe that’s the spirituality rising to the top. That is the only thing getting me through because it is not any of my other coping mechanisms when it is that bad.” Karen shared, “I seem to fall into ugly situations and I pray to God and then maybe [I can] work through it . . . I’ve noticed when things are at their worst, that’s when I become more reliant on God.”

Sometimes, a push of encouragement is needed, and the participants in the study found it via thinking about the power of the Ultimate and the role of a higher power in their lives. Nora said,

I remember thinking, if it is what I am supposed to do, why is it so hard? And hearing, “Why would you think it would be easy just because it is what you are meant to do?” Those conversations and the relationship [with God] have guided me along the way.

Stacie stated, “I think the experience of spirituality permeates my work. Kind of an infinite cycle. It’s what got me into it and keeps me in it. It’s what pushes me back into line.”
The insightful comments shared by the participants of this study resulted in a clear picture of how they both appreciate and rely on their manifestation of a higher power. This outermost thematic ring of the role of the Ultimate is what holds together the meaning they make of their work, how they use their leadership to serve and support others, and how they access their spirituality as a resource to help them cope with the demands of work.

Summary

In this chapter, I briefly recapped the process (described in detail in Chapter 3) by which the data were generated, gathered, and recorded for this study, as well as the systems I used to keep track of data and emerging understandings. It is my hope that the evidence provided gives the reader a feeling of confidence about the way in which the research has been conducted.

The focus of this chapter was to present the research findings. Hence, the circular depiction of the themes was provided, and the patterns from which it was built were described. In sum, there are eight themes that make up special education administrators’ experience of spirituality at work, with the existence of a higher power and service to students with disabilities at the center. At times, the themes are not completely distinct and they flow into one another. They include: (a) productive thought processes, (b) enacting core values, (c) fulfilling collaboration, (d) resilience to uncertainty and change, (e) work as an integrated part of life, and (f) appreciating the grace of/relying on the support of the Ultimate.

There are also challenges experienced, and they include: (a) feeling inadequate,
(b) being required to implement policies/laws, (c) frustration due to skill and/or will
deficits of parents and staff members, (e) feeling overwhelmed by omnipresent change
and isolation, and (f) work dominating and pushing life out of balance.

As an outcome of this study, the research question has been explored and the
results have been unpacked. Now, it is appropriate to locate the results within the extant
research in the related fields, search for deeper meanings, and to determine what may be
the implications of its addition to the literature. I am impelled with urgency into the next
stage by Nora’s comment,

I do worry that we [special education administrators] may be becoming extinct.

This director of student services piece, at least people coming to it for the same
reason, [I fear] that there’s gonna be more turn-over, because it’s not a job
anybody wants.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

The preceding chapter described the research findings in this investigation of special education administrators’ experience of spirituality in their work lives. This culminating chapter includes several sections. First, a short summary of the study is provided. Next, the discussion of the study grounds the findings of the study in the conceptual framework and provides context for understanding the findings in the bigger picture. Accordingly, implications for social change are suggested, along with recommendations for further study. Importantly, there is a section on my reflections as a researcher looking back on the process. Lastly, the section containing a full summary and final conclusions ends the chapter.

Summary of the Study

This study was conceived with two main ideas in mind. First, based on the difficulties faced by many stakeholders in our society while attempting to improve the outcomes for students with disabilities, alternative ways of addressing the issues need to be explored. Then, I chose this particular alternative concept—that the spirituality of special education administrators might be a lever for positive change for students with disabilities—as a result of personal and societal interest in the topic.

The aim of this study was to answer the research question: How do special education administrators experience spirituality in their work? Three supporting questions narrowed the width of the inquiry: (a) How is the spirituality of special
education administrators related to the meaning they make of their work, including their
career choices? (b) How does special education administrators’ spirituality enable them,
as leaders, to serve and support others? and (c) How do special education administrators
access their spirituality as a resource to help them cope with the demands of work and
continue to nurture their own development?

Given the content of the research and my ontological and epistemological beliefs,
I designed this study as a basic descriptive qualitative study with a theoretical position of
interpretive constructivism. The data collection and analysis elements of the study were
chosen to enhance the rigor and trustworthiness of the data by addressing its credibility,
transferability, and dependability/confirmability. Eight special education administrators
at different points in their careers participated in writing personal narratives, engaging in
two rounds of individual interviews, and making journal entries over a multi-week period
in order to provide the data sources for the study.

Analysis stayed close to the data and was guided by the strategies of responsive
interview coding, latent content analysis, and interpretive analysis. After coding all data
into categories, the categories were sorted into themes. This process was supported by
my use of a researcher reflective journal in which I made frequent notes and memos
about both content and process.

Briefly, the findings suggest that special education administrators experience
spirituality in their work as illustrated in Figure 3. The main themes are:

- The Ultimate is where everything originates and the influence permeates life
- Service to students with disabilities is the motivation for work
• Special education administrators have productive thought processes, but sometimes feel inadequate

• Core values are enacted in the work of spiritually oriented special education administrators; however, they cannot always follow through as a result of working within restrictive parameters

• Spiritual P–12 special education administrators experience fulfilling collaboration, but sometimes are frustrated due to skill/will deficits of others

• The participants in this study are resilient to uncertainty and change, but can become overwhelmed by omnipresent change and isolation in their work

• On the positive side, spiritual special education administrators experience work as an integrated part of life; however, work can dominate and push life out of balance

• Appreciation of the grace of the Ultimate when things are pleasant and reliance on the support of the Ultimate when circumstances are difficult is an all-encompassing theme of the experience of special education administrators who identify themselves as spiritual

Discussion

Parallel to the approach in the research findings chapter, the discussion section addresses the research question theme by theme. The purpose of this chapter is to make supported interpretations that relate the findings to the body of literature in the field, thus seeking to add to what is known in a meaningful way. The organization of the interpretation of findings is the same as that of the prior chapter. Because of the way the
themes blended as the primary research question was answered, the three supporting questions are not answered separately.

As I embark on nesting the findings of this study into the field of existing research, thereby seeking to enrich both entities, it bears mention that this study has examined the work experience of special education administrators from numerous angles. Cook-Greuter (2000) wrote about the benefit of such a process.

Self-inquiring, full-bodied developmental theories, which focus on meaning rather than mechanics, and include cognitive, affective, and behavioral components, tend to assess their own methods and arguments for hidden assumptions and limitations. (p. 234)

Although I did not seek to create a developmental theory, the understandings I posit contain multiple elements of cognition, affect, and behavior in special education administrators. By addressing a broader spectrum of human development, I hope this interpretation of the findings is useful.

**Overview of the Graphic**

In order to support the reader’s understanding of the themes of this research the graphic that illustrates the themes is provided (Figure 4). At the outset, I acknowledge that adequately illustrating the experience of the Ultimate may not be possible, based on its complexity. Nevertheless, it does provide a common frame of reference for discussion. Of course, readers may develop their own perception of what it means; at the same time, I believe some description of the way I interpret the picture could be helpful.
Figure 4. The swirl of special education administrators’ spiritual leadership
Broadly, the swirl has the participants’ chosen higher power (or Ultimate, as defined by Elkins et al., 1988) at its center, and the influence of this higher power radiates throughout the swirl, moving in a counter-clockwise direction. The swirl has a “light side” on the top and a “shadow side” on the bottom. Special education administrators find enjoyable experiences within their work lives on the light side, and the obstacles to feeling fulfillment on the shadow side. The wavy line dividing the upper and lower portions of the swirl signifies, depending on environmental factors, the portion of the work experience comprised of contentment and the portion characterized by dissonance. These experiences vary across themes and are ever changing.

The two triangles on the diagram are labeled “faith” and “gratitude.” Participants feel gratitude following experiences of spirituality in their work, and that carries them into the challenges they face. Faith is a main mechanism by which the participants in the study pull themselves out of the shadow side.

The outer ring of the swirl portrays the idea that when they experience the influence of their spirituality at work, these leaders experience the grace of their concept of the Ultimate. On the lower side of the figure, where the challenges lay, they rely on the support of the Ultimate to function in their work lives. A key point about the figure is that the Ultimate is at the center, permeates all of the various elements of work, and encompasses everything. A second essential point is that work for the benefit of children with disabilities is the main motivation for these professionals, and it guides their work continuously. Thirdly, inherited factors (ranging from physical/mental capacities to the
inborn purposes of a person’s life) influenced by the Ultimate are indelible, and are central aspects of the swirl of these leaders’ experience.

By providing a global explanation, it is my hope that the reader will have a sense of the whole that will help provide context to the constituent parts. These parts, or themes, are thoughts or processes that weave throughout and tie categories together (Mayan, 2009).

Before discussion of the themes identified through the recursive data analysis routine, background information related to how the participants found themselves in the role of special education administrator is addressed. Several sub-themes are described under the larger theme of a path of service.

**Path of Service**

As described in the first chapter, the review of the literature did not reveal prior research about how special education administrators rise to that career. There were, however, related ideas with regard to several elements of the path of service that are helpful in interpreting the new data.

**Move to administration.** Participants in this study suggested different reasons for changing from their initial career “on the front lines” of working with children in the public schools, ranging from expanding their sphere of influence to working with particular leaders. These impetuses were expected as the research commenced, based on my own experience and casual conversations with special education administrators over time.
Within her Theory of Felt Connection, Sinnott (2005) wrote, “Motivation comes from the desire to be more complete or whole, to heal or grow” (p. 30). This supports the participants’ comments about making the change, and links it to moving up on the continuum of adult development.

The prestige and the compensation packages associated with becoming an administrator were mentioned by some of the participants, though these outcomes were not emphasized. The culture of public education, in general, is that it is improper to cite these external motivators as reasons for doing the work, and may have affected how respondents replied. If they had been asked specifically about compensation incentives, for example, I might have heard more about it.

**Divine intervention.** To some degree, environmental factors prompted them to make the move into administration. I also believe inherited factors (i.e., what each of them is meant to learn in the course of life) led to them embarking on a career in educational leadership.

A call to serve was a thread in the participants’ comments about their path in special education. They believe a higher power has led them to do the challenging work they do.

Again, Sinnott (2005) offered a statement that reinforces the universality of their experience. She noted, “Motivation comes from the desire to increase our participation in something spiritual, something larger than our local Self” (p. 30).

**Preparation for leadership.** In the process, the administrators-to-be proceeded from the decision to make the change from their first career to actually preparing for it by
taking the necessary graduate-level coursework. During this time spent in higher
education, none of them recall their spiritual development (and, thus, their adult
development) being addressed. Furthermore, only one participant (and only in a single
course) felt encouraged to delve into her deeper values and how they are related to work.

I believe this represents a shortcoming in the preparation process for future
special education administrators. By not clarifying values early on, it seems that a critical
opportunity in the formation of a leader is squandered.

Kouzes and Posner (2002) lent support for my assertion. They stated, “To
become a credible leader, first you have to comprehend fully the values, beliefs, and
assumptions that drive you” (p. 44).

Additionally, one of the sacred tenets of their practices of exemplary leadership is
“Do What You Say You Will Do” (Kouzes & Posner, 2002, p. 38). If these special
education administrators have not clarified their values, they may not know how to
follow this guidance. In other words, “Before you can do what you say, you must be sure
you mean what you say” (Kouzes & Posner, 2002, p. 45). In short, special education
administrators would be better prepared to lead if they know what they stand for before
they seek employment in the field. This preparation would likely provide a feeling of
confidence and security as they begin this unpredictable and often stressful work.

The future. Participants in this study on special education spirituality were
unanimous in their conviction that they will not seek a position as a superintendent in the
future. Given that they are at different points in their career (early, mid, and late), their
future plans are otherwise, naturally, varied. For those who continued to see themselves working professionally, plans focused around special education.

In addition to being dedicated to serving students with disabilities, I believe their proximity to superintendents contributes to this perspective. Working as closely as they do with their superintendents, they are afforded an up-close view of the struggles endured by the organization’s top leader, thus being turned off from pursuing that role as a career goal.

As was the case for special education administrators’ choice to become a special education administrator, there is also no framework in which to embed this information about how they may leave the field, either to pursue another role or as they retire from public education. In all cases, the participants expressed a desire to continue to support children with disabilities in some way, and that fits with Lips-Wiersma and Morris’ (2011) point about being useful to wider groups of humanity, even to the planet, itself.

Clearly, this group of special education professionals prioritizes giving back in their work and in their lives. That said, they tended to limit their ideas to their local or regional environs, rather than mentioning anything that had a national or global reach.

School districts and educational agencies are, by design, local, regional, and state entities, with few organizations on the national, let alone international, level. Due to the local character of educational entities, a somewhat myopic field of view for leaders working in these settings may result, compared with, for example, leaders in the business world.
After discussing how the special education administrators’ path of service is situated in the literature, it is natural to comment on the larger thematic findings of the study. First, I go to the center of the swirl of their experience, elaborating on the higher power or Ultimate at the very core of their work.

**Thematic Findings**

The swirl of special education administrators’ spiritual leadership has eight elements (see Figure 4), and they speak not only to the main research question, but also to the underlying research sub-questions about making meaning, serving others, and coping with the demands of the work. The first two elements are stable factors: (a) a higher power or Ultimate at the very core and (b) concern for children as their first guiding principle with inherited factors playing a central role.

**A higher power permeates.** None of the sources in the conceptual framework for this study involves spirituality, *per se*. Thus, the idea of a higher power is not discussed in overtly spiritual language in the sources cited.

It is useful, therefore, at this point in the discussion to be reminded of the definition of spirituality chosen for the study:

Spirituality, which comes from the Latin, *spiritus*, meaning ‘breath of life,’ is a way of being and experiencing that comes about through awareness of a transcendent dimension and that is characterized by certain identifiable values in regard to self, others, nature, life and whatever one considers to be the Ultimate.

(Elkins et al., 1988, p. 5)
Lips-Wiersma and Morris (2011) avoid the use of spiritual terminology, instead saying that inspiration “breathes life into [us]” and is the spark that ignites and nourishes our life. However, their emphasis on the breath provides a link to this study’s definition of spirituality, thus making a relevant secular connection (p. 110). The participants in this study expressed emphatically that their version of the Ultimate (e.g., God, the Lord, etc.) is the creating force in their professional work; at the same time, they also expressed the secular qualities found in the description of the core of the Holistic Development Model. This dovetail with the existing research lends weight to the new findings.

As part of this discussion, consideration as to why these special education professionals experience the Ultimate infused into all aspects of their work is appropriate. Based on the data, the conceptual framework, and my own perspective, I imagine these administrators were born with the sensibility to believe in a higher power, and that this disposition was influenced in their youth and adolescence. As adults, they have applied the lessons learned during their formative years, and they have found that it brings them peace and fulfillment, if not always resolution to the situation.

As indicated, the special education leaders experience the Ultimate at the root of their being. Closely tethered to that experience is the deeply embedded priority of improving the lives of children with special needs.

**Students with disabilities at the center.** Participants in the study unanimously endorsed working on behalf of students as a way they make meaning from their work. As people who have given thought to their priorities through their lens of spirituality, they are demonstrating upward moving adult development.
According to Barrett (2010), uncovering meaning in life is the fifth (Cohesion) stage of development of personal consciousness. His idea supports the finding that these special education administrators benefit from knowing what is meaningful about their work.

In the study, participants also expressed fulfillment and satisfaction when they believed their work actually centered on and improved the lives of students. Lips-Wiersma and Morris’ (2011) work supported this notion, as well, when they stated, “There is an inherent meaning in mastering something. When something comes out of my hands that I know to be good, it is a great feeling” (p. 33).

Interpretation of these findings through the lens of the researcher suggests these leaders truly are dedicated to students with disabilities. By crystallizing their vision for work on this noble cause, it provides a moral purpose for their work and allows easy understanding of their values by others. Students with disabilities are not championed by many people in our capitalistic society, and these professionals take up the cause, leading to benefits for children and satisfaction for them.

As described in the above sections, the foundation of special education administrators’ experience of spirituality at work is the Ultimate at the point of origin, with the influence radiating throughout life. Wrapped tightly around that center is a profound motivation to provide something better for students with disabilities and the influence of inherited factors that these people use in life, including in their vocation. These factors give meaning to their work and provide the North Star around which the other themes revolve.
The first layer of the swirl that has both a light and dark side is thought processes. Several elements are explored in order to link the findings of the study with the existing literature.

**Productive thought processes.** The very idea that participants’ thinking would be part of the data, and eventually the themes, of this study is yoked to the conceptual framework. Sinnott (2005) wrote,

To integrate the types of connections and their sometimes disparate or conflicting ideas successfully, yet preserve a concept of a Self that is whole and a coherent strong center of events, postformal complex cognitive operations must be used. The conflicting ideas, and the person’s high motivation to work out the conflict, provide an occasion for the initial learning and continuing development of this complex thinking ability. (p. 30)

Based on Sinnott’s remarks, it is not only to be expected, but actually essential, that the participants engage in this type of thinking in order to continue their development. The fact that these spiritually inspired leaders are doing so, when not all adults do, speaks to their continuing professional and personal growth. I surmise that the participants in this study are able to do this as a result of naturally high capacity and potential combined with environmental influences such as mentors who have modeled productive thought processes.

**Personal qualities.** Several of the personal qualities personified in the participants of this study were noted in the leadership element of the conceptual framework. The participants of this study are humble, but also can be hard on
themselves, holding high standards of performance. Again, this finding is explained by inborn tendencies, including temperament, and high expectations for themselves that may have originated internally but have been fueled by external sources. It is critical for them to continue to work hard and be humble, but for their balanced and continuing development, it is also important to accept mistakes and learn from them.

Kouzes and Posner (2002) suggested, “Humility is the only way to resolve conflicts and contradictions of leadership . . . The best leaders are the best learners” (pp. 397-398). Related to high expectations, they commented that when someone believes in us, that reinforcement encourages the heart.

This idea of being able to face mistakes and learn from them is also echoed in Lips-Wiersma and Morris’ (2011) comments about meaningful work and the uneasy feeling we may have when we fail to come to grips with the reality of our shortcomings. They said, “Meaningfulness cannot be experienced when we pretend, either in relation to ourselves or to our circumstances. It includes awareness that we are imperfect and live in an imperfect world” (p. 44).

Thus, qualities mentioned by this study’s participants, such as patience/tolerance, compassion/kindness, respect, being able to focus, having a strong work ethic, not taking things personally, and being less judgmental of others, likely result in these participants being equipped as encouraging leaders.

*Keeping calm.* Calmness is a quality felt by many of the co-creators of this study. Calmness is associated with spirituality (e.g., being “Zen”), both in the academic literature and in general society. When people can tolerate difficulties and remain
centered, it suggests they are acting from their beliefs, rather than reacting to the
circumstances. This may be one reason why most participants both emphasized and
attempt to cultivate the quality of calm. That said, there are unique personalities, and no
one personality is automatically spiritual or not.

While calm was not among the key leadership qualities found in Kouzes and
Posner’s (2002) work, it could provide one pathway toward finding a way to make sense
of what is happening around us. They wrote, “Leaders guide and channel the
often-frenetic human motion of change toward some end” (p. 224).

Optimism. Due to its prevalence in the data of the study, optimism deserves
special attention in the discussion. The participants feel it is their responsibility to be
optimistic and to share this optimism with others. According to the literature review, this
hopeful attitude is a vital leadership quality. According to Kouzes and Posner (2002),
“This is the time and place for optimism, imagination and enthusiasm” (p. 398).

The odds of closing the achievement gap for students with disabilities amidst the
other challenges of the public education system are not in favor of the students.
Therefore, the innate optimism in the quiver of arrows held by these leaders provides an
important weapon in the fight. In contemporary American culture, optimists need to
swim upstream, making their optimism is a prerequisite for spirituality in the special
education workplace.

Feeling inadequate. In addition to the many proactive qualities participants
voiced, they also shared they have some negative tendencies, including feeling
inadequate for the challenges they face and, at times, being too attached to one way of
looking at a situation. I assert that these professionals feel inadequate because of a fear of failure, high pressure, and not receiving enough support or praise.

This state of development was addressed within the conceptual framework. For example, the fact that several of the participants related the idea that there is evil in the world that cannot be directly overcome denotes the upper limit of their ego development within the characteristics of the Postconventional tier. Cook-Greuter (2000) wrote,

In the Postautonomous step of deconstruction, individuals come to reject the overall stance of the systems thinker. By turning further inward, they start to see through their own thought and language habits, and become aware of the profound splits and paradoxes inherent in rational thought . . . Good and evil, life and death, beauty and ugliness may now appear as two sides of the same coin, as mutually necessitating and defining each other—at least on logical grounds. (p. 234)

The special education administrators who participated in this study demonstrate behaviors and thoughts associated with functioning at an ego development level above the most common for adults (Conventional). They exhibit features of the Postconventional tier in that they are aware of inner conflicts and recognize that what is portrayed is not always what they (or others) actually feel.

Additionally, they exhibit traits associated with the Postconventional tier in that they recognize the complexity of reality and are striving for meaning based in self-actualization. Their spiritual focus and desire for personal growth may provide the opportunities for further development. Cook-Greuter (2000) also noted that a person
does not need to move into the Postautonomous tier (which follows the Postconventional tier) to live a deserving life.

Although the path to enlightenment may demand dedication beyond the capacity of many seekers, there is no reason to despair. The ordinary, personal plan of action offers human beings myriad opportunities to grow in tolerance, love, wisdom, and depth of understanding. (p. 239)

It is important to note that it would be inappropriate to place the participants on the continuum of the Ego Development Theory based on solely on the findings of this study. Instead, the stages are referred to as a reference point for consideration.

A big idea about growth was described succinctly by Sinnott (2005) when she identified a challenge: “The Self that exists at any one time is called into question by experiencing the reality of the transcendent, and the manner in which one perceives the transcendent is transformed as more sides of the Self are accepted” (p. 30). This quote ties the spiritual aspect of this study, through connecting with the experience of the transcendent, back to the personal qualities identified.

The development of adults is progressive, and the more integrated the sides of self, the more one experiences unity and balance, regardless of outside circumstances. In the tough world of special education administration, with the goal of nurturing student success, attention to this development would seem a worthwhile endeavor for the benefit of all.
In addition to personal qualities, another thought process in the swirl of special education administrators’ experience of spirituality in their leadership is reflective metacognition.

**Reflective metacognition.** The special education administrators who participated in the study are thinkers. Furthermore, they think about their own thinking. There are internal processes churning, with their minds engaged in filtering thoughts before they become words or actions, taking perspective on how bad a situation is and checking to see if they are upholding their values.

This inner behavior of “open attention to one’s habits of mind and heart” (Cook-Greuter, 2000, p. 239) is related to higher levels of adult development, meaning making, and spiritual experience. Cook-Greuter indicated,

The regular practice of turning inward and observing one’s own mental processes can also lead to the spontaneous discovery of a direct mode of experiencing in which knower and known momentarily merge, and the personal self-sense disappears. These states are variously called peak moments, flow states or bliss experiences. (p. 235)

The practice of reflective metacognition not only helps people know themselves, but also marks a turning point in considering others. When he wrote about the transformational level of consciousness, the tipping point for learning to balance self-interest with collective interest, Barrett (2010) said, “The main focus at the Transformation level of personal consciousness is self-knowledge and recovery of the
soul. [At this stage, we] become adaptable, more willing to explore other peoples’ points of view” (p. 261).

Thus, the conceptual framework for this study provides a base from which to understand the data from the study in the more specific areas of reflective metacognition, as well.

*Filtering thoughts.* Participants in this study described recognizing that they need to edit their thoughts. Often with humor, they shared strategies they use to keep themselves from saying inappropriate things, even under stress. This trait is another signal of higher adult development, according to Cook-Greuter (2000). She described “the language habit,” whereby people with high levels of development become aware of how language affects them and how even thinking in terms of words limits the ability to be a nonevaluative witness (p. 227). The fact that these educational leaders are aware of the language habit and are consciously counteracting it is a sign of their advanced development.

On a less esoteric level, Lips-Wiersma and Morris (2011) addressed self-awareness and how it is related to making meaning. They wrote,

At the heart of [the Developing our Inner Self] pathway is the idea that an unexamined life is not worth living, and who we become as a result of being engaged in work, and in other parts of our lives, greatly matters to us as human beings. (p. 20)

The participants in this study want to serve children with special needs and they focus their attention on this goal. The type of self-reflection described by Lips-Wiersma
and Morris (2011) describes this alignment and shows it is not unique to these participants. In addition to filtering their thoughts, these special education administrators have learned to recognize that things may not be as bad as they seem.

*Things seem worse beforehand.* This subtheme is related to optimism, but is not an innate trait. Instead, it is learning forged by experience and then remembered at the right time. Kouzes and Posner (2002) discussed how this learning contributes to the ability of effective leaders to change. They said, “Getting ourselves and others to change old mindsets and habits and substitute new ones—and commit to them, long-term—is daunting. Even with the best of intentions, people tend to revert to old and familiar patterns” (p. 208).

The timing of the realization that things seem worse than they actually may be is critical. Special education administrators who recognize this and refrain from getting worked up in the first place are winning. By maintaining a more even keel, confidence builds, thus paving the way for additional success.

*Sticking with values.* Kouzes and Posner (2002) shared an engaging image: “All great leaders have wrestled with their souls . . . Such personal searching is essential in the development of leaders . . . You can’t lead others until you’ve first led yourself through a struggle with opposing values” (pp. 393-94).

Lips-Wiersma and Morris (2011) carried the idea of sticking with values further when they wrote, “[Being true to self] focuses on the aspects of not being false, being in accordance with the reality of oneself and being in perfect tune with oneself” (p. 24).
Clearly, the participants in the study of special education administrator spirituality prioritize acting in accordance with their values. Kouzes and Posner (2002) reinforced the import of this intention when they shared

John Gardner’s four moral goals of leadership: (a) releasing human potential, (b) balancing the needs of the individual and the community, (c) defending the fundamental values of the community, and (d) instilling in individuals a sense of initiative and responsibility. (p. 393)

While none of the study’s participants mentioned the larger interests invoked by Gardner, they absolutely described a desire for the common good. It may be that their field of view is a bit too focused on the details of their work in order for them to see the moral goals of leadership and where they can lead. Or, it may simply be that the interview questions were not posed in a way that resulted in answers that addressed the bigger picture.

Thus far, the contents of the swirl have been internal, unobservable. The next layer becomes visible, as these leaders enact their core values.

**Enacting core values.** From the earliest beginnings of this study, there has been a question about the relationships among beliefs, values, and spirituality. In fact, one of the assumptions listed in Chapter 1 is that the terms core values, beliefs, and spirituality are regarded as synonymous. The findings suggest that the connections cannot be easily summarized, but bear elaboration. In this study, beliefs and spirituality were often linked in participants’ responses. To me, this indicates their overall belief system is tied to their spiritual outlook.
Although beliefs and values have been used together to describe elements of a person’s character, the leaders in this study were more likely to pair the word values with the word morals, rather than either the words beliefs or spirituality. At times, they attributed their values to teachings in their religion. Since many of the participants stated that there is no separation between their spirituality and their religion, for those people, beliefs and values would both be related to spirituality. For participants who are not as identified with religion at this point in their lives, values were referred to as guidelines for how to treat people and act with integrity.

In both cases, having similar values was a benefit to working productively with others, while beliefs were not referenced in that way. This suggests holding certain beliefs is neutral in terms of effective job performance, but that shared values are necessary to be able to envision and pursue a common purpose. To the extent, then, that their spirituality influences their perceptions and actions related their values—and the values of others—the special education administrators’ values are shaped by their beliefs, which are closely coupled with their spirituality.

An important take-away here is that shared values are desired; however, there is no need for shared beliefs. This allows for a common vision and shared aspirations while honoring completely each person’s unique belief system.

Writing on developing the inner self for the sake of making meaning in work, Lips-Wiersma and Morris (2011) noted that the moral nature of our character is highlighted, and they also emphasized the ability of people to make a distinction between right and wrong. Their participants talked about honesty and trustworthiness, and having
the courage to do what is right rather than convenient. This suggests the themes found in this study of special education administrators have universal qualities also found in other populations.

From a leadership practices perspective, Kouzes and Posner (2002) also lent credibility to the findings of this study. They wrote, “To effectively model the behavior they expect of others, leaders must first be clear about their guiding principles” (p. 14). After leaders are clear about their own principles, they are then able to model the way. In other words, it is not enough to know internally what one’s values are, but an essential leadership skill is to externalize them.

The data from this study’s participants depicted that they seek to do so. Kouzes and Posner (2002) said, “[It is] necessary to . . . build and affirm shared values [and] align actions with values” (p. 77). Therefore, establishing the values is just the first step, with relationships—and the actions taken to sustain those relationships—being a sought after outcome.

**Trust.** The examples of trust provided the participants of this study centered around giving others power. This relates strongly to Kouzes and Posner’s (2002) exemplary leadership practice of Enabling Others to Act, which, in turn, fosters collaboration and builds trust.

The special education leaders in the study are building this valuable cycle of trust. I believe they are willing to take the risks associated with doing so due to their faith that the Ultimate permeates, in spite of a culture of mistrust on many fronts, including in some of our schools, our communities, our nation and the world.
Psychological studies have established that people who are trusting (as opposed to those who view the world with suspicion) are more likely to be happy and psychologically adjusted than those who view the world suspiciously (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). As trust develops, people offer more ideas to leaders and leaders consider and implement others’ ideas more often. This leads to more trust and builds a positive, reciprocal process (Kouzes & Posner, 2002).

**Repair mistakes.** Mistakes on the part of leaders is a sensitive subject. Kouzes and Posner (2002) provided some perspective, “By admitting you were wrong, you can build credibility rather than destroy it . . . Early recognition and admission of mistakes promotes learning, which in turn prevents similar errors in the future” (p. 233).

In this study, the participants were matter-of-fact about the inevitability of making mistakes. Their core values dictated that they apologize for them and try to make amends. This bodes well for these administrators and those with whom they work.

In terms of adult development, the instinct of these administrators to repair mistakes is also relevant. Sinnott (2005) stated, “Motivation comes from our desires to maintain and improve ties with people important to us” (p. 30). Thus, it may not only be core values that drive these administrators to atone for mistakes, but their underlying yearning for stronger relationships. They want to manifest the connections in their work to feel more fulfilled. Society makes this hard, due to a trend toward isolation, but there is awareness about the importance of relationships (e.g., a rise in social media). This idea is addressed further later in this chapter, when both partnerships and collaboration are discussed.
**Honesty.** Participants of this study described situations in which they were honest, even when it was tough to do so, when it is for the good of others. At times, they experience the dissonance of working with others who may not be ready to hear the honesty, and sometimes feel separated from others as a result. The capacity of the other people with whom these special education administrators work likely had a significant influence on this finding.

According to Kouzes and Posner (2002), “Honesty is the single most important ingredient in the leader-constituent relationship” (p. 25). This idea goes beyond simply being truthful; it involves being willing to let our real selves shine through. Kouzes and Posner (2002) wrote that leaders must express themselves genuinely, going beyond just words to “authentically communicate your beliefs in ways that uniquely express who you are” (p. 45).

Barrett (2010) also addressed assertion of authenticity in our words and actions. He wrote,

Fully expressing our inner self (who we really are, including our suppressed emotions) without fear of what others think, particularly our parents and peers, comes in at the transformational level of personal consciousness. It gives us the opportunity to make choices that are more authentic and reflect who we really are. (p. 260)

Based on Barrett’s interpretation, it takes courage to show who we are and what we believe in by acting in a way that is true to our beliefs. In order to do so, a certain level, the Transformational level (to be exact) must be reached.
Within the subtheme of honesty, I did not hear any examples of these leaders not being honest in some way. As fallible human beings, it is reasonable to entertain the possibility that they may have instances where complete honesty did not occur. Potential explanations for this not being part of the data are that (a) they really may be honest all of the time, (b) they were reluctant to share something embarrassing with me, or (c) they may not have recognized or remembered times when something other than the whole truth was forthcoming.

**Working within parameters.** If special education administrators believe they are not able to act from their authentic center, they are not able to express their full potential. Over time, this could lead to disenchantment and loss of self-efficacy in their work on behalf of some of our nation’s most vulnerable citizens. The mismatch between their vision and passion and many of the laws and regulations they are employed to uphold is a conflict that is addressed in the recommendations section of this document.

The frustration these leaders experience is explained in Lips-Wiersma and Morris’ (2011) work on making meaning, specifically in the area of Expressing Full Potential. Expressing Full Potential mainly involves creating, achieving, and influencing.

Societal factors are strong in this area. There are competing priorities and ideas about the use of time, energy, and financial resources, thus setting up this juxtaposition.

**Direct assistance to families.** Lips-Wiersma and Morris’ (2011) Map of Meaning offered a frame in which to fit this data. Under the category of Work is Service to Others, they identified two subthemes: making a difference and meeting the needs of humanity and the planet.
The acknowledgment that helping others is a human need, and not just a spiritually driven need, is an important concept for the applicability of this study. Additionally, it is interesting that Lips-Wiersma and Morris (2011) took their idea of making a difference to the level of the planet stretches beyond the scope of anything mentioned by the participants of this study. It may be that if they understood the potentially far-reaching implications of every good they do for families, they would feel more satisfied in their work. I suspect the reason I did not hear about an exponentially larger sphere of influence is that participants have not been exposed to, or thought much about, the idea of global impact of their work.

**Productive partnerships.** The instinct that the participants in this study enact—by strengthening and empowering the other adults with whom they work—is actually critical for the wellbeing of the school districts in which they work. Again, I believe they empower others naturally, due to perceived connectivity and symbiosis.

Lips-Wiersma and Morris (2011) emphasized that in order for full potential to be realized, influencing others will occur. They also mentioned getting others on board, inspiring others, and reminding others of why we do what we do.

While Lips-Wiersma and Morris’ (2011) comments focused more on the effect partnerships have on the leader, Kouzes and Posner (2002) highlighted what partnership can do for others and for the organization. Particularly because of the deserving populations being served through these relationships, the affiliative behavior of these special education administrators in this area is prosocial and is a result of their underlying desire to do what it takes to support students with disabilities.
Kouzes and Posner (2002) said,

Leaders who can strengthen others can boost worker performance. At the core, it’s all about how people are made to feel . . . Creating a climate where people are involved and important is at the heart of strengthening others. (pp. 283-284)

As indicated earlier, the next ring of the swirl is also an external, visible construct. Fulfilling collaboration emerges from the foundational step of building productive partnerships.

**Fulfilling collaboration.** As part of her interpretive remarks on the Theory of Felt Connection, Sinnott (2005) discussed how interactions with others have bearing on who people are and who they are becoming. She wrote,

The Self that exists at any one time is called into question by experiencing the reality of others, and the manner in which one perceives and relates to others is transformed as more sides of the self are accepted. (p. 29)

Thus, the strong convictions this study’s participants feel about collaboration are given even more weight, as it not only impact students, families, and work, but their very own personal development.

Lips-Wiersma and Morris (2011) also accentuated the concept that everyone gains by collaboration within the pathway of Unity with Others. Further, as mavens of leadership, it is no surprise that Kouzes and Posner (2002) had a lot to say about collaboration. They indicated, “Leadership is not a solo act, it’s a team effort” (Kouzes & Posner, 2002, p. 242). They elaborated, “Leaders accept and act on the paradox of
power: we become most powerful when we give our own power away . . . and use power in service to others because capable and confident people perform better” (pp. 284, 301).

This strongly connects the data in the study of special education administrators to the literature in that they see themselves as working in the service of others in addition to being collaboration-oriented. However, although the participants talked about collaboration, I only inconsistently heard about giving power away as discussed by Kouzes and Posner (2002). I believe intermittent or frequent insecurity about the skills and commitment of some collaborators, as well as a strong sense of responsibility influences this behavior.

The next step is to draw out connections for the subthemes. A wide range of evidence was found in the area of listening carefully.

*Listen carefully.* The centrality of the data around special education administrators’ view of careful listening as critical to their work cannot be overstated. Kouzes and Posner (2002) also gave it much attention. Pragmatically, they talked about how the simple act of listening demonstrates respect, and noted, “People listen more attentively to those who listen to them” (p. 248).

Furthermore, Kouzes and Posner suggested, “Sensitivity to others is no trivial skill; rather, it is a truly precious human ability. But it isn’t complex: it requires only receptiveness to other people and a willingness to listen” (2002, p. 150). The participants of this study expressed that they had learned to be better listeners over time, sometimes as a result of problems that emerged based on not listening closely enough.
In the field of special education there are *inside* constituents (e.g., teachers, related service providers, etc.) and *outside* constituents (e.g., parents). Barrett’s (2010) comments addressed that aspect of careful listening,

The possibility of seeing the world and ourselves through the eyes of others is also part of the transformational level of personal consciousness. We must be willing to suspend judgment, to actively listen, and to make compromises—even to change our beliefs. We must also become willing to receive feedback. (p. 261)

The leaders in this study described hearing what others said and then being amenable to doing something different because of it. This is another instance where they are rising to higher levels of consciousness in their work.

In addition to listening from the position of leader, the participants also endorsed listening from the position of being a learner.

**Mentors.** The encouragement and validation provided by mentors often nurtured the participants’ willingness to be themselves in their work. It stopped short, however, of inspiring them to express their spirituality overtly.

Kouzes and Posner’s (2002) commented on mentorship, indicating that respected leaders can facilitate us finding our own voice. Lips-Wiersma and Morris (2011) noted that “[Personal growth] covers the idea of growth as deliberately ‘cultivated,’ and the idea of allowing growth to come naturally into existence” (p. 22). Relationships with mentors matches with the concept of deliberately cultivating growth, another useful behavior exhibited by these leaders.
**Persistence.** The willingness to persist, to continue to come back to the table with an open mind and heart—even after things have not been harmonious—is a key trait that allows effective collaboration to occur. I surmise the participants are persistent because of the spark of the divine they recognize not only in themselves, but also in others.

Under the heading of Encourage the Heart, Kouzes and Posner (2002) provided a window into how persistence can help when they wrote, “Genuine acts of caring [by leaders] uplift the spirits and draw people forward” (p. 19).

Sinnott (2005) described an even stronger connection to a higher power in her remarks about persisting with others.

The manner in which one perceives and relates to others may be changed by one’s growing awareness of the Transcendent (for example, God, spirit, the earth). And our connection with the transcendent might change when challenged by the behavior of others close to us. (pp. 29-30)

Treating others as they want to be treated is a similar subtheme, and was often referred to by participants as the Golden Rule.

**The Golden Rule.** Given how prevalent the idea of the Golden Rule was in the special education administrators’ comments, it was surprising how little evidence about it was found in the conceptual framework. The only reference found was in Kouzes and Posner’s (2002) description of trust, indicating a willingness to go first in trust is an example of the Golden Rule.

In spite of the dearth of notations in the literature used for this study, it is important to understand its widespread existence in the value systems of the participants.
Since it is a common, easily understood idea, it is also a necessary element in depicting the participants. Because of the general acceptance of the idea of the Golden Rule (treat others as you want to be treated) in our culture, I would suggest that is the simple explanation as to why I heard it in the data created in this study.

The next three subthemes fall on the shadow side of the swirl. They represent the challenges the special education administrators face as they try to engage in fulfilling collaboration. They include skill and will deficits of others, others’ perception of them, and not expressing their spirituality at work.

**Skill deficits.** Collaboration, by definition, requires input from at least two people. Although the input from different collaborators may not always be equal, a certain skill level on all parts facilitates the process. Participants in the study shared experiences of staff members who appear to lack the skills necessary to carry their part of serving students with disabilities. This situation leads to frustration for special education administrators, even those who have a spiritual outlook. Kouzes and Posner (2002) offered that training, even during periods of change, is a solution for the problem of skill deficits.

This advice provides both an explanation and a suggested course of action for those who apparently lack the skills needed to serve students with disabilities. Plus, this perspective on why people are not on board gives them the benefit of the doubt and supports them, rather than getting negative and moving away from them.

**Will deficits.** I agree with Kouzes and Posner (2002), in that apparent apathy on the part of some educators is likely to be the result of an absence of shared values and
vision. They advocated convincingly for spending time on this initiative, stating that it is a shared vision that will sustain organizations through difficult times and that it is what gives meaning and purpose to life and work.

With will deficits being a significant challenge to collaboration from the participants’ perspective, it is reasonable to assert that these leaders may not have successfully conceived a shared vision and values with their collaborators. Evidence that this is a common problem was found in the conceptual framework. Kouzes and Posner (2002) reported that Inspiring a Shared Vision is the least frequently employed of the Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership. Furthermore, they found that only one in 10 leaders believe they are inspiring, and it is the practice with which they feel with most uncomfortable. They wrote,

It’s not necessary to be a famous, charismatic person to inspire a shared vision. What is necessary is believing and developing the skills to transmit that belief. This deeply felt belief, along with commitment and enthusiasm for it, is what motivates movements and energizes enterprises. It’s this belief, genuinely displayed, that brings the vision to life for everyone. (Kouzes & Posner, 2002, p. 144)

This perspective offers a realistic pathway for special education administrators to shift the will deficits that cause them frustration as they engage in collaboration for students with disabilities. It may also help address the obstacles described by the next subtheme, the perceptions of others.
Perceptions of others. In some cases, participants in this study hear from others that they are viewed with suspicion and/or that they have an intimidating demeanor. If this is the case for administrators who identify themselves as spiritual, they are likely widely held beliefs.

The fact that these administrators are cognizant of the perceptions of others is explained by Cook-Greuter (2000).

Systems thinkers, or Autonomous [Postconventional] persons in Ego Development Theory, are aware of interpretation as an inevitable aspect of all meaning making. . . They now realize that their perspectives are local, partial, context-dependent and culturally conditioned. [They] are aware of themselves as participant observers, or as inevitably part of the problem space . . . They still believe in a rationally knowable reality and rely on logically derived solutions and procedures. (p. 234)

In other words, as constituents make meaning and develop ideas about their work, bosses, and so forth, many factors contribute to their points of view. Although changing people’s opinions is difficult, Kouzes and Posner (2002) offered that being forward-looking is an essential quality to communicate to others within the organization.

So, in addition to leaders understanding their own values, developing a shared vision, and doing what they say they will do, developing their own foresight is necessary to garner the support and regard of constituents. Due to the difficulties noted in the working within parameters subtheme of enacting core values, this is a nuanced process. Being honest and explaining the competing items may also help build collaborative
relationships with those who are fearful or reluctant in some way. By doing so, special education administrators would begin to let others know where they are coming from and where they are going.

In our popular culture, attitudes of judgment and criticism are often shown as the norm. This environmental factor, especially when added to the natural human condition of seeing ourselves as separate from one another (until, that is, we reach very high levels of ego development), is anticipated to have given rise to this subtheme about the way others view these (and perhaps other) leaders.

Secreted spirituality. The spiritual special education administrators who participated in this study do not talk openly about their beliefs at work. They have concerns about whether that would be appropriate and even whether it might be offensive. This creates dissonance and emptiness for them, though, as they are leaving an essential part of themselves unexpressed at work. Kouzes and Posner (2002) offered ideas about how to approach this problem, saying, “once leaders take the risk of being open, others are more likely to take a similar risk—and thereby take the next step necessary to build interpersonal trust” (p. 248).

It is reasonable to suggest that special education administrators would be safe in—and likely to benefit from—sharing more of their spiritual selves at work. It could inspire and help them connect with others, while also allowing them to acknowledge and honor their own core motivation. Without question, finesse would need to be practiced in order to present ideas broadly without pressure to adopt the leaders’ beliefs in order for each individual’s own personal beliefs to be honored.
Working collaboratively on behalf of students was a major theme in this study, as evidenced by the numerous subthemes and plentiful data about successes and struggles with the process. Challenges are a part of any profession, and the next section explores links between the findings of this study and the conceptual framework in terms of how these leaders cope with uncertainty and change.

Resilience to uncertainty and change. Compared with other P–12 educators, these administrators have a propensity to seek and embrace change. Thus, they put themselves in situations where they will experience, and hopefully learn from, change.

Within the conceptual framework for this study, the authors made some useful observations about change. First, Sinnott (2005) wrote, “As humans we paradoxically desire both continuity and change” (p. 29). Second, Kouzes and Posner (2002) commented about how successful leaders cope with change and support others in change, noting that leaders are experimenters and have a hardy attitude about change.

The findings of this study on the experience of spirituality in special education administrators’ work lives suggested they have mechanisms for handling uncertainty and change. These constructs include self-regulation strategies, letting go, dealing with the unpredictable, and continued learning.

Self-regulation strategies. Kouzes and Posner (2002) acknowledged the importance of coping strategies, emphasizing the function they serve in staying in touch with oneself. They wrote that each of us needs to find a way “in which you can hear your own voice speaking to you about what truly matters” (p. 66).
In elaborating on her theory of adult development, Sinnott (2005) expressly recommended meditation for connecting the sides of the self. She wrote, “Training awareness through mental stillness in meditation allows awareness and compassion to grow and skilled behavior to emerge” (p. 36).

Finally, the work of Cook-Greuter (2000) offered some interpretation on the types of self-regulation strategies utilized by the participants. She noted that features of the Conscientious stage (Conventional tier) include a sense of responsibility, differentiated self-criticism, and long-term, self-evaluated goals. People at this stage, if they accept the idea of a higher power, usually adhere to a particular belief system or ideology and do so to the letter, rather than to the spirit, of the teachings (Cook-Greuter, 2000).

Analyzing the various self-regulation strategies in light of Cook-Greuter’s (2000) assertions, I believe venting is an example of Conventional development. It is a communal activity, yet emphasizes the separate, individual self. Another self-regulation technique that may be interpreted through the lens of Ego Development Theory is praying for others. This seems to reach the Postconventional tier, as it tacitly recognizes that there is a connecting force that one could appeal to on behalf of another person.

In this subtheme on self-regulatory practices, I was surprised that only one participant mentioned meditation. I thought, with the current spiritual zeitgeist, I would hear more on this topic. Furthermore, I was incredulous that no one mentioned doing yoga. With the prevalence of yoga classes and the ubiquitous claims that it benefits body, mind, and spirit, I anticipated that these professionals would at least be casual practitioners.
As to why yoga and meditation were not well represented in the data, I have two ideas. First, it may be that the participants’ full schedules prevent them from adding one more thing, and their longer-standing self-regulatory activities (ones that are not as recently popularized as yoga) take precedence. Second, it is possible that, with the relatively traditional Western religious/spiritual background of the participants, they are not drawn to meditation or yoga because of their Eastern origin.

**Letting go.** Continuing discussion about the developmental level of these spiritual special education administrators, Barrett’s work in the development of personal consciousness offers some perspective. Barrett (2010) described people in the sixth stage of personal consciousness—Inclusion—as focused on making a difference at work or in society. Purpose is demonstrated through action, even if it means “giving up a whole way of life that you have become used to . . . or confronting more of your fears” (p. 262).

The participants in the study shared the thought process they used as they made decisions to let go/move on, and they resonate with Barrett’s comments. They truly believed it was better to go, even when it would have been easier to stay.

**Continued learning.** Working in the field of education, the expectation of lifelong learning is a given. Even more, these professionals chose to study beyond the requirements for continuing education by pursuing additional degrees and licensure beyond their initial career. In itself, this fact authentically evidences their belief that ongoing learning is worthwhile.

Kouzes and Posner (2002) offered commentary about leaders who prioritize learning. They said, “Leaders are simply great learners” (p. 216). They also noted,
“Promoting learning requires tolerance for error and a framework for forgiveness” (p. 216). This sentiment provides an apt segue into the next section on unpredictability.

**Dealing with the unpredictable.** Within the conceptual framework for this study, Kouzes and Posner’s (2002) comments on Challenge the Process supported understanding this subtheme. They wrote, “Leaders are pioneers—people who are willing to step out into the unknown. They search for opportunities to innovate, grow, and improve,” even in tumultuous times (p. 16).

This line of thinking is closely related to qualities and behaviors described in other themes, which illustrates the interconnectedness and swirling effect of these administrators’ spiritual experience in their work. It is important to note, though, that these leaders often feel they are struggling to deal with the unpredictable and with pervasive change, and that leads to doubt, loneliness and feeling misunderstood.

The entire arena of education, including, but not limited to special education, is changing rapidly. This environmental factor is undoubtedly the main cause of uncertainty in this subtheme.

**Doubt.** In spite of all of their effort and their connection to the Ultimate, the participants of this study sometimes experience doubt. One possible source of this doubt could be on the cognitive development continuum.

Sinnott (2005) posited one explanation.

Failure to develop complex postformal cognitive representations and some integration of the differing realities of the several types of felt connections leaves the Self in a fragmented and conflicted state, with few conscious cognitive tools
to become whole and learn. The person in such a state may never consciously conceptualize and grasp a way to be able to live with multiple strongly felt connections and related ideas. (pp. 30-31)

If these administrators are, even at times, unable to connect to themselves, others, and their version of the Ultimate, it would lead to inner conflict, a lack of meaning, and/or feelings of isolation. Difficulty connecting is likely to be the result of stresses in the environment. Alternatively, it could be a result of failure to realize that connecting, as counter-intuitive as it may seem, under certain trying circumstances, would actually help the situation.

Another way of looking at these feelings of doubt is provided in Cook-Greuter’s (2000) work. She wrote,

Unlike earlier stages, Construct-aware [Postautonomous] individuals consciously experience the ego’s clever and vigilant machinations at self-preservation . . . Realizing the bankruptcy of one’s automatic way of meaning making can be profoundly distressing and frustrating. (p. 235)

She went on to indicate that she has observed two distinct responses to this dilemma. She noted, “Some Construct-aware individuals remain indebted to and try to perfect discursive rationality; others seem drawn to move beneath or beyond it” (Cook-Greuter, 2000, p. 235).

Relating Cook-Greuter’s research to the data used for this study, it seems that features of both responses were found in the comments of the special education administrators. This is not surprising, given the very small number of people who have
been scored in the Construct-aware stage of Ego Development Theory. When doubt is combated with increased effort at setting things right in the world in which they work, I believe this is functioning in the Postconventional tier. However, when participants were able to look deeper and see that doubt could be overcome by surrendering to their higher power, it is an example of going beyond the ego. Thus, it is people’s level of ego development that underlies feelings of doubt and how they react to it.

Returning to the leadership angle to try and understand these administrators’ feelings of doubt, Kouzes and Posner (2002) noted, “Leaders, by definition, are out in front of change, not behind it trying to catch up. Innovation and leadership are nearly synonymous” (p. 195). If the leaders in the study feel like they are not in front of change, for whatever reason, it could be the cause of feelings of doubt. As indicated earlier, with constant change, it is difficult to feel proactive.

**Feeling lonely and misunderstood.** The last subtheme in the area of resilience to uncertainty and change is on the obstacle side of the swirl. As they operate in their environments, special education administrators feel lonely and misunderstood by parents, teachers and other administrators. Barrett (2010) explained that people need to feel self-worth (third stage of development of personal consciousness), but that, sometimes, people (a) develop fears about their worthiness, (b) develop an exaggerated sense of competitiveness, and/or (c) display arrogance as a way to cover up their fears of inadequacy.

Special education administrators should reflect on whether they have developed any of these traits and if they have, seek to ameliorate them in order to avoid further
alienation of others. While I did hear some fears about worthiness, I did not hear about excessive competitiveness or displays of arrogance. It could be that these exist, but the methods used in the study did not reveal them.

Another explanation for feeling lonely and misunderstood was described by Lips-Wiersma and Morris (2011) in the section of their Map of Meaning called Unity with Others. They suggested that experiencing unity and connection with others is fostered by making assumptions visible and talking about why we do things before we actually do them. If special education administrators are not doing this already, it would be worth trying. Especially from participants who emphasized strategic leadership in their comments, I heard how they externalize their assumptions and philosophies to those with whom they work. I think it is their confidence level, as well as their knowledge about leadership, that prompts them to do this.

Going first with reaching out to share about themselves may result in others being willing to draw closer to the special education administrators, thus assuaging these sad feelings. The inherited factor of fear about how others will react is likely to be a barrier to this practice, as is the environmental obstacle of having the time and space to do so.

The spiritual special education administrators who participated in this study have some success in abiding with uncertainty and change, yet they fail sometimes and struggle to regain their confidence and balance. In the next theme represented in the swirl of their experience, there are extreme highs and lows, with the lows comprising the majority of the sentiments shared.
Work as part of an integrated life. The title of this theme represents the best-case scenario for the participants of the study. Going back to the graphic of the swirl, recall that working for the benefit of children with special needs is the dominant influence in the way these leaders make meaning of their work. When they find they are able to see benefit to others and when work fits into a balanced life, they are satisfied. However, they perceive the obstacles to their work coming to fruition often prevail.

Difficulty dropping work. The administrators in the study related that they have a hard time turning their energy and attention away from work after hours. This compromises their ability to rest and recharge for the challenges ahead.

In their description of the tension between self and others, Lips-Wiersma and Morris (2011) provided supporting evidence for this theme. They explained that the existence of this internal/external tension makes it hard to know how to give meaningfully to others while still nourishing ourselves. These leaders do not have difficulty dropping work because of a desire for power or achievement, but, instead, because they care so much about the students with disabilities they serve. Consequently, difficulty dropping work expands into work dominating the life of these dedicated administrators.

Work dominating life. Several of the participants described how their work encroaches into the lives and results in a lack of balance. Lips-Wiersma and Morris (2011) identified two tensions that relate to meaning: one between Being and Doing and the other between Self and Others.
Thus, as common sense would suggest, the administrators who participated in this study are not alone in the experience of difficulty maintaining balance. They overemphasize Doing and Others at the expense of Being and Self because of the legal responsibilities of their jobs, their natural disposition to put forth their very best, and their dedication to students with disabilities. Kouzes and Posner (2002) reinforced the need to put work in its place, advising, “Do not allow work to consume you. Get involved in the world that surrounds you. The very best leaders have numerous pursuits and interests” (p. 397).

**Work as part of a whole life.** In spite of the challenges they face, these leaders do, in fact, manage to experience meaning in their work as an inseparable part of who they are. They live spiritually and care about kids no matter where they are or what else is happening around them. Several sources within the conceptual framework for this study contained ideas to which the data could be connected.

Sinnott (2005) commented about how we experience an integrated life from the perspective of adult development.

Bridged by our felt connections [to others, sides of self and the transcendent] we manage to experience and understand inner change and continuity over time as we learn during adulthood . . . Paradoxically, the more a Self learns to be balanced and interwoven and interconnected, the more that single Self becomes important in the creation of the dance [of felt connection]. (pp. 27-28)

Kouzes and Posner (2002) explained how work fits into the life of a modern, conscientious leader,
There is a deep human yearning to make a difference. We want to know that we’ve done something on this earth, that there’s a purpose to our existence . . .

Work has become a place where people pursue meaning and identity. (p. 152)

Developing a personal credo, they opined, resolves internal competing beliefs and allows a person to lead with integrity in all parts of life (Kouzes & Posner, 2002).

The spirituality of these special education administrators is clearly part of a set of personal commitments, whether formalized or not, that is an internal support to their ability to integrate work and life. Detachment from short-term results of their actions was not mentioned by any of the participants, yet it might help them achieve better balance. I posit that I did not hear this perspective because of their particular belief systems and American society’s obsession with immediate results.

The outermost layer of the swirl of experience for special education administrators’ spiritual leadership is made up of their appreciation for and reliance on their conceptualization of the Ultimate. It is all positive and supportive in their quest for meaning and balance, with no shadow side.

Appreciating the grace of the Ultimate/Reliance on the support of the Ultimate. When special education administrators were invited to participate in this study by an email to their statewide professional organization, it said, “If you experience spirituality in your work and are willing to participate in my study . . .” Thus, it was fully anticipated that there would be a theme related to the Ultimate as part of the research findings.
Through the data generation and analysis phases of this study, it became clear that the participants have a default mode that involves appreciation of their higher power. Additionally, however, they increase their reliance on the divine when they face difficult situations. Interestingly, all five sources in the conceptual framework for this study provided a context in which to ground the findings in this theme.

Cook-Greuter (2000) reminded readers about the conventional Western understanding that mental growth follows a certain trajectory, and that each stage transcends and integrates the content of the prior stages. In terms of Ego Development Theory (which, in the adult stages, moves from gaining self-awareness toward a Uniative state), this means of development is conventional and limited. Cook-Greuter (2000) posited that one of the reasons about 90% of people make sense of their experience in this way is that unconsciously held beliefs, norms, and assumptions about reality are acquired during socialization and schooling.

When the personal narratives of the participants were reviewed, there was a common thread of some form of spirituality in their formative years. Interestingly, the professionals who volunteered for this study were all raised in a Christian religious tradition, and participated in church activities in their youth. I believe this early exposure was an environmental influence that embedded structures that would allow them to feel connection to a higher power later on in their work life. At the same time, I do not suggest that either Christianity or going to church is a prerequisite for experiencing the Ultimate in a person’s occupation.
Given the relative uniformity of the participants who volunteered for the study, it is fitting to consider whether special education administrators of different (i.e., not Christian) spiritual persuasions might have responded in line with the data gathered with this set of leaders. For example, how would atheists who consider themselves spiritual have answered? Would persons raised in the Muslim tradition have a similar experience in their work lives?

After a lengthy thought process, I hold that as long as special education administrators currently consider themselves to be spiritual (whatever it means to the individual person), the results would fit. Chiefly, I base this scholarly opinion on the principle that all great spiritual traditions rest on the core of Perennial Philosophy: there is a divine spark in the human soul, and discovering it in ourselves, then realizing that it is the same in all living things, is the realization of the goal of life. Thus, it is inconsequential what name of the Lord is used (if any) or what traditions are followed (if any) in order for the ideas in this study to apply.

Sinnott (2005) also reflected on the role of our society in the formation of a spiritual outlook, pointing out, “our culture is strong on scientific objectivity, taking action, analytical thought, and individuality. It is less adept at felt connection, spirituality, community, emotional response, and synthetic thought” (p. 33). This gives a clue as to why it can be difficult to feel the influence of the Ultimate at work, even for those who are aware of it and consciously strive to perceive it.

When considering the responses shared by the special education administrators in this study, they are striving for, but have not achieved, Unity consciousness, the
uppermost level of personal consciousness described by Barrett (2010). At this level, people understand they are operating from a place of infinite connectedness and that whatever is needed for completion of the mission will be provided.

The participants in this study definitely exhibit markers of seeking unity of personal consciousness. They see the Ultimate as weaving through everything they do, and their intention is that everything they do in their work is for the benefit of students with disabilities. This finding is explained by these leaders’ core motivation to be of service to students with special needs, as well as an inherited disposition about the role of a higher power in the world.

Unity was also elaborated on by Lips-Wiersma and Morris (2011). They wrote, “[Unity with Others] is understanding that humanity is essentially one and that experiencing this is what enriches our humanity” (p. 25). Furthermore, they indicated, “Inspiration often includes the concept of grace and joy, a combination of outer animation and our inner response” (p. 42).

In addition to a connection to the Ultimate being the encapsulating theme for the swirl of the participants’ experience, it is important to remember that a higher power, based in love, is also at the center of it all. The graphic depicts it as a heart because of the love that was described—explicitly by some, implicitly by others—by the leaders in the study. Relatedly, Kouzes and Posner (2002) closed their influential book with this clear message, “Of all the things that sustain a leader over time, love is the most lasting . . . Leadership is not an affair or the head. Leadership is an affair of the heart” (p. 399).
Thinking about the findings of this study, I heard surprisingly little evidence about the participants showing appreciation of individual excellence and finding opportunities to celebrate community values and victories, practices strongly advocated for by Kouzes and Posner (2002). Of course, it is possible that this near-absence of instances of celebration in work is a result of the questions posed or not posed. If there really are few examples of Encouraging the Heart, I suspect the underlying reason is a combination of (a) the way these leaders are viewed by others, (b) how they are relied upon in their position, (c) the high standards they set for themselves and others, (d) the need for encouragement being overlooked, (e) a feeling that the compensation in the job is (or should be) enough, and, most of all, (f) difficulty finding time and the resources to do it. Given its vast importance, I would suggest two specific ways to provide this heartfelt support.

First, encouragement needs to be given to the hearts of the special education administrators: to themselves, by themselves. Sometimes, they cannot depend on encouragement coming from the outside, so they need to take charge of this essential leadership dimension for themselves. It is important to acknowledge, even if only privately, the noble, selfless work these leaders are doing. They need to know that it is not selfish or self-centered to celebrate the effort they expend on behalf of students with disabilities.

Additionally (recognizing that there are internal processes at play, in addition to external actions) I believe that if special educators silently encourage others through thoughts and intentions, it could be a powerful leadership practice. This builds on the
idea that there are unseen, but real, connections among all humans, and honors that connection through attention and effort. That said, pairing these subtle supports with some tangible celebrations would likely provide fertile ground for the creation of a productive, healthy work environment.

**Essence of the Discussion**

The discussion section of this chapter allowed me not only to make observations about the findings, but also to explain why I believed the phenomenon described by the data analysis process are occurring. The swirl of special education administrators’ spiritual leadership is the graphic representation of my interpretive analysis.

Additionally, I sought to relate the findings of the study to the conceptual framework in order to provide context through analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Finally, it provided a forum to explore how the findings fit into the existing research in the field to aid the reader in determining the transferability of the recommendations of this study. Given that every theme had ample evidence from the conceptual framework to undergird it, the findings of this study would appear to have a suitable place in the literature on educational leadership.

Based on the process of thinking intensely about what the results of the analysis are saying, I have concluded that there are three drivers of the active experience these leaders have of spirituality in their work: (a) inherited factors, (b) environmental factors, and (c) choosing to cultivate a sense of the Ultimate. These factors animate the themes identified in Chapter 4 and provide the jewel of understanding from this study.
As described in the beginning of this chapter, the inherited factors consist of elements such as genetics and the lessons learned in childhood and adolescence. I also intend for it to represent something less obvious. Scaffolding from the idea that there is an Ultimate and that everything and everyone is connected, I also mean for the term *inherited factors* to include the purpose of life, or the lessons people are given to learn while on the earth in the course of their lifetime. Looking through my lens, inherited factors do not pre-determine the experience of a person’s life, but certainly provide some of the assets and liabilities involved that shape the trajectory.

Environmental factors are the most straightforward of the three influences. This element simply suggests that the spiritual experiences of special education administrators are impacted by external constructs such as laws, colleagues, parents of students with disabilities, the students themselves, timelines for completion of work, budgetary factors, stressors occurring in their lives, and so forth. The swirl represents environmental factors as a wavy line, signifying constant, unpredictable undulation.

The third dynamic that affects the spiritual experience of P–12 special education leaders is the ability to make conscious, constant choices to infuse their work life with a perspective that includes the Ultimate. During the study, I heard gratitude directed to the Ultimate when they had positive experiences, and reliance upon their faith in the Ultimate when strength was needed to overcome challenges. The choices the participants make to appreciate the grace of and rely on the support of the Ultimate require intention, focus, humility, practice and determination.
It is this factor, perhaps more than the other two, that allows these leaders to experience spirituality in their work life, since it is the only one they control completely. It forms the basis for hope that special education administrators have access to an approach to work that minimizes the shadow side and increases the light side as a result of where they direct their thoughts. If they move through life in this way, they will continue to develop along the various continua of adult development referred to in the conceptual framework for this study (i.e., Barrett, 2010; Cook-Greuter, 2000; Sinnott, 2005). In turn, new capacity for acceptance and understanding will emerge.

Taking it one step further, it stands to reason that this power of thought could even extend to the level of feeling gratitude for the difficult circumstances that are presented in the course of these leaders’ work. This would suggest a faith in the Ultimate that exactly the right things were happening, even when the situation is not pleasant. The direction of the swirl would then be reversed, with the gratitude coming from the difficulties and faith being expanded even further by the successes.

Through the data generation and analysis process, this study described how special education administrators experience spirituality in their work lives. Going deeper, the interaction of inherited factors, environmental factors, and the choice to cultivate a sense of the Ultimate in their work life provides an apt description as to why these leaders experience spirituality in their work lives. Enmeshing the two in the swirl of special education administrators’ spiritual leadership provides a basis for reflection and potential further development.
In order to make use of the findings of the study as interpreted though the conceptual framework, implications and recommendations for social change are provided. The goal for this section is to share practical strategies for a variety of audiences based on the research.

**Implications and Recommendations for Social Change**

In the first chapter, evidence provided about challenges in the field of special education was paired with an acknowledgment that outcomes for students on individualized education programs are not yet satisfactory. While various interventions are being implemented in order to address this problem, the administrators who create and guide the provision of special education services are an understudied population. In order to achieve a certain level of focus on this group—and because of a nationwide and personal interest—the lens of spirituality provided a focal point for the study. The plans for disseminating the results of the study are a result of careful consideration about where they may be most useful.

**Disseminating the Results**

I believe the co-constructed knowledge created through the work with the participants of this study is worthwhile and needs to be shared with a wider audience. First, I plan to make the dissertation available on the ProQuest database so that other scholars will have access to the work. It is my hope that it will in some way be helpful as they are working on their own projects.
I also hope to co-author, with my dissertation director, one or more articles to be published in academic, refereed journals. Through this medium, not only scholars, but also practitioners in the field will be exposed to this research.

Presenting the study at one or more professional conferences is the third strategy for disseminating the results. I will approach the Ohio Association of Pupil Services Administrators and ask to present at a statewide meeting during the 2014-15 school year. This would bring the study full circle and share the results with one of the study’s key beneficiaries. I will also suggest a roundtable session following the presentation (perhaps over lunch or following the meeting) to facilitate discussion and debriefing about the study. Additionally, I hope to present the findings at one or more national conferences, in the fields of special education, leadership, and/or qualitative research.

Through these efforts at distributing the knowledge created by this study, I strive to reach several potential consumer groups, including prospective special education administrators, universities that provide licensure programs, colleagues of special education administrators, superintendents, and current special education administrators. Implications for change and action are described in order to clearly articulate practical suggestions as a result of this study.

**Implications**

**Implications for prospective special education administrators.** A review of the literature yielded no prior information about special education administrators’ decision to leave their initial career in education (e.g., intervention specialist) and move into an administrative role. Given that these leaders all cited a desire to work on behalf
of students as the main purpose for their work, it seems critical that aspiring special education administrators examine their own motivations. In other words, will they be content with assisting children via working through others (what Stacie called “the transitive property of caring”)? Or do they believe they need to have direct contact with students in order to feel fulfilled in their career?

When considering this significant career change, these professionals should give strong consideration to their beliefs, values, and the role work plays in their life as a whole. Based on the findings of this research, I recommend the following:

- Create a document that describes how meaning is made from work and the reasons for considering a change to special education administration.
- Interview and shadow more than one special education administrator prior to applying to a licensure program. Interview questions should speak to the issues identified in the ‘meaning at work’ document.
- Give plenty of thought to whether the change to administration is the best way to find professional satisfaction or whether another avenue might be a better choice.
- Based on the frequent occurrence of practitioners with leadership qualities being approached by their superiors and asked if they want to move into special education administration, this self-reflection should be considered by any practitioner with multiple years or experience and a role of increased responsibility in the district.
Implications for higher education. In terms of implications for higher education, I suggest two angles of action: admissions and coursework. Admittedly, institutions of higher education want to be sure their enrollments are adequate for ensuring their organization’s health. At the same time, however, they likely want to find a good fit for candidates in the programs they enter.

During the admissions process for special education administration licensure or degree programs, interview and/or essay application questions should ask candidates to delve into their spiritual development as applied to work situations. In order to be inclusive, the word spirituality would not need to be used. Instead, asking about how they make meaning in their work and what tools they have to fortify their resilience could be posed.

Since the participants in this study find their spirituality essential to their work, providing an opportunity for future special education administrators to have guided exploration of the intersection of their beliefs, core values and their work life while in the university setting would be beneficial. This could take the form of an entire course or be embedded in another course, such as Fundamentals of Educational Administration. Attention to this aspect of development is supported by Finkenbinder’s (1981) meta-analysis indicating a humanistic point of view is a quality needed by people moving into the field of special education and administration.

If it were to be its own course, I would, again, refrain from using the word spirituality in the title, but instead call it Adult Development for Educational Leadership. This would allow exploration of the realm of spirituality without unnecessarily limiting
the interested student base. Specific goals within this course (or section of a course) would be to (a) clarify core values related to educational leadership; (b) identify one’s personal belief system; (c) understand examples, models, and theories associated with cognitive, ego, and identity development; (d) identify disconnects between one’s beliefs and actions; and (e) understand one’s own spirituality/adult development as a leverage point for leadership.

**Implications for colleagues of special education administrators.** By externalizing the spiritual outlook some special education administrators bring to their work lives, I hoped to understand how they communicate with, engage with, and think about others. If colleagues (e.g., teachers, related service providers, and principals) read this study, their perspective about the motivations and intentions of the special education administrators could change. This shift might promote better relationships with decreased stress, which would be likely to have a positive influence on the work environment as well as services provided to students.

If so inclined, special education administrators could share some portion of this study (perhaps the abstract or conclusions) with colleagues and describe their own reaction to it. This could be done in a department meeting or in a written form such as an email or monthly/quarterly newsletter. The beginning of the school year would be an opportune time to set the tone for a fresh perspective.

**Implications for superintendents.** As overseers of every aspect of a school district, the superintendent has a responsibility to have the right people in the right roles
to maximize student success. This study has implications for the hiring of special education administrators and for the job responsibilities of those in active duty.

When there is an opening for a special education administration position, superintendents may select a candidate from within or do an external search. The findings of this study provide some background for a superintendent in terms of the qualities of special education administrators who describe themselves as spiritual. If these qualities appeal to superintendents, they may want to consider becoming knowledgeable about adult development and asking questions about spirituality—or at least beliefs, core values, thought processes, and resilience—to get at those areas to find a person with developed identity.

In situations where the superintendent is considering offering the special education administration position to an internal candidate, it would be wise to consider the experiences of several of this study’s participants. Ample time for the candidate to think about the decision and reassurance that the candidate need not worry about retribution for not taking on the leadership role will be likely to yield a good outcome for the candidate’s authentic path of service.

Participants in the study were dismayed with the component of their job that requires direct involvement with attorneys. It is time consuming, stressful, and often not linked to their passion for choosing to be a special education administrator. In order to allow special education administrators to concentrate on their area of expertise, I suggest superintendents contract with a legal liaison (i.e., an attorney with expertise in special
education law) to act directly on the district’s behalf in difficult legal situations, rather than relying on the special education administrator.

The legal liaison could report directly to the special education administrator, much like a coordinator of gifted and talented services would. At first it may seem that this is a drastic—and perhaps expensive—step; however, I assert that there would be benefits in the functioning of the special education administrator in other areas, less chance for error and potentially better outcomes in difficult cases.

**Implications for current special education administrators.** This study purposely focused on the “higher nature” of special education administrators with the hope of bringing greater perspective and a conduit for contentment to this beleaguered group of professionals. If any of the recommendations for action for other readers of this research is implemented, there would likely be an increase in the connection special education administrators feel to others and to sides of themselves. On their own behalf there are also a few steps these leaders could take based on the research conducted.

These spiritually inclined special education administrators identified self-regulation or coping strategies to compensate for stress at work. They varied over a wide range, with some being overtly spiritual and others not. Special education administrators need to have a menu of healthy coping strategies and use it liberally and regularly in order to stay fit for best performance at work. If spiritually influenced practices currently are not part of leaders’ routines, they could experiment with one or more of the strategies outlined in this study, and examine its influence on their outlook.
In the section on prospective special education administrators, I made the recommendation to create a *meaning at work* narrative. I would make the same recommendation for current special education administrators based on the responses of the participants of this study.

Periodically, perhaps on a quarterly, semi-annual, or annual basis, special education administrators should engage in reflection about the meaning made in work. Ideas for reflective questions include:

- How is my current work consistent/not consistent with my reasons for becoming a special education administrator?
- How and why is that so?
- What can I do to move toward/continue to experience my reasons for wanting to do this work in the first place?
- Have I discovered any new reasons for doing this work?
- How do my language habits influence my work life?
- How do my mental processes take me closer to or further away from peak moments, flow states or bliss experiences?
- What could I do to further integrate the joy I find in spirituality with work?

In order to address the theme of feeling alone and misunderstood, I recommend semi-structured mentorship and ‘critical friend’ relationships among special education administrators. When new leaders enter the field, it would be important for them to have a mentor to help provide wisdom and perspective. For more-experienced special education administrators, these critical friend relationships could help process issues with
someone else who truly understands. These relationships could occur informally by one person approaching the other, and/or there could be a mechanism in professional organizations to set up the partnerships. Small groups could also be an effective structure for these conversations.

A key element in this recommendation for action is that these conversations not be mere venting sessions. Instead, they need to be solution focused, with the critical friend using active listening techniques to redirect the other person find the way to the answers that will help. Stacie’s comment lent credibility to this recommendation:

I find that [participants’] comments are very humbling. I think it’s wonderful to see that under the surface that everybody that you meet in these meetings and on this journey of being a pupil services director, there’s so much depth and grace here, but you don’t get opportunities to see it. Which is a reason I wanted to participate in this study, is I need to know that there’s people out there who are like me, and that they get their sustenance and wade through the mire of this job by having something to hang on to, to guide them, that isn’t just your knowledge base or your skill set. (Member check group meeting, 2014)

To address the difficulties experienced through perceptions of others and the will deficits some staff members exhibit, special education administrators could examine their own leadership qualities. Possible questions to ask include:

- Have I clarified my own vision?
- How have I endeavored to make it a shared vision in my department/district?
- Do I do what I say I will do?
At the center of the experience of the participants of the study is the importance of knowing their work is benefiting kids. Sometimes, the only way to feel confident that good things are happening is to get out into the field and see it with one’s own eyes. In spite of time constraints, therefore, it is highly recommended that special education administrators schedule themselves to visit classrooms on a regular and ongoing basis as a priority, not an afterthought.

**Implications for students with disabilities and the larger community.**

Looking back at the introductory chapter of this paper, I wonder, “Did this study manifest my ultimate dream of providing knowledge that will increase success for students with disabilities, thereby benefitting the world-at-large?” With due modesty, I feel optimistic that it did, at least on some level. Results of this study show that special education administrators who self-identify as spiritual—and who volunteered to participate in an exploration of their spiritual experience in their work life—(a) prioritize the success of students and (b) are willing to expend considerable effort in pursuit of those priorities. These findings provide knowledge related to student success.

Through their spiritual outlook, these leaders connect to self, others, and the Ultimate. While this study did not demonstrate a tangible outcome of benefit to students with disabilities or the larger community, it did not seek to do so. By identifying the swirl of special education administrators’ spiritual leadership experience, however, I have made an effort to illustrate how their spirituality influences the world in which they exist. As Greek philosopher Philo said, “Households, cities, countries, and nations have enjoyed great happiness when a single individual has taken heed of the Good and the
Beautiful . . . Such people not only liberate themselves; they fill those they meet with a free mind” (Easwaran, n.d.). If students with disabilities derived freer minds as a result of these leaders’ ability to use their spirituality as a means for optimism, who could argue that it would not make the students more successful?

**Recommendations for Further Study**

This research project sought to explore the spiritual experiences special education administrators have within the context of their work lives. Through the course of conducting the study, themes were generated and implications for change suggested. Additionally, several ideas for different types of future research arose from the results.

**Non-Spiritual Leaders**

The purposively selected special education administrators who co-created this research embody many desirable traits, not only from the standpoint of their own experience, but also from the perspective of a potential employer. There is an apparent overlap between what could originate from a place of spirituality (as it did for these participants) and the core beliefs and values that may not be characterized as spiritual by other special education administrators.

In order to find out more about those who do not identify themselves as spiritual, a companion study, using the parallel questions, with the word *spirituality* replaced, would likely provide additional, helpful information to be compared and contrasted with the findings of this study. A study of this type would be important because it could expand understanding about special education administrators’ experience, which could,
in turn, result in greater longevity, productivity and career satisfaction on the part of these leaders.

Another important reason to consider additional study of similar research questions—with the concept of spirituality scrubbed from them—is the reaction many people have to the term *spirituality*. Although the academic literature is able to parse the concepts of religion and spirituality, it must be acknowledged that many people perceive them synonymously. With the sensitivity that surrounds religious beliefs, especially for people who are in the minority, even the use of the term spirituality may result in them feeling excluded, disdainful, or perhaps even offended.

In order to promote a tone of inclusivity, and for broader use of the results of the research, other vocabulary to probe the underlying experience is recommended for future research. Potential replacement words would need to be decided by the researcher, however, inspiration, meaning-making, balance, wellness, and mindfulness are worth consideration.

**Higher Education Leaders**

According to Hamblet (2014), students with disabilities enrolling in colleges and universities are having more difficulty completing degrees than their typical peers. Thus, higher education administrators who oversee accessibility programs are facing many of the same situations as their P–12 counterparts. Thus, a similar study conducted with spiritually inclined higher education special education administrators would be additive. As our nation seeks to be globally competitive while being attentive to the pursuit of happiness for all citizens, this is a relevant topic for many constituents.
360° Case Study

In this study, the only perspective from which data were generated was that of the participants. Since leadership is about relationships, and in this case, relationships with those who have direct contact with students with disabilities, gaining a sense of how these administrators are perceived by others would be interesting. A case study method could be employed, using interviews with supervisors, constituents, parents, and students (if applicable), researcher observation checklists and documents (e.g., emails, meeting agendas) to get a sense of the match or disconnect between administrator’s and others’ points of view. This proposed study would be important for the same reasons as the current study, but with the added benefit of gaining a multi-directional perspective.

In order to obtain useful results, I envision two essential elements of this hypothetical study. First, the special education administrator would need to write to potential participants ahead of time, assuring them that sincere responses, even if difficult to receive, are desired. Additionally, trust would have to be developed with the participants in order to have confidence that their responses were forthcoming. Thus the culture in the district would have to be accounted for in choosing the location for the study.

Effect of Increased Self-Regulation

If the self-regulation strategies the spiritual special education administrators use to cope with their work could be maximized if implemented on a more regular or frequent basis, it would be important to know. The strategies they identified in this study were inexpensive and readily available, therefore, they would likely be easily transferable.
Thus, future research could take the form of pre- and post-test on the use of one or more self-regulation strategies to determine whether engaging in additional practice improves the experience or mental state of the participant(s).

**Effect of a Course or Workshop**

Another opportunity for future study is linked to one of the implications for action. It would involve a survey to be completed by a group of special education administrators. The survey would include questions about various aspects of leadership and personal satisfaction and efficacy. Then, a subgroup would take either a graduate course or a workshop in adult development for educational leadership. After completion of the instruction, the control and experimental group would again take the survey. A possible null hypothesis is that those who took the course or workshop would experience higher levels of satisfaction and efficacy. The importance of this study, especially if the null hypothesis was supported, would be that time spent learning about adult development would be worthwhile for special education administrators.

Identifying potential avenues for future research is an important culminating feature of a research project, as it looks beyond the completed study to new endeavors. As I finalize this study, however, I recognize it is equally critical to reflect on the experience of the research process I have just concluded.

**Researcher Reflections**

This research was structured with a descriptive qualitative method at its foundation. I think this method served the participants and the data exceptionally. When conducting qualitative research, it is necessary to acknowledge that the “researcher is
personally engaged” (W. L. Miller & Crabtree, 1999a, p. 5). This unavoidable fact could have some effect on the study; thus, I need to externalize my experience of the research process. In addition to my feelings, I consider possible personal biases, preconceived ideas and values, and possible effects I may have had on the participants.

**Researcher’s Experience**

My experience with the research process has been extremely positive. Through some combination of grace and hard work, I was able to keep the process moving steadily forward through the various stages involved. As a result of the guidance I received from my dissertation director, a friend who is a researcher in the field of medicine, and a variety of online sources, I usually felt that I knew what needed to be accomplished next and how to go about doing it.

At times, of course, the process threatened to overwhelm me. There seemed to be too many good sources to read, the data analysis process was a challenge to synthesize, and finding time to work regularly required foregoing many other activities. There were times when the “growing pains” of doing something I’d never done before hurt quite a bit.

In order to counteract the possibility of being overcome by the study, I made time for mediation, yoga, and other regularly planned exercise. I wrote myself encouraging notes in my Word documents and on sticky notes around my workspace. I kept my eye on the prize and made myself take at least some time for relaxation with my husband each Sunday.
I highly recommend this process to anyone who is very interested in a particular problem or phenomenon. I have learned so much, both about myself and about my area of study. Without question, this project increased my respect for the field of educational administration, and allowed me to appreciate the threads of applied psychology that are densely woven into the discipline of leadership. I feel that I am better for having surmounted this challenge, integrating my own development and my work in the field of educational administration in a way that would not have been possible without this dissertation.

In Chapter 3, strategies used for corroborating/legitimating the data were described in depth. The purpose of the strategies is to minimize researcher bias, thereby increasing rigor and trustworthiness. Accordingly, I shift from sharing my own experience to identifying some factors that need to be considered as consumers of this research judge its applicability.

Possible Personal Biases

Several topics present themselves as potential personal biases. First and foremost is the fact that I consider myself to be a spiritual person, and it is possible that my own beliefs may have influenced my choices in the study. The chief concern here is in the selection of sources for the conceptual framework. As I look at the literature base for this study, it seems to lean toward Eastern thought. I wonder, “Is it because that is what anyone would find when they search for ‘spirituality’ or is it because I practice meditation and have beliefs aligned with Eastern paths?”
Another possible point of bias is that I may be inclined to see negativity about the field of special education administration where it was not intended. I left the field just one year ago, due to becoming disenfranchised with the work.

Thirdly, while five of the participants were complete strangers to me at the start of the study, I had casual professional relationships with three of them as a result of our work in the field of special education. If there was any effect, I believe it was positive, in that we may have had an easier time talking about this personal subject matter.

I believe the safeguards I have used for dependability and confirmability have neutralized these potential biases; nevertheless, they needed to be surfaced. In addition to researcher bias, it is appropriate to enumerate the preconceived ideas and values of the qualitative researcher.

**Preconceived Ideas and Values**

Going into this study, I had a few preconceived ideas and existing values that could skew the process. Again, I used research strategies to arrest them, yet I prefer to state them for total transparency.

I believe that the work of special education administrators is difficult. Based on my own experiences and on conversations with others prior to the proposal of this study, I already wanted to find something that would help relieve some of the suffering that is part of the job.

I believe that spirituality is a helpful construct for all human beings. Thus, entering the study, I was alert to data that garnered support for my point of view on spirituality as a part of a satisfying life.
Relatedly, I believe there is a place for spirituality in the workplace. While not everyone agrees, I think that as long as it is referred to/relied on without pressure on anyone else to agree or participate, expressions of spirituality at work are positive. I perceive that they allow people to bring their whole selves to work and to find the deepest meaning in their vocation.

Unlike many people, I don’t have strong feelings about whether and how religion and spirituality are related. For some readers, the fact that this study doesn’t address this relationship may make it a nonstarter. For me, on a cognitive level, it was easy to proceed with a basic definition of spirituality for the study, let the participants define the term for themselves, and relate it to religion if they chose.

Reading the preconceived ideas and values, I can say all of them are still true, even after conducting the research, which makes them lasting perspectives for me. However, through the process of conducting this study, I have come to a new perspective about the construct of spirituality.

At the outset, as evidenced by the research question, I put spirituality in the foreground. As I learned more about spiritual development within the context of adult development, however, I came to realize that it could be beneficial to approach the concept of spirituality less directly. By exploring the useful and fulfilling qualities associated with spiritual development via other lines of questioning (i.e., using other terms to refer to what is described in the academic literature as spirituality), the desired knowledge may be found in an inclusive fashion.
Although my prior perspective now seems a bit naïve, I recognize that it is only through having the experience of conducting this research, thus progressing in my own development as a result of engaging in the process, that am I able to see this wider perspective. Without actually doing the work and receiving constructive feedback about it, I likely would not have achieved this new level of understanding.

The final area upon which to reflect as part of the qualitative research process is the possibility that I may have had some effect upon the participants.

**Possible Effects of the Researcher on the Participants**

My co-researchers, the participants, each expressed that they enjoyed the research process and many said I was easy to talk to. This helps me feel confident that there were no egregious affronts to any of them based on my behavior. That said, there is always the possibility that the researcher affected the participants in some way.

One possibility for researcher effects occurred in my communication with them, particularly during the interviews. I developed the questions, so even the content of what I asked was likely to have an effect on the participants. Given that no one refused to answer any of the questions or became upset by them, the questions seemed to be appropriate.

Furthermore, there may have been a researcher effect in the data generation phase of the study based on my interactions during the interviews. Did I ask leading questions rather than let them answer candidly? Did I interrupt excessively? Was I too agreeable/not willing enough to challenge their assertions? Did I miss too many opportunities for key follow-up questions? As a first-time researcher, I am sure that I
committed all of those gaffs, especially during the initial round of interviews. Nevertheless, I do not feel as though they had a significant effect on the participants or the findings of the study.

Finally, I want to note that my enthusiasm for the topic of the spiritual experience of special education administrators may have had an effect on the participants. It is my hope that my zest was contagious, resulting in them bringing as much energy and honesty to all of the research activities as was possible.

Chapter 5 is comprised of many important sections. The Discussion of the research afforded me the opportunity to describe why I believed the themes arose and how they fit together. It also showed how the findings of this study could add to the existing body of research delineated by the conceptual framework for the study.

Accordingly, the Implications and Recommendations for Social Change section provided actionable steps for the use of the research conducted. Next, I made recommendations for further study, which both acknowledged the limits of this study and showed its potential to launch other investigations. Then, the section on researcher reflections was written to provide information to help the reader of the study make judgments about its dependability and confirmability, as well as help me assimilate my experiences as a researcher. The final section contains the summary and conclusions of the study.
Summary and Conclusions

Summary

With this qualitative study, I sought to peer intensely into the experience of a purposively selected cadre of spiritual special education administrators. I wanted to understand and describe what is really going on as they consider how their spirituality intersects with their work life. Instead of being content with surface descriptions, I questioned and analyzed in order to comprehend what seemed to be happening at a deeper level with respect to their beliefs, motivations, goals, successes, struggles, and relationships.

In order to focus the study, I chose a primary research question: How do special education administrators experience spirituality in their work? This question was supported by three sub-questions: (a) How is the spirituality of special education administrators related to the meaning they make of their work, including their career choices? (b) How does special education administrators’ spirituality enable them, as leaders, to serve and support others? and (c) How do special education administrators access their spirituality as a resource to help them cope with the demands of work and continue to nurture their own development?

I conducted a thorough review of the academic literature in the areas of special education, adult development, work life, and leadership. This allowed me both to understand how the research would fit into what is already known and to create a conceptual framework for the study. As a result, I chose five theories to undergird my work: Ego Development Theory (Cook-Greuter, 2000), The Five Practices of Exemplary
Leadership (Kouzes & Posner, 2002), The Theory of Felt Connection (Sinnott, 2005), The Seven Stages of Development of Personal Consciousness (Barrett, 2010), and The Holistic Development Model (Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2011).

The research methodology for this study was comprised of a theoretical position of interpretive constructivism and a descriptive qualitative method. Eight participants were located through the statewide association for special education administrators, and data were gathered through personal narratives, two rounds of interviews, and participant journals.

The data analysis process commenced while the data collection phase was still active. Rather than follow a prescribed data analysis format, I developed an approach that borrowed from the strategies of responsive interview coding, latent content analysis, and interpretive analysis. Electronic spreadsheets and frequent memos in my researcher journal (kept in a blog format at https://mfergus8.wordpress.com/) were used to organize, reflect on, and begin to interpret the data.

I created categories for the data and then grouped the categories into themes. Eventually, as I thought about how the themes intermingled, I developed the idea for The Swirl of Special Education Administrators’ Spiritual Leadership and provided email and in-person opportunities for member checking. While two-dimensional visuals are not capable of conveying all the nuances in the findings, I believe it is helpful in grasping the deeper meaning of the participants’ experience.

The swirl (Figure 4) was provided at the beginning of this chapter, and augments the themes represented in graphic form presented in Chapter 4 (Figure 3). It summarized
the findings by depicting the existence of The Ultimate or higher power at the center of the participants’ work experience, radiating throughout and influencing everything. The needs of children with disabilities are the enduring, steady motivation, and make up the next layer of the swirl.

The experiences of these leaders are bi-modal. Through this process, I have come to believe that spiritual special education administrators have priceless positive traits and perspectives that result in valuable contributions to everyone around them. I observed that they come to have these gifts via different paths, and they are manifested diversely—depending upon the individual personality—ranging from devout to irreverent. Their positive experiences include (a) productive thought processes, (b) enacting core values, (c) fulfilling collaboration, (d) resilience to uncertainty and change, and (e) work as a part of an integrated life.

I also have learned that these leaders experience struggles on multiple levels. They try to use their spirituality to ameliorate the immediate and lasting effects of the problems they encounter from multiple sources. The negative factors are (a) feeling inadequate, (b) working within restrictive parameters, (c) frustration due to skill/will deficits of others, (d) being overwhelmed by omnipresent change and isolation, and (e) work dominating and pushing life out of balance.

The swirl captures the idea that the day-to-day experience of the special education administrators varies in degree of light and dark, depending on the circumstances and their inner state. It also conveys that they are grateful for the presence of the Ultimate in their life and that faith in the Ultimate helps them cope with the challenges of the work.
Finally, the entire swirl is encapsulated by these leaders’ appreciation of the grace of the Ultimate on the light side and their reliance of the support of the Ultimate on the shadow side. This brings full circle the initial idea that the Ultimate is in the center and also permeates all of their experience.

In Chapter 1, my hopes for the study were fourfold: (a) to bring greater perspective and opportunity for contentment to special education administrators; (b) for spiritual special education administrators to be able to use the externalized, explored spiritual outlook to improve the way they communicate with, engage with and think about others; (c) the findings could be used in higher education to prepare educators considering the field of special education administration; and (d) the study would provide knowledge that would increase success for students with disabilities.

Favorably, the findings of this study have implications leading to social change that address my initial hopes for the study. Recommendations were made regarding several interest groups, including prospective special education administrators, higher education leaders, colleagues of special education administrators, superintendents, current special education administrators, and students with disabilities/the larger community. Integrating what was learned through this study into the preparation of, supervision for, and collaboration with special education leadership would be anticipated to result in benefit for all involved, including students with disabilities. Relatedly, some of my recommendations for further study include ideas that would seek to clarify—and even quantify—those potential benefits.
Conclusions

Returning to the personal narrative I shared in the first pages of this study, I re-read what I wrote about my own path of service and my reasons for conducting this research. Now, at the end of my first year as an elementary school principal, I am both relieved and pleased to say that there is no question that I am more fulfilled working with a population that is inclusive of students with disabilities but is not dominated by special education issues. I also feel grateful that my own spiritual and cognitive development seems to have been enhanced by completing this project, both as a result of imbibing the findings of the study and through the discipline of actually doing the work.

The outcomes of this study provide good news for everyone who has contact with the field of special education, including students with disabilities, their families, people who work with special education administrators, and the special education administrators, themselves. As a result of this study, ideas have been generated that provide pathways for both thought and action on the part of a wide range of professionals in both P–12 and higher education.

The culminating message of this project is straightforward: There are highly developed special education administrators who have enacted spirituality in their work, and feel rewarded when they know their work is helping students with disabilities. They are secure in their identity and purpose, yet they continue to strive, through their spirituality, to be even more consistent in the way they honor the Ultimate in their work. Since these professionals exhibit many exemplary practices of leadership, it is highly likely that they effectively impact their many constituents.
The worldview of this study’s spiritual participants can be emulated. There are infinite versions of an experience of spirituality, and a person can begin anywhere along a continuum of seeking to connect with themselves, with others, and with the transcendent. Perhaps readers of this study will give consideration as to whether some form of spiritual emphasis in their lives could help address their external problems or internal fears in some small way. Even if they are not sure spirituality is right for them, an innocuous starting point would be to borrow the practice of gratitude, directing it toward their version of the Ultimate, a particular person, or to the Earth that sustains life.

The title of this study borrows a line from The Prayer of Saint Francis (Easwaran, 2003). I believe the full text of the prayer encompasses the Swirl of Special Education Administrators’ Spiritual Leadership and provides an elegant conclusion to the study:

Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
Where there is sadness, joy.
O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
To be consoled as to console,
Not so much to be understood as to understand,
To be loved, as to love;
For it is in giving that we receive;

It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;

It is in dying to self that we are born to eternal life. (p. 109)
APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL
Appendix A

Institutional Review Board Approval

RE: Protocol #13-424 - entitled “Special Education Administrators’ Experience of Spirituality at Work: Making Meaning, Serving Others, and Handling it All”

The Kent State University Institutional Review Board has reviewed and approved your Application for Approval to Use Human Research Participants as Level I/Exempt from Annual review research. Your research project involves minimal risk to human subjects and meets the criteria for the following category of exemption under federal regulations:

• Exemption 2: Educational tests, Surveys, Interviews, Public Behavior Observation

This application was approved on October 2, 2013.

***Submission of annual review reports is not required for Level 1/Exempt projects.

If any modifications are made in research design, methodology, or procedures that increase the risks to subjects or includes activities that do not fall within the approved exemption category, those modifications must be submitted to and approved by the IRB before implementation.

Please contact an IRB discipline specific reviewer or the Office of Research Compliance to discuss the changes and whether a new application must be submitted. [http://www.kent.edu/research/researchsafetyandcompliance/irb/index.cfm](http://www.kent.edu/research/researchsafetyandcompliance/irb/index.cfm)

Kent State University has a Federal Wide Assurance on file with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP); FWA Number 00001853.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact us at Researchcompliance@kent.edu or by phone at 330-672-2704 or 330.672.8058.

Respectfully,
Kent State University Office of Research Compliance
224 Cartwright Hall | fax 330.672.2658

Kevin McCreary | Research Compliance Coordinator | 330.672.8058 | kmccrea1@kent.edu
Paulette Washko | Manager, Research Compliance | 330.672.2704 | Pwashko@kent.edu

For links to obtain general information, access forms, and complete required training, visit our website at www.kent.edu/research.
**EXEMPT FROM ANNUAL REVIEW APPLICATION (Level I)**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>INSTRUCTION FOR USE BY IRB</th>
<th>IRB OFFICE USE</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>REVIEWER INFORMATION</strong></td>
<td><strong>Date Received</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Discipline Specific Reviewer:</td>
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<td>Comments:</td>
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<td>Date of Final Approval</td>
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**INSTRUCTIONS for INVESTIGATORS:**

1. Complete this form to request an exemption determination for your study.
2. Review the Categories of Research Activities that are Exempt document prior to completing this application. All procedures and instruments used in your study must meet the exemption criteria to receive the exemption determination. If your study does not meet the exemption criteria, you will be asked to complete the USE OF HUMAN SUBJECTS IN RESEARCH application.
3. Submit this completed document (any needed Appendices) via email attachment to an IRB Discipline Specific Reviewer. To submit the form, with a typed signature, the form must be submitted from the investigator’s @kent.edu email account. If completed forms are signed and then scanned as a PDF attachment, the @kent.edu email requirement does not apply.
4. Do NOT begin data collection prior to receiving notification from the KSU IRB that the study meets the exemption criteria.

**DEFINITIONS:**

**Minimal Risk:**
The probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in the research are not greater in and of themselves than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests.

**Prisoner:**
An individual involuntarily confined or detained in a penal institution (e.g., prison, jail, or juvenile offender facility), with restricted ability to leave the institution. The term is intended to encompass individuals sentenced to such an institution under a criminal or civil statute, individuals detained in other facilities by virtue of statutes or commitment procedures that provide alternatives to criminal prosecution or incarceration in a penal institution, and individuals detained pending arraignment, trial, or sentencing.

**Title of Study:** Special Education Administrators’ Experience of Spirituality at Work: Making Meaning, Serving Others, and Handling it All.

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**Section 1 = INVESTIGATOR INFORMATION**

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<tr>
<th>Last Name</th>
<th>Hackney</th>
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<th><a href="mailto:Checknex@kent.edu">Checknex@kent.edu</a></th>
<th>330.672.0572</th>
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<td>Department: School of Foundations, Leadership and Administration</td>
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<th>Status:</th>
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<td>Project:</td>
<td>Student Thesis/Dissertation</td>
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Revision 3.00

Page 1 of 1
Only faculty members and professional staff who are full-time university employees are eligible for PI status. Students conducting research for their dissertation or master’s thesis research can still have primary responsibility for the intellectual content, conduct of the research, or primary authorship in publications by serving as co-investigators or key personnel on IRB applications. If you are a KSU employee conducting research involving human subjects as part of your graduate or undergraduate program, your faculty advisor must serve as the PI of record for IRB protocols. Please review IRB policy for PI eligibility and responsibilities.

a. Are there any Kent State University affiliated co-investigators or key personnel on this protocol?
   - Yes  Complete Appendix A.  
   - No
   
   “Key personnel” are defined as individuals who participate in the design, conduct, or reporting of human subjects research. At a minimum, include individuals who recruit participants, obtain consent or, who collect study data.

b. Are there any external (non-Kent State University affiliated) co-investigators or key personnel engaged in the research?
   - Yes  Complete Appendix B.  
   - No
   
   “Engaged” individuals are those who intervene or interact with participants in the context of the research or who will obtain individually identifiable private information for research funded, supervised, or coordinated by Kent State University. See OHRP Engagement Guidance or contact ORC for more information.

c. Has the Principal Investigator (PI) completed the required web-based course years (CITI, or equivalent) in the protection of human research subjects?
   - Yes  Attach Copy of completion certificate.  
   - No
   
   Educational requirements (initial and continuing) should be satisfied prior to submitting the application for IRB review. See Human Subjects Protection Training policy for more information. Final approval from the IRB will not be obtained until all requirements are fulfilled.

d. Are there other person(s) (e.g., research manager, study or regulatory coordinator, research assistant, etc.) that we should contact if further information about this application is needed?

   If Yes  Name: [ ]  
   Phone: [ ]  
   Email: [ ]  

Section 2 – FUNDING INFORMATION

a. Does this research have external funding or have you requested external funding for this research?
   - Yes  
   - No

   If Yes  Specify sponsor: [ ]
   Protocol/Proposal # [ ]
   Institution (if not KSU): [ ]
   Have all Kent State University investigators and key personnel completed the required COI disclosure for externally funded research for the purposes of this research project?
   - Yes  
   - No

b. Is any support other than monetary (e.g., drugs, equipment, supplies, etc.) being provided for the study?
   - Yes  
   - No

   If Yes  Specify support and provider: [ ]
   Attach a copy of the grant application or funding proposal.

The university is required to verify that all funding proposals and grants (new or renewals) have been reviewed by the IRB before funds are awarded. If the research funded by a federal agency and involves a subcontract to or from another entity, an IRB Authorization Agreement may be required. Contact the Office of Research Compliance (ORC) for more information.
c. Does the PI for this research or their immediate family members (i.e., spouse, domestic partner, or dependent children) have a financial interest that would reasonably be affected by the research, or a financial interest in any entity whose financial interest would reasonably appear to be affected by the research?  
Financial interests include (but are not limited to) salary or other payments for services (e.g., consulting fees or honoraria), equity interests (e.g., stocks, stock options, or other ownership interests), and intellectual property rights (e.g., patents, copyrights, and royalties from such rights).

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d. Does the PI for this research or their immediate family members (i.e., spouse, domestic partner, or dependent children) have a non-financial Conflict of Interest that would reasonably be affected by the research

A non-financial conflict of interest is an interest, other than monetary, of an individual (or his/her immediate family) in the design, conduct, or reporting of the research or other interest that competes with the obligation to protect research participants and potentially compromizes the objectivity and credibility of the research process.

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SECTION 3: Qualifying Statements

You must indicate an answer to each of the following (5) statements

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1. The research will not expose participants to discomfort or distress beyond that normally encountered in daily life.

2. The research will not include collection of data where the responses, if disclosed outside of the research, would place the participants at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to participants' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

3. The research will not involve individuals that are prisoners (involuntarily confined or detained in a penal institution), with restricted ability to leave the institution.

4. If there is interaction with subjects there will be a verbal consent process or a document that is given to participants to disclose the information:
   - That the activity involves research
   - Subject rights
   - The procedures/what they are being asked to do
   - Duration of subject’s participation
   - That participation is voluntary
   - Confidentiality statement
   - Incentives or payments (if applicable)
   - Name and contact information for the investigator
   - Contact information for the KSU IRB (330-672-2706)

5. The research is not subject to FDA regulations.

SECTION 4 - Category of Research

1. Check one or more categories of exemption for which you are applying.
2. Answer all of the questions for each category that you choose.

To be considered for the Exemption your research can involve only procedures listed in one or more of these categories.

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<th>True</th>
<th>Not True</th>
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Category 1 - Educational Settings

1. The research will only be conducted in established or commonly-accepted educational settings including, but not limited to, schools and colleges. (May include other sites where educational activities regularly occur. For example, boy scout meetings, dance classes)

2. The research will involve only normal educational practices, such as
   - (i) research on regular and special education instructional strategies, or
   - (ii) research on the effectiveness of or the comparison among instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Category 2 - Educational Tests, Surveys, Interviews, Public Behavior Observation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The subject population includes ADULTS (&gt;18 years old) and the research will involve only the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior. .................................................................................................................................</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. The subject population includes CHILDREN (&lt;18 years old) and the research procedures will be limited to the observation of public behavior where the investigator will NOT participate in the activities being observed ...........................................................................................................................................</td>
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<th>Category 3 - Educational Tests, Surveys, Interviews, Public Behavior Observation of PUBLIC OFFICIALS</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. The research will involve only the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior</td>
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<td>2. AND (one of the following is true) ............................................................................................</td>
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<tr>
<td>a) The human subjects are elected or appointed public officials or candidates for public office. (Applies to senior officials such as mayor or school superintendent rather than a police officer or teacher.) ..........................................................................................................................................................</td>
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<tr>
<td>b) Federal statute(s) require without exception that the confidentiality of the personally identifiable information will be maintained throughout the research and thereafter.</td>
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<th>Category 4 - Existing Data, Documents, Specimens</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. The research will involve only the collection or study of existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens. (&quot;Existing&quot; means existing before the research is proposed to the IRB to determine whether the research is exempt. All materials to be reviewed currently exist at the time of this exemption request.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. The sources of the existing data, documents, records or specimens are publicly available OR the information will be recorded by the investigator in such a manner that participants cannot be readily identified either directly or through identifiers (such as a code) linked to them.</td>
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<td>Category 5 – For Public Benefit or Service Programs (Federal)</td>
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<tr>
<td>The project is a research or demonstration project conducted by or subject to the approval of a (federal) Department or Agency head and which is designed to study, evaluate, or otherwise examine:</td>
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<tr>
<td>(i) public benefit (e.g., financial or medical benefits as provided under the Social Security Act) or service programs (e.g., social, supportive, or nutrition services as provided under the Older Americans Act);</td>
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<td>(ii) procedures for obtaining benefits or services under those programs;</td>
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<td>(iii) possible changes in or alternatives to those programs or procedures; or</td>
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<tr>
<td>(iv) possible changes in methods or levels of payment for benefits or services under those public benefit or service programs.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Category 6 – For Taste and Food Quality and Consumer Acceptance Studies</th>
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<tr>
<td>The research involves only a taste and food quality evaluation or a food consumer acceptance study in which</td>
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<td>i. wholesome foods without additives will be consumed OR</td>
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<tr>
<td>ii. food will be consumed that contains a food ingredient, agricultural chemical or environmental contaminant that is at or below the level found to be safe by the Food and Drug Administration or is approved by the Environmental Protection Agency or the Food Safety and Inspection Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.</td>
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</table>

If you have checked Not True to ANY of the questions in the category you have chosen above, your research is NOT EXEMPT FROM ANNUAL REVIEW. Do not complete this application. You must submit a Use of Human Subjects in Research Application.

### Section 5 – RESEARCH DESIGN

a. Will any members of the research team be conducting or coordinating study activities at a site other than Kent State University

Research to be conducted at locations other than Kent State University may require a letter of support, another institution’s approval if personnel are engaged or, the execution of an IRB Authorization Agreement. See OHRP Engagement Guidance or contact ORC for more information.

Yes ➔ Complete Appendix O

No

b. Is any of this research being conducted outside of the U.S.A?

Yes ➔ Complete Appendix U

No

c. What are the estimated beginning and end dates of the project?

Sep 30, 2013 (but not before approval is obtained) to Sep 30, 2014

d. Briefly summarize the purpose of the proposed research using non-technical language that can be readily understood by someone outside the discipline. Use complete sentences (limit 300 words).
The purpose of this study is to explore P-12 special education administrators’ experience of their spiritual lives within their work lives. It is important this research be conducted because education is at the core of our society, education leaders have an enormous impact on the direction and effectiveness of the education provided to the nation’s children, special education results have been unsatisfactory, and there is both interest and potential for spirituality to support the work of P-12 special education administrators.

While there has been research (both qualitative and quantitative) in the arenas of spirituality and the workplace, and in different types of education settings (e.g., higher education), a gap emerged in the literature surrounding P-12 special education administrators’ experience of their spiritual lives within the context of their work lives. Direct beneficiaries of this research will be P-12 special education administrators and those who train and supervise them.

The objectives of the research study are to answer the following research question/sub-questions:
1) How do P-12 special education administrators experience spirituality in their work?
   a) How is the spirituality of special education administrators related to the meaning the make of their work, including career choices?
   b) How does special education administrators’ spirituality enable them, as leaders, to serve and support others?
   c) How do special education administrators access their spirituality as a resource to help them cope with the demands of work and continue to nurture their own development?

Section 6 - PARTICIPANT IDENTIFICATION, RECRUITMENT, & SELECTION

a. Specify the recruitment methods for this study and attach copies of written documents to this application.

- Personal contact
- Contact or approach letters
- Telephone calls (attach copy of script)
- Brochures
- Printed advertisements
- Student research pools (e.g., psychology, sociology, communication) → Complete Appendix V
- Flyers
- Internet
- Home visits
- Radio or TV (include written text of the advertisement and brief layout of images)
- Email (include copy of text to be used)
  Specify frequency: 2 times
  Specify: Other

b. Who will approach or recruit potential participants?

- Principal Investigator
- Research Staff
- Other → please describe: Merritt F. Waters, Doctoral Candidate/Co-Principal Investigator

c. When/how often will participants be recruited? (e.g., via email with 3 reminders sent at specific intervals)

Participants will be recruited through an initial email describing the study and asking for volunteers. The email will request that those interested in participating in the study email back with their contact information. The co-principal investigator will then contact participants via email and telephone.

d. Where will participants be recruited? (e.g., doctor’s office, classroom, online)

Participants will be recruited via email through the Ohio Association of Pupil Services Administrators (OAPSA) professional association.

e. What steps will be taken to avoid coercion or undue influence in the recruitment of research participants? (e.g., will the potential participants be afforded the opportunity to take material home and discuss the study with family members and/or primary care providers?)
Those OAPSA members who receive the email may simply delete it. If they indicate a desire to participate they will be contacted by telephone for further explanation of the study. They may decline to participate at any time and will not be approached by anyone who has direct authority over them about participating in the study.

Section 7 - PARTICIPANT POPULATION
a. What is the total number of participants (or number of participant records, specimens, etc.):

The number of participants is defined as the number of individuals who agree to participate (i.e., those who provide consent or whose records are accessed, etc.) even if all do complete the study. The total number of research participants may be increased only with prior IRB approval.

If Between seven and ten individuals will be interviewed.

b. Describe the individuals who may participate in the research:

Participants will be adults with at least a Master’s degree who are employed (or recently retired) special education administrators in a P-12 setting.

Age(s): 30-70 years

Section 8 - CONFIDENTIALITY OF DATA
a. What format will be used to store participant information? Check all that apply.

- Hardcopy paper documentation
- Database system
- Disk (CD ROM, floppy disk, flash drive)
- Audio Tapes
- Video Tapes
- Other
- Specify:

b. How will the participant information be kept secure and confidential?

The signed consent forms, transcripts of the audio recordings, field notes and participant journals will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in the principal investigator’s home office. All documentation for researchers’ use and publication will use pseudonyms, the study will be characterized as taking place in a Great Lakes state, and the digital audio recordings of the interviews will be deleted after transcripts are created.

c. Will you be retaining identifying information for purposes of another research project (e.g. keeping participants’ contact information to recruit them for future research)?

- Yes
- No

If Yes → Describe what information will be retained. The information must also be described in the consent form.

Section 9 - ASSURANCE: PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

I agree to follow all applicable policies and procedures of Kent State University and federal, state, and local laws and guidance regarding the protection of human subjects in research, as well as professional practice standards and generally accepted good research practice guidelines for investigators, including, but not limited to, the following:

- Perform the research as approved by the IRB under the direction of the Principal Investigator (or Advisor) by appropriately trained and qualified personnel with adequate resources;
- Understand that the parameters of the research cannot be modified without approval by the KSU IRB (except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants);
- Agree to maintain research-related records (and source documents) in a manner that documents the validity of the research and integrity of the data collected, while protecting the confidentiality of the data and privacy of participants;
- Will retain research-related records for audit for a period of at least three years after the research has ended (or longer, according to sponsor or publication requirements) even if I leave the University;
• Will contact the Office Research Compliance for assistance in amending (to request a change in Principal Investigator) or terminating the research if I leave the University or am unavailable to conduct or supervise the research personally (e.g., sabbatical or extended leave);
• Agree to inform all Co-Investigators, research staff, employees, and students assisting in the conduct of the research of their obligations in meeting the above commitments.

I verify that the information provided in this Use of Human Subjects in Research application is accurate and complete.

Catherine E. Hackney
Signature of Principal Investigator

9/9/13
Date

Catherine E. Hackney
Printed name of Principal Investigator
INSTRUCTIONS for INVESTIGATORS:

1. Complete this form to add KSU-affiliated Co-Investigator's or Key Personnel to research that involves human subjects.

2. Submit this completed document with your application via email attachment. To submit the form with a typed signature, the form must be submitted from the Investigator's @kent.edu email account. If completed form is signed and then scanned as a PDF attachment, the @kent.edu email requirement does not apply.

3. Do NOT begin data collection prior to receiving notification from the KSU IRB that the study/revision has been fully approved.

DEFINITIONS

Key personnel:
Individuals who participate in the design, conduct, or reporting of human subjects research. At a minimum, include individuals who recruit participants, obtain consent, or who collect study data.

Conflict of Interest is a financial interest or other opportunity for tangible personal benefit of an individual or his/her immediate family that may exert a substantial and improper influence on the individual's professional judgment in exercising any institutional duty or responsibility, including the conduct or design of research.

Financial Conflict of Interest:
An interest of an individual (or his/her immediate family) of monetary value that would reasonably appear to be affected by the research or an individual's interest in any entity whose financial interests would reasonably appear to be affected by the research. Financial interests include (but are not limited to) salary or other payments for services (e.g., consulting fees or honoraria), equity interests (e.g., stocks, stock options, or other ownership interests), and intellectual property rights (e.g., patents, copyrights, and royalties from such rights).

Non-Financial Conflict of Interest:
An interest other than monetary of an individual (or his/her immediate family) in the design, conduct, or reporting of the research or other interest that competes with the obligation to protect research participants and potentially compromises the objectivity and credibility of the research process.

Immediate Family:
An Investigator's or Key personnel's spouse or domestic partner and dependent children.

To complete this form: Single left-click to complete text fields. To check a box, double left-click on the box, then click "checked". Click OK.

Section I - KSU PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR INFORMATION

Last Name: Hackney
First Name: Catherine
Title or, IRB log number of Research (should match Human Subjects Research Application)
Faculty
**KSU Co-Investigator(s) or Key Personnel (#1)**

- Co-Investigator
- Faculty

**Name (Last, First, MI):** Waters, Merritt F.

**E-mail:** Mfergus8@kent.edu

**Phone:** 440.258.2470

a. Have Co-Investigator(s)/Key personnel completed the CITI online (or equivalent) training?

- Yes [attach copy of completion certificate.]
- No

b. Describe the role/activities that this Co-investigator or Key Personnel will perform for this study (e.g., subject recruitment, informed consent):

The Co-investigator is a doctoral candidate and will perform all direct activities related to the study, including participant recruitment, informed consent, data collection and generation of results.

c. Where will the Co-investigator or Key Personnel perform the research activities?

- at KSU
- at external research site [complete Appendix O]


d. Does Co-Investigator or Key personnel have a Conflict of Interest related to the research?

- Yes [provide explanation below]
- No

Explanation:

---

e. Does Co-Investigator or Key personnel have a patent or, pending patent, or current patent idea that could be conceivably related to this research project?

- Yes [provide explanation below]
- No

Explanation:

---

f. Has/will Co-Investigator or Key personnel receive funds or, other resources (including equipment, devices, etc...) from a Sponsor or funding agency/entity for purposes of this research project?

- Yes [provide explanation below]
- No

Explanation:

I agree to follow all applicable policies and procedures of Kent State University and federal, state, and local laws and guidance regarding the protection of human subjects in research, as well as professional practice standards and generally accepted good research practice guidelines for investigators, including, but not limited to, the following:
APPENDIX A1 – Co-Investigator(s) or Key Personnel  IRB LOG NUMBER

KSU Co-Investigator(s) or Key Personnel

- Perform the research as approved by the IRB under the direction of the Principal Investigator (or Advisor) by appropriately trained and qualified personnel with adequate resources;
- Initiate the research after written notification of IRB approval has been received;
- Obtain and document (unless waived) informed consent and HIPAA research authorization from human subjects (or their legally authorized representatives) prior to their involvement in the research using the currently IRB-approved consent form(s) and process;
- Promptly report to the IRB events that may represent unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others;
- Provide significant new findings that may relate to the subjects willingness to continue to participate;
- Inform the IRB of any proposed changes in the research or informed consent process before changes are implemented, and agree that no changes will be made until approved by the KSU IRB (except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants);
- If applicable, complete and submit a Continuing Review of Human Subjects Research application before the deadline for review at intervals determined by the IRB to be appropriate to the degree of risk (but not less than once per year) to avoid expiration of IRB approval and cessation of all research activities;
- Maintain research-related records (and source documents) in a manner that documents the validity of the research and integrity of the data collected, while protecting the confidentiality of the data and privacy of participants;
- Retain research-related records for audit for a period of at least three years after the research has ended (or longer, according to sponsor or publication requirements) even if I leave the University;

I verify that the information provided in this form is accurate and complete.

Signature: Merritt F. Watery  Date 9/15/13

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KSU CO-INVESTIGATOR(S) and/or KEY PERSONNEL (#2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✣ Co-Investigator ☐ Key Personnel ☐ Faculty ☐ Graduate Student ☐ Undergraduate Student ☐ Staff</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Name (Last, First, MI):

E-mail: @kent.edu  Phone: 

g. Have Co-Investigator(s)/Key personnel completed the CITI online (or equivalent) training?  ☐ Yes  ☐ No

h. Describe the role/activities that this Co-investigator or Key Personnel will perform for this study (e.g., subject recruitment, informed consent):

i. Where will the Co-investigator or Key Personnel perform the research activities?  ☐ at KSU  ☐ at external research site

j. Does Co-Investigator or Key personnel have a Conflict of Interest related to the research?  ☐ Yes  ☐ No

[More questions and options listed but not fully transcribed here, including Yes/No options and references to Appendix Q.]

[Signature line: Merritt F. Watery  Date 9/15/13]
APPENDIX A1 – Co-Investigator(s) or Key Personnel

Refer to definitions above.

Explanation:

k. Does Co-Investigator or Key personnel have a patent or, pending patent, or current patent idea that could be conceivably related to this research project?

☐ Yes  → provide explanation below.

☐ No

Explanation:

l. Has/will Co-Investigator or Key personnel receive funds or, other resources (including equipment, devices, etc...) from a Sponsor or funding agency/entity for purposes of this research project?

☐ Yes  → provide explanation below.

☐ No

Explanation:

I agree to follow all applicable policies and procedures of Kent State University and federal, state, and local laws and guidance regarding the protection of human subjects in research, as well as professional practice standards and generally accepted good research practice guidelines for investigators, including, but not limited to, the following:

• Perform the research as approved by the IRB under the direction of the Principal Investigator (or Advisor) by appropriately trained and qualified personnel with adequate resources;

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• Promptly report to the IRB events that may represent unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others;

• Provide significant new findings that may relate to the subjects willingness to continue to participate;

• Inform the IRB of any proposed changes in the research or informed consent process before changes are implemented, and agree that no changes will be made until approved by the KSU IRB (except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants);

• If applicable, complete and submit a Continuing Review of Human Subjects Research application before the deadline for review at intervals determined by the IRB to be appropriate to the degree of risk (but not less than once per year) to avoid expiration of IRB approval and cessation of all research activities;

• Maintain research-related records (and source documents) in a manner that documents the validity of the research and integrity of the data collected, while protecting the confidentiality of the data and privacy of participants;

• Retain research-related records for audit for a period of at least three years after the research has ended (or longer, according to sponsor or publication requirements) even if I leave the University;

I verify that the information provided in this form is accurate and complete.

Signature ________________________________ Date ________________

Copy and Paste table if additional Co-Investigators/Key Personnel.
Research Conducted at Multiple Sites

INSTRUCTIONS for INVESTIGATORS:

1. Complete this form to include performance sites outside of Kent State University for your research activity (e.g., obtaining consent, conducting research procedures, obtaining or accessing identifiable data for research purposes, etc.)

OR

Any component of your research will be conducted by collaborators outside of Kent State University and you are responsible for coordinating the conduct of all or part of this research (e.g., you are running the study at multiple locations; you are conducting or coordinating parts of the research such as follow-up at multiple locations; your data analysis work is being done at an outside institution.)

2. Submit this completed document via email along with the Human Subjects Research application.

3. Retain a copy of the Human Subjects application and applicable attachments.

4. Do NOT begin data collection prior to receiving notification from the KSU IRB that your application has been fully approved or determined by the IRB to be exempt from annual review.

DEFINITIONS

Engaged in Research - an institution is considered engaged in research when its employees or agents for the purposes of the research project obtain: (1) data about the subjects of the research through intervention or interaction with them; (2) identifiable private information about the subjects of the research; or (3) the informed consent of human subjects for the research.

Performance Site – a site whose staff, facilities or private records of individuals are engaged in the conduct of research; or a site that receives HHS funds. The performance site is the actual place where the research activity (e.g., site where staff are consenting subjects).

IRB of Record – The IRB responsible for review of research and for determining that the research meets the regulatory requirements for approval.

To complete this form: Single left-click to complete text fields. To check a box, double left-click on the box, then click “checked”. Click OK.

Section I - KSU Investigator Information

Last Name: Hackney First Name: Catherine

Title of Study (should match Human Subjects Research Application)

Special Education Administrators’ Experience of Spirituality at Work: Making Meaning, Serving Others, and Handling it All.
### Performance site #1

1. Name of Performance Site (e.g. Oriana House, Akron Children’s Hospital, Summa, School)
   
   Offices of the public school employees who become participants of the study. For example, if the Director of Student Services for Strongsville City Schools became a participant, the performance site would be her office at the Strongsville Board of Education.

2. Who is conducting research activities at this Performance Site?
   - [x] KSU PI, CO-PI or key personnel
   - [ ] Collaborator → Local PI Name:

3. Performance Site contact name & phone number for IRB matters
   
   To be determined based on participant recruitment.

4. Who will be the IRB of Record for research conducted at this Performance Site?
   - [x] KSU IRB → answer question #5
   - [ ] Performance Site’s IRB → provide FWA # and expiration
   - [ ] Other IRB → Name:

5. If KSU is the IRB of Record, what is the method of documenting the Performance site’s reliance on our IRB?
   - [ ] Master IRB Collaboration Agreement (currently only applicable for Summa)
   - [ ] IRB Authorization Agreement (applicable for a location with an FWA)
   - [x] Individual Investigator Agreement/Letter of Support (applicable for researchers at locations with no FWA)

6. If KSU is not the IRB of record, has the site’s local IRB granted approval?
   - [ ] No → Explain:
   - [ ] Yes → provide dates of site IRB Approval: _____ to: _____ → (attach copy of the Performance Site’s IRB Approval letter).
   - Performance Site’s IRB file number: _____

7. What are the study procedures that will take place at this Performance Site (e.g., conduct research interviews; obtain informed consent, accessing records).
   
   Conduct research interviews

### Performance site #2

8. Name of Performance Site (e.g. Oriana House, Akron Children’s Hospital, Summa, School)

9. Who is conducting research activities at this Performance Site?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10. Performance Site contact name &amp; phone number for IRB matters</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Who will be the IRB of Record for research conducted at this Performance Site?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ KSU IRB ↠ answer question #5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Performance Site's IRB ↠ provide FWA # and expiration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Other IRB ↠ Local PI Name:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. If KSU is the IRB of Record, what is the method of documenting the Performance site's reliance on our IRB?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. If KSU is not the IRB of record, has the site's local IRB granted approval?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ No ↠ Explain:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Yes ↠ provide dates of site IRB Approval: _____ to: _____ (attach copy of the Performance Site's IRB Approval letter).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance Site's IRB file number: ____</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. What are the study procedures that will take place at this Performance Site (e.g., conduct research interviews, obtain informed consent, accessing records).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**If additional Performance Site's, copy/paste table below.**
APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY
Appendix B

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Study Title
Special education administrators’ experience of spirituality at work: Making meaning, serving others, and handling it all.

Principal Investigator: Dr. Catherine E. Hackney, Dissertation Director
Co-Investigator: Merritt F. Waters, Doctoral Candidate

You are being invited to participate in a research study. This consent form will provide you with information on the research project, what you will need to do, and the associated risks and benefits of the research. Your participation is voluntary. Please read this form carefully. It is important that you ask questions and understand fully the research in order to make an informed decision. You will receive a copy of this document to take with you.

Purpose
The purpose of this basic interpretive qualitative study is to explore how preschool – grade twelve (P–12) special education administrators’ experience spirituality in their work. In particular, I am interested in researching:

- How is the spirituality of special education administrators related to the meaning the make of their work, including career choices?
- How does special education administrators’ spirituality enable them, as leaders, to serve and support others?
- How do special education administrators access their spirituality as a resource to help them cope with the demands of work and continue to nurture their own development?

I believe this study will be of interest to P–12 special education administrators and to those who train them at the university level.

All reports, articles and presentations of the research will be posted on (or available through) a project website, the web address of which will be provided to all who participate in the research.

Procedures
If you choose to participate in this project, we would engage in a few activities together. First, you would write a personal narrative about the formation of your spirituality and how you came to be a special education administrator. Next, I would interview you for between 45-60 minutes (preferably in your school office) about topics related to the research questions for this study (listed above). Then, for the next three weeks, you would keep a journal to record things that happen at work that were spiritually meaningful, allowed you to serve/support someone else and how spirituality helped (or did not help) you deal with stress at work. Fourth, I would like to do a follow-up closing interview with you on the telephone, lasting 30-45 minutes. Finally, you will be invited to participate in a focus group with the other participants in order for us to review what we have discovered together. The total time span of the project is expected to be three to six months.

Audio and Video Recording and Photography
The interviews will be audio recorded so that I may transcribe it for further review. You may have a copy of the recording and/or transcript if you wish.
Benefits
The potential benefits of this study may include educators learning about the nature of P–12 special education administrators’ experience of their spiritual life at work (including the meaning made of work, how others are served and supported, and how it helps them cope and continue to grow). You may appreciate the structured opportunity for self-reflection and discourse about your spirituality with me and with the focus group at the end.

Risks and Discomforts
There are no known risks involved in participating in this study, beyond those occurring in everyday life. However, if you wish to see the interview questions prior to deciding whether or not to participate in the study, they will be shared with you. If you do not feel comfortable answering a question, we will skip it.

Privacy and Confidentiality
Your signed consent form will be kept separate from your study data, and your confidentiality will be protected through the use of pseudonyms in all written products of the research. If the audio recordings of our interviews are transcribed by a third party, a pseudonym will be used, and the recording will be deleted after transcription. No one but me will see your written narrative and journal entries. Upon completion of the study, your written narrative and journal entries, as well as the transcriptions of our interviews, will be destroyed. If you choose not to participate in the optional focus group at the end of the study in order to maintain your confidentiality, it does not prevent you from participating in the study.

Voluntary Participation
Taking part in this research study is entirely up to you. You may choose not to participate or you may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You will be informed of any new, relevant information that may affect your health, welfare, or willingness to continue your study participation.

Contact Information
If you have any questions or concerns about this research, you may contact Mrs. Merritt Waters, doctoral candidate, at 440.258.2470 or Dr. Catherine Hackney, Dissertation Director, at 330.672.0552. This project has been approved by the Kent State University Institutional Review Board. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or complaints about the research, you may call the IRB at 330.672.2704.

Consent Statement and Signature
I have read this consent form and have had the opportunity to have my questions answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I understand that a copy of this consent will be provided to me for future reference.

__________________________________  ______________________
APPENDIX C

AUDIO RECORDING CONSENT FORM
Appendix C

Audio Recording Consent Form

SPECIAL EDUCATION ADMINISTRATORS’ EXPERIENCE OF SPIRITUALITY AT WORK: MAKING MEANING, SERVING OTHERS, AND HANDLING IT ALL

MERRITT F. WATERS

1. I agree to participate in audio-recorded interviews about the special education administrators’ spiritual experience at work as part of this project and for the purposes of data analysis. I agree that Merritt F. Waters may audio-record these interviews. The date, time and place of the interviews will be mutually agreed upon.

Signature ____________________________________________________________ Date ________________________________

2. I have been told that I have the right to listen to the recording of the interviews before they are used. I have decided that I (please check one):

_____ want to listen to the recordings

_____ do not want to listen to the recordings

Sign below if you do not want to listen to the recordings. If you want to listen to the recordings, you will be asked to sign after listening to them.

Signature ____________________________________________________________ Date ________________________________

3. Merritt F. Waters may / may not (circle one) use the audio-recordings made of me. The original recordings may be used for (check all that apply):

_____ this research project _____ publication _____ presentation at professional meetings

Signature ____________________________________________________________ Date ________________________________
APPENDIX D

RECRUITMENT COMMUNICATION
Email to be sent to OAPSA members:

Dear OAPSA Member,

I am an OAPSA member and a doctoral candidate in the P–12 Educational Leadership program at Kent State University. I am currently seeking participants for my dissertation study entitled “Special education administrators’ experience of spirituality at work: Making meaning, serving others, and handling it all.”

With this study, I hope to learn about how you experience spirituality in your work life. In order to be inclusive of a variety of perspectives, I have chosen a broad definition of spirituality for this study:

Spirituality, which comes from the Latin, *spiritus*, meaning ‘breath of life,’ is a way of being and experiencing that comes about through an awareness of a transcendent dimension and that is characterized by certain identifiable values in regard to self, others, nature, life and whatever one considers to be the Ultimate (Elkins, Hedstrom, Hughes, Leaf, and Saunders, 1988, p. 5).

*If you experience spirituality in your work and are willing to participate in my study,* which involves a total commitment of about five hours of your time over the next several months (e.g., interviews with me and some journal writing), **please include your contact information (telephone number, county, and city where you live) in a return email to me at mfergus8@kent.edu.** I will then contact you via telephone to further describe the study and seek your informed consent to participate. The consent form is attached if you would like to review it before replying.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at 440.258.2470 or mfergus8@kent.edu or my dissertation director, Dr. Catherine Hackney, at 330.672.0552 or chackne1@kent.edu.

Thank you,

Merritt
Merritt F. Waters

************************************************************************

Follow up email responses within two weeks:
Email respondent with
- Potential dates/times for a phone call
- Attach a copy of the informed consent to review during the call
- If there are more volunteers than needed, contact them and ask if they are willing to be on a list of alternates if data collection requires more participants

Telephone call to
- Review informed consent
- Answer any questions

If the respondent wants to be a participant
- Send the written narrative guidelines
- Set up the first interview

**********************************************************
Second email sent to OAPSA members

Dear OAPSA Members,
Thank you to all who responded to the initial email asking for participants in my dissertation research about special education administrators and their experience of spirituality at work. Data collection is occurring, and the responses are rich and interesting!

So far, the participants have similar characteristics in terms of race/ethnicity (Caucasian) and religion/faith (forms of Christianity). In order to make the study interesting to a wide audience, I am specifically seeking participants with diverse race/ethnicity and/or a belief system other than Christianity.

If you would like to explore your experience of spirituality in your work life and represent the diversity described above, please contact me as soon as possible at mfergus8@kent.edu or 440.258.2470. Current participants are really enjoying the study, and the total time commitment is no more than 5 hours of your time between now and January/February 2014.

Thank you,
Merritt F. Waters
Doctoral Candidate
Kent State University
APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW #1 QUESTIONS
Appendix E

Interview #1 Questions

1) Thank you for the narrative you wrote about your career development path. What areas of it would you like to discuss?
   • If the participant needs further prompting, I will:
     o Summarize key points the narrative and
     o Probe further about the transition from original career in education to special education administration, including:
       ▪ Specific decisions or events that led to it and
       ▪ Their motivations and expectations related to the change

2) What does the term *spirituality* mean to you?
   • Follow-ups:
     o Which of your life experiences have especially influenced your spirituality?
     o Why have they been influential?
     o How have they been influential?
     o As you define *spirituality*, do you believe it is the same as *ethics*, *values* or *morals*? Why?

3) Do you have a ‘spirituality routine’ or ‘spiritual habits’ (such as prayer or meditation) in your daily life?
   • Follow-ups:
     o If so, please explain.
     o Is there anything in your car or office that reminds you of your spirituality?
     o In your life outside of school, what do you like to do for enjoyment, to feel peaceful or to calm down?

4) What did you do, or experience, in your work in the past week (or so) that was deeply meaningful to you. Please describe how/why it was meaningful, made you feel ‘alive.’
   • Follow-up:
     o Compare the meaning you find in your work now to what you did in your original education career.

5) As a leader, what is most important to you?
   • Follow ups:
     o How do you describe your leadership disposition?
     o What influenced the development of your leadership disposition?
     o Was spirituality part of your leadership preparation program? If
so, how?
  o  On a continuum from essential to peripheral, where would you place your spirituality in relation to your leadership?

6) What aspects of your spirituality are enacted through the many facets of your work as a special education administrator?
   •  Follow-up:
     o  Please share a recent example of how a thought, word, action or reaction related to another person at work (child or adult) was guided by your spirituality. Please use descriptive details that will help me feel like I was there with you.

7) When faced with difficult situations at work, how do you keep a sense of balance and purpose about your life and work?
   •  Follow-ups:
     o  Describe the most recent high-stress, agitating situation you experienced at work.
     o  How well did you cope with it?
     o  Did you access anything you consider spiritual to regain balance?

8) What are you striving for in your future career/professional goals?
   •  What role does spirituality play in your aspirations?

9) Is there anything you want to discuss that I haven’t asked?
APPENDIX F

INTERVIEW #2 QUESTIONS
Appendix F

Interview #2 Questions

(modified 11/24/13 after one 2nd round interview)

1) Thank you for journaling about your experience of spirituality in your work in the past three weeks.
   • What have you noticed (i.e., themes) about your experience of your spirituality at work during this project?
   • Were you surprised by anything you noticed or journaled?

2) What did you notice about your typical spiritual habits during this time period?

3) During the past month, you have been paying additional attention to spirituality in the context of your work through our research project.
   • In what ways may the extra attention have influenced the meaning you made, how you supported others or your emotional state (i.e., stress level)? Please describe.

6) In a nutshell, what is your experience of spirituality in your work life?

7) Looking back over the years of your career, has this experience changed? If so, how?

8) How might participating in this study influence your experience of your spirituality in your work life going forward?

9) Is there anything you want to discuss that I haven’t asked?
APPENDIX G

JOURNAL ENTRY GUIDELINES
Appendix G

Journal Entry Guidelines

Kent State University
Dissertation Study
Merritt F. Waters, Co-Investigator
440.258.2470
mfergus8@kent.edu
Fall 2013

As a way to gather different types of data, journal writing is being included in this study. For the next 3 weeks, please reflect on and write about the following questions. Please journal at least one time per week for each question:

1) What happened at work that was most-strongly aligned with the core reasons of why you do your work as a special education leader? What was most significant or meaningful?

2) How were you able to serve or support another person in your work as a leader?

3) If you believe your spirituality helped you deal with stress this week, please describe how. If not, please share your thoughts about why it did not.

The style of journal you keep is up to you. Please feel free to write it by hand, type it in a Word document or utilize an online format such as Google Docs.

We will conduct our second and final interview the week of __________. At that time, please provide me with your journal entries (of course, feel free to keep a copy for yourself).

Thank you for participating in this study, and please feel free to contact me anytime.

Follow-up interview date/time options:

1.
2.
3.

353
APPENDIX H

GROUP MEMBER CHECK POWERPOINT
Appendix H

Group Member Check PowerPoint

6/15/14

**Group Norms**
- Share ideas candidly
- One person talks at a time
- Respect confidentiality
- Other?

**Session Goals for Participants**
- Gain understanding of data analysis process used
- Consider the preliminary thematic findings
- Provide feedback about the legitimacy of the preliminary findings
- Understand what is next for the project
- Create additional themes if necessary

**Data Analysis Process**
- Coded via conceptual framework/emergent codes
- Sorted & Summarized
- Weighted & Combined
- Looked for broader implications to develop an overarching explanation that addresses the research questions and creates understanding of the issue (Rubin & Rubin, 2005)

**Proposed Findings**
- Use of Gary Adams’ Two Paths as a metaphor for the findings

**Proposed Findings**
- “The Path”
Categories & Symbolism

1. Path of service — The path the figure walks on
   - Center of the whole picture

2. Thought processes — What the person is thinking
   - The internal monologue

3. Personal qualities — The person and gear carried along
   - Tool for the work at hand

Categories & Symbolism

4. Acting in accordance with beliefs/priorities — Footsteps along the path
   - The method for action in life and work

5. Interaction with other people — The mobile phone

6. Self-regulation through spiritual and other practices — the type of progress on the path (e.g., speed, motion, dilation)

Categories & Symbolism

7. Perspective on uncertainty and change
   - The weather conditions, reason

8. Work’s place in life as a whole — The landscape
   - The context of work in the big picture

9. God’s influence on work life — The high ground in the distance
   - The presence of the Ultimate in daily effort

Research Question #1

How is the spirituality of special education administrators related to the meaning they make of their work, including their career choices?

Career Choices

1. Career
   - Desire to help and serve others
   - Social influences — friends’ choices

   Move to Administration
   - Desire to expand the reach of the help and service
   - Other social influences
   - Work with particular leadership

   Convinced by others to make the change

   Did not experience

   "I feel like the name of God was speaking to me and really allowed me to see myself."

Career Choices

Preparation for Leadership
- Task classes to work toward something
- Most said no spiritual component in graduate program
- No program approached it directly, but one professor was clearly spiritually grounded and it came through
- Participants would have welcomed it or been neutral
Career Choices

Preparation for Leadership
- Two participants had a very intense, arduous preparation experience.
- They felt they were receiving more help from the administration than those who were not.
- The school psychology program did a better job preparing them than the administration coursework.

Making Meaning of Sp Ed Ad Work

PERSONAL QUALITIES
- Show your true self
  - People know what they're getting when they're talking to me.
- Patience and tolerance
  - Part of my job is to listen and be patient and explain it as many times as is needed.

Making Meaning of Sp Ed Ad Work

PERSONAL QUALITIES
- Compassion/kindness/respect
  - I had heart-to-heart conversations with struggling staff...and felt valuable to someone in my role as a leader.
- I needed to find a way to connect if I'm going to understand what they need.
- Optimism
  - Making positive comments about colleagues
  - I'm finding people really know themselves pretty well.
  - I gave thanks today for the dedication of my staff.

Making Meaning of Sp Ed Ad Work

PERSONAL QUALITIES
- Optimism
  - I went productive at work
    - Working in the classroom and seeing teachers in action has been satisfying.
    - Seeing people reflect back how meaningful it was to them
    - How it changed them made me feel better at work
  - I felt empowered when I am able to go in and problem solve
  - I engaged in conflict situations because you have to be optimistic about the outcome.

Making Meaning of Sp Ed Ad Work

PERSONAL QUALITIES
- Obstacles to Optimism
  - There is evil in the world.
  - Frustration with colleagues/families.
  - Feeling not good enough/inadequate.
  - High expectations for self/self-deprecating.
  - Feelings of disappointment.

Making Meaning of Sp Ed Ad Work

THOUGHT PROCESSES
- In the moment, being caring, forgiving, following values.
  - "I thought, what is best for me, for them, and the kids is to come to peace.
- Filtering thoughts in order to preserve relationships
  - Take a step back and put the filter on, knowing the other person doesn't have the same training.
Making Meaning of Sp Ed Ad Work

**THOUGHT PROCESSES**
- Developing the inner self
- Energized by learning something new that can help kids

**Modeling the way**
- Do what is right, even if it is difficult or unpopular
- Be open with others

**ACTING ON BELIEFS**
- We need to have high expectations for kids
- There needs to be joy in every kid's day
- I feel a sense of accomplishment when I've done something risky for a student
- I really enjoy working with parents and teachers to brainstorm ways to improve student success
- It is gratifying to hear about progress for kids we've had since preschool

**Direct Assistance to Families**
- The last thing was the support I could provide to families because of my knowledge.
- When he was hospitalized, I went with the grandma to the hospital to help her understand.
- My spirituality is carried out through the work I do with families and students.

**Open, honest dialogue**
- I've tried myself to be honest
- I've been told I was a bit too direct

**Repair mistakes**
- I'm going to make mistakes, but I need to apologize and go back and fix it

**ACTING ON BELIEFS**
- Inspiring a Shared Vision
- This is a shared problem and this is what we need to do. Can you help me with it?
- I'm trying to be an extended learning, problem-solving way to identify the purpose.

**Enabling others to Act**
- I'm not万能 sage.... I give people brainy and question in low key do things.
- The skill manages well with little input on my part at meetings.
Making Meaning of Sp Ed Ad Work

INTERACTION WITH OTHERS
- Influence of a Mentor
  - I was so impressed with the questions he asked that were about commitment.
  - She was positive and supportive but constructive.
  - I have a strong work ethic... my father and brother are the same way.
  - My mother was kind, but not a pushover.

- Persistence in difficult relationships with others
  - If you try to look at them as children of God, it changes how you respond to them.
  - The belief that I am doing the right thing helps when they are on the attack.
  - It is best not to hold grudges.
  - I'm sure it feel as deaf ears, but you keep at it.
  - I do my own mini TA's on people to find out what their motivations are.

INTERACTION WITH OTHERS
- The Golden Rule
  - Try very hard to say to myself if it were me, how would I want somebody to approach me?
  - Whether you're religious or not, treat people the way you'd want to be treated.
  - Listen Carefully
    - I find time for them and really listen to what their needs are and try to accommodate them.

INTERACTION WITH OTHERS
- Belief in a Higher Power
  - God wants us to be all we can be.
  - I ask for guidance as I have the right split to answer.
  - Seeing God in others
    - When I see God in another person, I feel good. I feel a sense of peace and calm.
Research Question #2

How does special education administrators’ spirituality enable them, as leaders, to serve and support others?

Serve & Support Others

PATH OF SERVICE
- Moving into special ed
  - It is focused on the kids and the programs that affect them.
- I took an enormous pay cut, but I felt like I wasn’t doing enough.
- I was asking for my asking: What is going to make the biggest difference?

Serve & Support Others

PATH OF SERVICE
- The Future
  - I’d like to teach college, special ed.
- Not becoming superintendent.
- Staying within the field of Special Education.
  - Special education is my calling and I can’t see myself doing another area of education.
- Human Resources.

Serve & Support Others

PERSONAL QUALITIES
- Focused
  - My spirituality guarantees I’m not going to get off track.
- Hard-working
  - I have to continue to challenge myself to be effective.

Serve & Support Others

PERSONAL QUALITIES
- Patient
  - I pray for patience in certain IEP meetings.
- Less Judgmental
  - I’m more patient and less judgmental as a result of my spirituality.
- When I do make assumptions about people, I try to catch myself and do a little more self-exploration, but some of it is not as heartfelt as it should be.

Serve & Support Others

PERSONAL QUALITIES
- Optimism
  - It must thrive on excitement or something.
- I can take the fall out. I think it is a skill an administrator needs.
- If I wasn’t involved in lots of things, I think I would leave and go somewhere I would be.
- It is difficult to implement the law as written and feel it is the right thing, yet maybe it will get the student the help she requires.
Serve & Support Others

PERSONAL QUALITIES

Obstacles to Optimism

- The thing that is most trying is not people who lack knowledge or all, but lack the attitudes and values and dispositions that go along with the [sic].
- Feeling like I haven't done enough
- You have to be able to look at everything, process it, and not let it soak you dry.
- Lots of different personalities and personal issues coming at you, and you never quite know.

Serve & Support Others

THOUGHT PROCESSES

Model the Way

- I have high expectations
- You have to get them to understand that you want them to contribute, or else why?
- I say what they think you want them to say
- Find out what's most important to you and get it done
- It is amazing when you provide opportunities who take them

Serve & Support Others

THOUGHT PROCESSES

Reflective Metrocognition

- I really need to do more work; just sit down and think about the people I work with and why I'm doing what I'm doing.
- I think there's a metaphor of going on, "Are you holding true to being a leader?"
- I have reflective on things, looking back and saying, "Where I was." Obstacle: It is surprising how little I reflect on what I do. People don't because they don't have time.

Serve & Support Others

THOUGHT PROCESSES

Filter Thoughts

- You can't say these things in a meeting.
- I'm typing, and I say, okay, I'm going to delete that.
- My heart guides my decision. I just know when things get odd, if it doesn't feel right in my heart, then something's not right.
- If I answer the phone and the person is upset, I take a minute to compose myself by asking them to hold while I get paper and pen for taking notes.

Serve & Support Others

ACTING ON BELIEFS

Enable Others to Act/Collaborate with Staff

- I would like to think of myself as building capacity in others and being an office for collaborative and then establishing systematic implementation on these things.
- Doing the work together
- You get the right people in the right places and I provide as much support as I can.
- Spending time coaching a newer teacher to assist her in carrying out my mission of supporting and advocating for children with disabilities

Serve & Support Others

ACTING ON BELIEFS

Pernicious with Others

- Perhaps that's where spirituality comes back, you look hard at the person and say, there is still something they bring to the table and value that
- Obstacle: The staff had a negative view of leadership and they believe there is a conspiracy behind everything.
Serve & Support Others

**SELF-REGULATION (not all “spiritual”)**
- Use of Humor
  - I'm pretty low key, I like to laugh and joke. I think my staff is pretty comfortable with me.
  - When I laugh and joke around, I think it helps people to be less anxious and fearful of things.
  - Venting to Others
  - One of my strategies to prevent overreacting to people is to vent to my colleagues or friends.

Serve & Support Others

**INTERACTION WITH OTHERS**
- Listen Carefully
  - It's easy to get defensive really quickly, so I try to understand their viewpoint, not just my own, and then really try and experience and understand where they are coming from.

Serve & Support Others

**RELATIONSHIP WITH UNCERTAINTY/CHANGE**
- Ability to Let Go
  - Today I could just let correctional officers make it up as they go along.
- Leans Behind Something Comfortable
  - I think I've done what I can do here...I think somebody else needs to come in and have a different mindset in this.
- My spiritual outlook played a role in deciding to change jobs because I wanted to go where I'd make the biggest difference.

Serve & Support Others

**INFLUENCE OF GOD ON WORK LIFE**
- Belief in a Higher Power
  - I don't hold God responsible for the things people do to mess up their lives, that's people making bad decisions, and hopefully they can learn from them and move on.
  - God is with me and He is in me, “You don't need to respond to that right now.”
- Discrete: I want to see God in everyone and there's times when it's really, really hard to do that.

Serve & Support Others

**SUMMARY OF MOST-EMPHASIZED AREAS**
- Staying within the field of Special Education
- Model the Way
- Reflective Metacognition
- Filter Thoughts
- Inspire Others to Act/Collaborate with Staff
- Encourage to Optimism
Research Question #3
How do special education administrators access their spirituality as a resource to help them cope with the demands of work and continue to nurture their own development?

Coping with Demands of Work
PATH OF SERVICE
- Moving Into Sp Ed Ad
  I've felt there was a force that led me to the next place...something will tell me I'm supposed to be there
  I was looking for my calling, where I was going to make the biggest difference.

Coping with Demands of Work
PERSONAL QUALITIES/PERSPECTIVES
- Keeping Calm
  Students and staff were getting stressed around the holidays. I believe spirituality helped me deal with their stress because I was able to stay calm, be patient and understand they have their stress to bear.
  There were many times I was close to losing my patience with staff this week. I know there was a force larger than myself helping me control my anger and help them correct mistakes. I was able to be positive and encouraging when I felt like biting their heads off.

Coping with Demands of Work
PERSONAL QUALITIES/PERSPECTIVES
- Being Grateful
  Start the day with being grateful, asking for guidance, patience and peace.
  I tried to turn it to gratitude, rather than why is this happening to me? That gets me through stressful situations.

Coping with Demands of Work
PERSONAL QUALITIES/PERSPECTIVES
- Optimism
  I choose to be optimistic every day and that is my connection to God.
  The force helps me to see I am doing a lot for kids and families. There is something that is making me recognize, "Hey, you're doing a really good job!"
  I needed the reassurance of the outside force telling me, "You'll work through this." It'll be fine.
  When I'm consistent in my faith, things DO happen for the best.

Coping with Demands of Work
PERSONAL QUALITIES/PERSPECTIVES
- Belief in Karma
  One participant
  I did a lot of experimenting with education, and how you treat people matters. I know you live your life matters. What you put out there comes back.
  I have intuitive karma. If I do something wrong, it will come right back on me.
Coping with Demands of Work

PERSONAL QUALITIES/PERSPECTIVES
- Things seemed worse beforehand
- My life experiences have proven that things aren’t as bad as they seem and you can get through it.
- I’m not alone
- I hang onto God for dear life because I was lonely even though I was never alone.
- I feel people in our field have to have spirituality to stay sane and well-grounded and not feel alone on those rough days.

THOUGHT PROCESSES
- Reflective metacognition
  - When I notice I’m getting overwhelmed, I recontextualize the work toward being motivated by love.
  - I don’t think we spend enough time attending to the joyful and beautiful things. I do pass by a beautiful field and don’t admire it; I praise God off, I think about that from The Color Purple.
  - Thinking about and journaling about my spirituality brought it to the forefront. I never gave it any credit before.

Coping with Demands of Work

STRATEGIES FOR SELF-REGULATION
- Traditional Prayers
  - Walk with Our Father
  - Pray the rosary.
- Mindfulness
  - Small Grounding/Moment.
  - Being in the moment, taking note of what was good, reflecting on what could have been.
- Appreciation of Nature
  - The trees in our pens can be very inspiring.
  - Focus on big birds, and enjoy sitting in the sun. I like to live by a beach.
  - Taking care of a pet and giving love to my animals.

Coping with Demands of Work

STRATEGIES FOR SELF-REGULATION
- Informal Prayers
  - Give me guidance, let me be smart today. Let me help people. Let me open up my heart.
  - If there’s something I need to get across.
  - Just talking to God.
  - In the morning and on the way home in the car.
  - Before meals, before a stressful task.
  - When I’m sorry for something.

Coping with Demands of Work

STRATEGIES FOR SELF-REGULATION
- Informal Prayers
  - I feel centered by prayer.
  - Is there anything I need to pray about?
  - What is the tool I should be using?
  - I need a devotional and also just talk, to say I need help here or if I’m confused or thought I said my best or just confiding, and asking for assistance and then not forgetting to be grateful.

Coping with Demands of Work

STRATEGIES FOR SELF-REGULATION
- Attending Church
  - We are Eucharistic ministers.
  - I attend weekly mass.
  - Light candles.
  - I don’t go to church on a weekly basis. I don’t buy into organized religion.
Coping with Demands of Work

STRATEGIES FOR SELF-REGULATION
- Attending Church
- I don't go to church as a weekly basis; I don't buy into organized religion.
- There's an evangical/charismatic group where people hold hands. That's one of the reasons I've stopped going the formality feels right to me.
- One of the things I like about church is the rituals.
- The digital things in church take away from the purity of my relationship with God.

Coping with Demands of Work

RELATIONSHIP WITH UNCERTAINTY/CHANGE
- Age and the Passage of Time
  - As I've gotten older, I rely on spirituality more than I did as a young person. I don't know if when you're younger you're just more self-centered and think you control everything. Then you realize there is someone bigger than you and you need that more.
  - As I age, I see there is certainly has the hand of God in so many things.
  - I think it's partly spirituality and partly that you just can't keep up that level of intensity.

Coping with Demands of Work

WORK'S PLACE IN LIFE
- Difficulty Dropping Work
  - You've got to pray for balance. I go to bed at night sometimes not able to turn a page off, and I pray oh Lord, please take them out of my head because I need to rest.
  - When I can't sleep, I pray for comfort and imagine I'm on a beach, floating on a cloud, and all the things you try to do

Coping with Demands of Work

RELATIONSHIP WITH UNCERTAINTY/CHANGE
- There Are Things I Don't Know
  - Now the key is for me to stop dwelling on it's value with my own internal doubts and frustrations so that I can enjoy the peace outside the tunnel of my job.
  - Work is Unpredictable
  - When I go into work I have a plan but I very rarely get to do those things. My work is influenced by spirituality because you have to be very quiet.
Coping with Demands of Work

GOD'S INFLUENCE ON WORK LIFE

Leadership Beliefs
- My leadership absolutely has a spiritual component to it, 'cause that's the kind of leader Christ was, right?
- In my belief system, we're supposed to reflect the love of God through our work.
- When you look at people, even when they're yelling at you, you gotta see God in that person, see humankind, and realize what your role is, who are you, what are you supposed to be doing?

Coping with Demands of Work

GOD'S INFLUENCE ON WORK LIFE

God as the Reason for Success at Work
- I've got all these out of site process situations by the grace of God. I don't have a really big head. I know it wasn't me.
- I think the experience of spirituality permeates my work. Kind of an infinite cycle. It's what gets me into it and keeps me in it. It's what pushes me back into line.

Coping with Demands of Work

GOD'S INFLUENCE ON WORK LIFE

That was not the way I thought it was going to go. I worried about it and when he apologized, I was like, "That is the hand of God."
- Extra attention to my spirituality has made my actions in difficult situations more effective.
- There were definitely these voices inside me that push me when I'm struggling, like, "Why am I doing this job?"

Coping with Demands of Work

SUMMARY OF MOST-EMPHASIZED AREAS

- Optimism
- Belief in God
- Direct relationship with God
- Informed Prayers
- Spiritual Gift is expressed at Work Integrated
- God as the Reason for Success at Work

Participant Feedback

- Are the findings accurate?
- Where are potential inaccuracies/areas for more exploration?
- What do the results make you think of?
- Stories, people, symbols, etc.
- What themes do we see in the data?
- Additional Questions
- Where is God?

Next Steps

- I make revisions based on this session
- I send powerpoint to participants who couldn't join us so they can comment if they wish
- I begin write my chapter on findings
- I meet with my dissertation director
- I present at the KSU Graduate Research Symposium on April 11th
- I keep writing
- Thank you for your participation!
Coping with Demands of Work

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Coping with Demands of Work

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Coping with Demands of Work

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Coping with Demands of Work

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