IDENTIFICATION AND SELECTION OF TEACHERS EQUIPPED TO GUIDE STUDENTS IN SPIRITUAL FORMATION IN MENNONITE SCHOOLS

A dissertation submitted to the Kent State University College of Education, Health, and Human Services in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By
Matthew R. McMullen

May 2016
A dissertation written by

Matthew R. McMullen

B.S., Eastern Mennonite University, 1983

M.Ed., University of South Florida, 1989

Ph.D., Kent State University, 2016

Approved by

__________________________, Director, Doctoral Dissertation Committee
Catherine E. Hackney

__________________________, Member, Doctoral Dissertation Committee
Erica Eckert

__________________________, Member, Doctoral Dissertation Committee
Averil E. McClelland

Accepted by

__________________________, Director, School of Foundations, Leadership and Administration
Kimberly S. Schimmel

__________________________, Interim Dean, College of Education, Health and Human Services
Mark A. Kretovics
The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand how head administrators, in Mennonite Schools Council member schools, identify and select teachers who are equipped to guide their students in spiritual formation. The study explored the categorical topics of fit, Mennonite culture, and spiritual formation as they interacted within a Mennonite school setting.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with the participating administrators, allowing for emergent questions and themes to develop. A review of individual school documents, policies, procedures, and applications for the purpose of identifying and selecting teachers was conducted. A qualitative grounded theory methodology was used to analyze the interview transcripts through open, axial, and selective coding.

Findings within the category of fit revealed the major themes of theological position, professional preparation, and student-centered disposition. The category of Mennonite culture established the themes of Christ-centered living, community building, and peace-making. In the category of spiritual formation, the central phenomenon of relationship as informed through listening/dialogue and faith journey emerged as the primary method of identifying and selecting teachers who would best guide students in spiritual formation in Mennonite schools. Results of this study may assist Mennonite
school administrators in evaluating and shaping their teacher selection processes. Further research of this type in other faith-based schools would enhance the understanding of spiritual formation as it relates to teacher identification and selection within those organizational cultures.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

“Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; His love endures forever.”

I Chronicles 16:34 (NIV)

“And all thy children shall be taught of the Lord; and great shall be the peace of thy children.”

Isaiah 54:13 (KJV)

Jesus said, “Let the little children come to Me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.”

Matthew 19:14 (NIV)

Untold thanks and appreciation go to my wife and children for their constant love and support. God has richly blessed me! Karla, Ellen, Charles, and Anna – I love you!

Thanks also to my Mom and Dad, for their continuous love and prayers.

I am deeply grateful to Dr. Catherine Hackney – your patience, encouragement, guidance, wisdom, and professional judgement throughout my dissertation phase has been a true blessing.

I am also deeply grateful for Rev. Don Davies – your friendship, support, time, and prayers were an amazing gift to me throughout this process.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</th>
<th>..........................................................</th>
<th>iv</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
<td>..................................................................</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>..................................................................</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question</td>
<td>................................................................</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of the Problem</td>
<td>..................................................</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of the Study</td>
<td>..................................................</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptual Base</td>
<td>........................................................</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goodness of Fit</td>
<td>........................................................</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employees and Goodness of Fit</td>
<td>...................................</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers and Goodness of Fit</td>
<td>........................................</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Culture</td>
<td>.................................................</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Categories</td>
<td>.............................................</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Knowledge</td>
<td>................................................</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual Formation</td>
<td>........................................................</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian School Spiritual Formation</td>
<td>................................</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mennonite Spiritual Formation</td>
<td>......................................</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants and Inquiry</td>
<td>................................................</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumptions</td>
<td>................................................................</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>..................................................................</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE</td>
<td>..........................................................</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee Selection</td>
<td>..................................................</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selection Methodology</td>
<td>..................................................</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selection Ethics</td>
<td>........................................................</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selection and Teacher Traits</td>
<td>........................................</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goodness of Fit</td>
<td>........................................................</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goodness of Fit Defined</td>
<td>..................................................</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Values and Goodness of Fit</td>
<td>................................</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Versus Organizational Values and Goodness of Fit</td>
<td>............</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personnel Selection and Goodness of Fit</td>
<td>.....................................</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethics and Goodness of Fit</td>
<td>..................................................</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of Goodness of Fit</td>
<td>...........................................</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Culture</td>
<td>..................................................</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Culture Defined</td>
<td>........................................</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Leadership</td>
<td>................................................</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Learning</td>
<td>..................................................</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Levels</td>
<td>........................................................</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Culture in Schools</td>
<td>..................................</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
III. METHODOLOGY ............................................................................................................................ 95
  Research Design .......................................................................................................................... 96
  Grounded Theory Methodology ............................................................................................... 98
  Participants ................................................................................................................................ 100
  Data Collection .......................................................................................................................... 103
  Data Analysis ............................................................................................................................. 105
    Data Analysis by Coding .......................................................................................................... 106
      Open coding ............................................................................................................................. 107
      Axial coding ............................................................................................................................. 108
  Data Verification and Trustworthiness ....................................................................................... 109
    Credibility ................................................................................................................................ 110
    Transferability ........................................................................................................................ 111
    Dependability .......................................................................................................................... 113
    Confirmability ........................................................................................................................ 114

IV. RESULTS OF THE STUDY ............................................................................................................. 115
  Context of Schools Included in the Study .................................................................................... 116
  School and Participant Demographic Information ...................................................................... 118
    Demographics of Schools ......................................................................................................... 119
    Participant Biographical Information ...................................................................................... 119
  The Process of Identifying Teacher Candidates ......................................................................... 120
    Advertising Job Openings ........................................................................................................ 121
    Interviewing Applicants .......................................................................................................... 122
    Negative Case .......................................................................................................................... 124
  Identifying and Selecting the Teacher ......................................................................................... 127
  Fit ............................................................................................................................................... 128
Theological Position ................................................................. 128
Professional Preparation .......................................................... 131
Student-Centered Disposition .................................................... 134
Mennonite Culture ...................................................................... 136
Community Building .................................................................. 137
Peace-Making ............................................................................ 141
Christ-Centered Living .............................................................. 143
Spiritual Formation ..................................................................... 145
Spiritual Formation as a Formal Process ...................................... 146
Relationship ............................................................................... 147
Listening/Dialogue ..................................................................... 150
Faith Journey ............................................................................. 152
Selection of Teachers ................................................................. 155
Scientific Process ........................................................................ 155
Intuition ...................................................................................... 158
Member Checking ....................................................................... 161
Fit .............................................................................................. 162
Mennonite Culture ...................................................................... 165
Spiritual Formation ..................................................................... 171
Concluding Remarks ................................................................... 172

V. CONCLUSIONS .......................................................................... 175
Summary of the Results .............................................................. 175
Fit and Mennonite Culture .......................................................... 176
Fit .............................................................................................. 177
Mennonite Culture ...................................................................... 180
Synthesis of Fit and Mennonite Culture ...................................... 182
Spiritual Formation ..................................................................... 184
Teacher Selection ........................................................................ 189
Fit .............................................................................................. 190
Mennonite Culture ...................................................................... 191
Spiritual Formation ..................................................................... 193
Models of spiritual formation .................................................... 193
Modeling spiritual formation ...................................................... 195
Relationship ............................................................................... 198
Reflections .................................................................................. 200
Implications for Mennonite School Leaders ................................ 203
Recommendations for Future Research ...................................... 206
Conclusion .................................................................................. 208
APPENDICES ........................................................................................................................................ 210
  APPENDIX A. CONFESSION OF FAITH IN A MENNONITE PERCEPTIVE .................................................. 211
  APPENDIX B. MENNONITE SCHOOL TEACHER APPLICATIONS ........... 217

REFERENCES ....................................................................................................................................... 228
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

As a career educator and administrator in Mennonite schools, the spiritual formation of students is of paramount importance in my work. My role as administrator includes oversight of the spiritual nurturing and development of the students and the teachers who assist in this process. In addition to the dimensions of student growth addressed in most school settings—educational, social, emotional, and physical—Mennonite schools, a subset of all faith-based schools, address the spiritual dimension of the student. The Mennonite denomination is a protestant denomination within the Christian faith. A central premise in Mennonite education is that all teaching should emanate from a Christian worldview, which is informed by scriptures contained in the Holy Bible and the work of the Holy Spirit. This orientation sets the stage for teaching and guiding students spiritually, and is further shaped by the Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective (General Conference Mennonite Church & Mennonite Church, 1995). Teachers in a Mennonite classroom are to be a spiritual role model for the student while teaching their subjects through the lens of a biblical understanding. The fulfillment of a Mennonite school’s mission statement depends on selecting teachers and staff who subscribe to the particular spiritual culture and beliefs of the school.

My interest in teacher selection processes was enhanced during an educational administration class where the use of scripted interviews in the selection of teachers was presented. Scripted interviews use identical wording and delivery of all interview questions to each applicant. The interpretation of scripted interview responses relies on
the analysis of previous response data related to how teachers, subsequently identified as effective practitioners, answered the questions. Specific words and phrases, which are used by effective teachers in answering the scripted questions, were developed as a rubric to guide administrative scoring of the interview answers. Scripted interviews specifically for use when hiring Mennonite school teachers, and targeted to identification of an effective spiritual guide, do not exist. In scripted interviews, the unit of analysis is the teacher. Identifying how teachers respond to pre-formulated questions is seen as very important in identifying their potential performance in professional domains. This led me to question how other Mennonite school administrators might identify a teacher’s ability to guide the spiritual formation of their students. The focus in this study is on how the administrators determine a teacher candidate’s strengths in the specific domain of guiding students in spiritual formation.

Schools look for teachers who are experts in their subject areas or grade levels, who will work well with parents and colleagues, who will attend to organizational and professional duties effectively, and who will have success in motivating and educating their students (Walls, Nardi, von Minden & Hoffman, 2002; Witcher & Onwuegbuzie, 1999). An abundance of existing scholarly literature supports addressing spirituality in public schools, in both the areas of counseling and teaching, but there is agreement that this must be done in ways that are not prescriptive as to what the student should believe (Dantley, 2005; Duffy, 2006; Jackson, 2007). Schools that are not faith-based would not seek to align with a particular religious group and would attempt to provide a level playing field for the entire spiritual spectrum, making discernment of the candidate’s
spiritual beliefs and practices irrelevant. In a Mennonite school, however, the spiritual domain is central to the qualifications being assessed during an interview and selection process.

Having interviewed and selected in excess of 100 teachers over the past 23 years, in four Mennonite schools, I have formulated questions and procedures for assessing teacher candidates. These questions and procedures were developed as a combination of school selection policies and the Mennonite faith perspective subscribed to in each particular school community. Board-approved teacher applications, which were completed by the applicant, included questions that addressed their spiritual experience, practice, and understanding. These included questions about church membership and attendance, theological understanding of certain biblical topics, spiritual and faith integration in the classroom, and interpersonal relations. Answers that are thoughtful, well developed, and provide evidence of past practices that have been successful for the teacher are helpful in assessing the potential for guiding students in spiritual formation, as with any teacher competency.

As a practicing administrator in Mennonite schools, I have been involved in and experienced the phenomenon of teacher selection and have observed the results of those selection decisions over time. Assessing a candidate’s beliefs, spiritual understanding, and potential for providing effective spiritual guidance is a challenging process. As the interviewer, evaluating answers to spiritually related questions can be uncomfortable because of a desire not to be judgmental. However, judgment and discernment are necessary in order to differentiate between truth and artificial answers given only through
the candidate’s perception of the most appropriate response for the setting, as with any
domain being assessed. The relative subjectivity of personal religious beliefs creates a
difficult task for the interviewer.

A common practice among faith-based schools is to ask interview questions
specifically related to the theological and doctrinal position of the school and its
sponsoring organization (B. Watson, 1992). Candidates sometimes answer questions
related to scriptural interpretation by saying that they believe what the Bible states. This
is problematic because there are increasingly divergent views as to the interpretation of
specific scriptural passages (Sproul, 2009; Vanhoozer, 2009). In order to assess the
spiritual orientation of the teacher candidate, the administrator will need to clearly
understand the candidate’s specific interpretation of scripture. Subsequently, the
administrator will compare the candidate’s understanding with the understanding that is
subscribed to by the school board and governing churches, if applicable. A close fit with
the school culture is desired in order for the teacher to be considered for a job. If the
candidate’s spiritual orientation fits within the theological framework of the school, their
belief system should support the targeted parameters of spiritual formation in students at
the school.

The question still remains as to how the teacher will model their spiritual
understanding, and if they will be able to guide and teach students in a proficient way.
Experience in mentoring students within other Christian contexts, such as being a church
youth leader or Sunday school teacher, could lead to positive references in this area from
previous supervisors. My past experience indicates that being a strong spiritual leader
does not necessarily indicate that the teacher will also have the ability to teach their subject matter with proficiency. A Christian school administrator is sometimes left with the dilemma of an apparent choice between spiritual strengths and academic strengths (Peshkin, 1986). The obvious goal is to find both of these strengths in one candidate.

The vision and mission of a school, as experienced in the school culture, should determine the qualities, skill set, and worldview that an effective teacher brings to the classroom in that organization. A Mennonite school will search for candidates who are able to mentor students in a biblical worldview from a Mennonite perspective, while simultaneously exhibiting a strong proficiency in teaching subject matter to those students.

Schools and other organizations attempt to focus their efforts for all stakeholders through appropriate mission statements. A review of the mission statements developed by the Mennonite schools participating in this study is helpful in illustrating the commonalities of the study group. As a method for establishing a strong link with the Mennonite Church, the statements contain phrases such as affiliated with, commissioned by, and grounded in. Being denominationally inclusive institutions which assist the families they serve, the statements also use phrases like partner with or in partnership with to refer to the significant relationships with parents, churches, and the denomination. The idea of spiritual formation is referred to with language such as Christian discipleship, nurture, faith commitment, faith development, and service to Christ. Mennonite school mission statements are very clear on the centrality of the spiritual dimension of each school’s culture. Other important themes that arise in the mission statements are
education, academics, community, and a global focus. In order for the culture of a school to be maintained and strengthened, the mission statement should be central to the selection process and systemic in all practices of the school (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999).

**Research Question**

This research study sought to understand how Mennonite school administrators identify and select teachers in Mennonite school settings. More specifically, the study explored how Mennonite school administrators identify a proficiency in teachers for guiding their students in personal spiritual formation. The central research question that guided this study was: How do Mennonite school administrators identify and select teachers who are able to guide students in their personal spiritual formation? As stated previously, numerous scholarly research studies have focused on other domains of teacher professionalism and proficiency. A void exists in the available literature that addresses the spiritual domain relevant to faith-based schools.

**Statement of the Problem**

According to the United States Department of Education Office of Nonpublic Education, during the 2011–12 school year, there were 21,086 schools with a religious orientation, educating 3,605,038 K–12 students in the U.S. (Statistics About Non-Public Education in the United States, n.d.). The number of students in Mennonite PK–12 schools, who maintain membership in the Mennonite Schools Council, is a subset of the total Christian school movement and totaled 8,504 students from 30 schools during the 2014–15 school year. These Christian schools are looking for teachers who are well-trained, academically superior, student-centered, professional, and appropriately licensed
(Stronge, 2007; Stronge & Xu, 2012). In Christian schools, teachers must also possess a particular worldview, informed by their faith, in order to successfully implement the stated mission of the schools. Practitioner articles from Christian educational sources give practical advice and other information in relation to interviewing and selection practices (Banke, Maldonado, & Lacey, 2012; Ketner, 2012; Stronge & Xu, 2012). However, scholarly literature on this topic was not found.

Scholarly research has been completed on the topics of effective teaching strategies in Kindergarten through 12th grade schools, subjects taught in the schools, and teacher selection processes used to select teachers in those settings (Arvey & Campion, 1982; Baker & Spier, 1990; Metzger & Wu, 2008). However, scholarly literature is silent on the topic of the efficacy of teacher selection processes in the Christian school setting in general. No scholarly research has been found which examines the methods used by Christian, and more specifically Mennonite, school administrators in selecting the most qualified teacher applicants—those who will most effectively guide students in spiritual formation tailored to the specific culture of their school. As mentioned previously, there are practitioner articles on the topics of interviewing and selecting teachers in Christian schools. These may be helpful to administrators as they process and refine their teacher selection methods, but the ideas are opinions which are not based on research findings.

Thus, the impetus for the current study is driven by the lack of scholarly research data available on this topic. When seeking the additional teacher proficiency of spiritual mentoring, Christian school administrators employ their own individual methods for identification and selection. Discussions with Christian, and more specifically
Mennonite, national and regional educational leaders indicated the importance of this topic. There is a need for discussion and research around successful methods for identifying proficiency in the area of guiding spiritual formation for the benefit of faith-based schools, especially for new administrators (E. Moyer, personal communication, February 16, 2015; R. Ross, personal communication, February 17, 2015). In Christian schools, it is just as important for teachers to be effective in guiding students spiritually as it is for them to be effective in teaching their subject matter (McMillan, 2007).

Mennonite school administrators who are leading the selection processes at their schools will feel the most direct impact of this study. Data-based information from this study should provide additional guidance for administrators who are establishing or reassessing their methods for determining a teacher candidate’s potential for positively impacting students in their faith development. If the results of this study assist administrators in selecting the teachers who are most proficient in guiding student spiritual formation, the successful accomplishment of the mission of their school will be enhanced.

**Significance of the Study**

McMillan (2007) conducted an in-depth study of Christian school administrators and noted, regarding teacher recruitment, that it is possible to miss important and relevant spiritual information if the administrator is not thorough in questioning and if the applicant is not honest with answers. Making the assumption that a person interviewing for a position at a Christian school is in line with the theological beliefs of the school, simply because they have chosen to apply, is a mistake. Due diligence is needed in
determining if there is a match between the applicant’s beliefs and that of the school leadership and stakeholders. Administrators in the Mennonite schools have an abundant amount of experience and wisdom, which was explored during this study. Sharing of knowledge through this qualitative study should enhance teacher selection protocols and their efficacy in faith-based schools, and more specifically in Mennonite schools.

Personal communication with administrators, prior to this study, from schools that belong to the Mennonite Schools Council was informative in regards to the potential significance of conducting the research. One administrator spoke to the difference between finding someone who is able to guide students in spiritual formation, versus one who is able to successfully guide in Anabaptist/Christian spiritual formation. The latter is a more difficult prospect in this administrator’s opinion. Another administrator expressed that most teacher applicants, in their setting, recognize the importance of guiding spiritual formation, but believe that it is mostly the responsibility of the Bible teacher. This administrator also expressed frustration that there is no instrument to measure this proficiency in teachers. Concern from a third administrator centered on the wide range of spiritual experiences represented in the student body of their school—from no faith commitment, to affiliation with a non-Christian religion, to a wide array of Christian denominations. He was concerned with guiding students spiritually in a way that is non-threatening to both students and parents alike. Finally, a Christian teacher with past experience in public schools is often selected. In their public schools, they were not able to practice biblical and spiritual integration as is expected in a Mennonite school. This administrator expressed that most teacher education programs, even in Christian colleges,
do not provide specific instruction in the area of guiding the spiritual formation of students. These are examples of conversations that led me to believe that the topic of the study is relevant and important to faith-based educators and administrators.

**Conceptual Base**

This study was conducted in order to discover how Mennonite school administrators select teachers who are able to guide Mennonite school students in the area of personal spiritual formation. The conceptual base revolved around three areas—goodness of fit, organizational culture within Mennonite schools, and spiritual formation. The established culture within an organization prescribes the qualities and skills that are being sought when teachers are selected. In turn, the teacher candidate should understand and identify a good fit within the identified organizational culture. Within the Mennonite school context, spiritual formation of students is central to the vision and mission of the school and should be a central concern to teachers who are selected by the school. The first area discussed within the conceptual base of this study is goodness of fit.

**Goodness of Fit**

The question that remains is how administrators determine the appropriate candidates to select for teaching positions within their schools. According to Berger (2003), “goodness of fit is a pattern of smooth interaction between the individual and the social milieu, including family, school and community” (p. 206). Given the culture and mission of Christian schools, predicting the goodness of fit for teachers and their schools is at the heart of the selection process. Patterns of smooth interaction are developed in a school when the people who serve in all levels of the organization are unified in their
goals. Berger’s study defined these levels of interaction as the school families, board members, administrators, teachers, staff members, and students.

**Employees and Goodness of Fit**

Goodness of fit, person-organization fit, or person-culture fit (Burk & Birk, 2001; Chatman, 1989; Little & Miller, 2007; O’Reilly, Chatman, & Caldwell, 1991; Vandenberghe, 1999; Van Vianen, 2000) are all terms referring to the degree to which a person and an organizational culture collaborate effectively in a work environment for the good of the organization. Person-organization fit theory has developed to the point where specific diagnostic instruments have been designed to assess person-organization fit. Bowen, Ledford, and Nathan (1991) noted that frequently those with seemingly the best fit for personality and social skills are not necessarily the ones with the best technical or job-related skills. Recognizing the importance of goodness of fit in an organization leads one to focus on how this concept is identified within teacher candidates in a school setting. And for teachers, both social skills and professional skills are equally important in determining fit.

**Teachers and Goodness of Fit**

The classroom teacher in a school has a major impact on the life of his or her students. Therefore, an administrator’s role in selecting appropriate personnel becomes integral to the positive student outcomes that schools strive to achieve. Burk and Birk (2001) discussed selection practices of organizations:

Many times organizations default to pencil-and-paper assessments for statistical comparisons between potential job candidates. Other companies engage in
generic interviews and intuitively determine whether applicants are qualified for a job. In either case, organizations determine a “goodness of fit” between themselves and the applicants. The “goodness of fit,” however, may be determined by such intangible factors as interpersonal skills, team orientation, physical appearance, and ideas of how well applicants might work with the organizational culture. (p. 32)

In order to achieve goodness of fit, knowing the culture of the school and how to predict the intangible factors in a potential teacher candidate are important. The authors’ reference to the use of intuition in interviewing may be a key understanding in a study of how administrators select new employees. Burk and Birk (2001) also referred to the fact that interviewers often fail to address how well an applicant will fit into an organizational culture. Specifically identifying the method or process for determining the potential cultural fit between the teacher and the school culture is an important part of employee selection.

Dym and Hutson (2005) addressed the idea of goodness of fit in nonprofit organizations and revealed that there should be a fit not only with the organization, but also within the larger culture in which the organization resides. Teachers are leaders within a school both in their classroom and in the general school culture. While the written curriculum is important in the education of a child, it is arguable that the influence of a teacher on a child’s life is much greater. Luke 6:40 (The New International Version) says, “The student is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like their teacher.” Mennonite schools fit within the larger
framework of their denominational affiliation and a study of the teacher selection process is affected by the larger culture surrounding the school. The next section addresses the relevance of organizational culture as a factor in teacher selection processes.

**Organizational Culture**

Significant study has been completed on many aspects of organizations, and subsequent theory has evolved from those studies, which inform the dynamics that exist within a school culture. Edgar Schein (1970), in his seminal book, provides the following definition: “An organization is the rational coordination of the activities of a number of people for the achievement of some common explicit purpose or goal, through division of labor and function, and through a hierarchy of authority and responsibility” (p. 9). In the context of this study, the cultural aspects of a faith-based school become operative with respect to these same parameters. The activities of teachers and the common goals they share are reflected in the culture of the school.

Meyer and Rowan (1977) used the term formal organizations and defined them as “systems of coordinated and controlled activities that arise when work is embedded in complex networks of technical relations and boundary-spanning changes” (p. 340). Educational institutions are certainly complex networks where relations and changes must be organized around common understandings of the proposed end results. Schools, as organizations, must have faculty and staff who understand and agree on the explicit purposes and goals of the school in order to successfully carry out the stated mission. The responsibility of selecting employees who subscribe to and agree with the mission of a school lies with the administrator and others involved in the selection process.
(Cranston, 2012). In turn, the administrator is also charged with inculcating and maintaining the organizational goals of the school throughout the constituent bodies—students, employees, parents, and all other stakeholders.

Culture is one of many dimensions in an organization, and the culture within schools is a central factor in the lived experience of teachers and students. Schein (1992) explored the culture of a group as “a pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration” (p. 12). His definition also addressed the idea that those assumptions work well in the group, are validated by the older members of the group, and are taught to new group members as valid and important constructs. How can a particular person’s receptivity to being inculcated into the culture of an organization, a school, be predicted in the selection process? New employees bring new ideas and new life into an organizational culture, but the predetermined basic assumptions will seek to be preserved in the process as the organization ages and establishes accepted norms. If a new employee tries to change the basic cultural assumptions, they may be viewed as being a poor fit with the school culture, although the culture may need a bold spokesperson for appropriate change as well. Selecting employees who fit well within a healthy student-centered Mennonite school culture is in the best interest of all stakeholders and the success of the school. In a broader sense, teachers are educated and trained to work within a specific category of organizations, educational institutions, as discussed in the next section.
Organizational Categories

Organizations can be divided into categories, and individual institutions within a category will likely have similar characteristics. Schools in general will have some common organizational understandings, but will vary according to their missions. Argyris and Schon (1996) used the word agency as a synonym for organization and defined an agency as “a collection of people that make decisions, delegate authority for action, and monitor membership, all on a continuing basis” (p. 10). In their discussion of agencies, schools are characterized as one category of agencies. Furthermore, agencies are viewed as formal organizations with explicit rules that are legalistic in nature. In this sense, the legalistic nature of a Christian school includes expectations of the spiritual grounding of teachers. In turn, the spiritual influence they have on their students—the beliefs they espouse and how they inculcate those into the lives of their students—becomes very important as new members are added to the agency or school organization. Teachers are the authorities charged with making decisions for, delegating to, and monitoring the students in their care. Students in Mennonite schools should learn and grow in all areas of their lives. Even though they become more autonomous, they are expected to function in a way that meshes with the organizational community. A closer study illuminates specific knowledge bases arising within organizations, known as organizational knowledge.

Organizational Knowledge

Through continued experience in an organization, employees develop a base of understanding known as organizational knowledge (Argyris & Schon, 1996;
Auernhammer & Hall, 2014). This organizational knowledge is learned through positive and negative experiences that are accepted by the members of the organization. A young organization accumulates knowledge more quickly than an organization that has a significant history, although the process slows as the organization adapts to environmental influences. Knowledge is held by members of the organization in files, records, and policies, and in physical objects in the organization that encourage behavior deemed as appropriate to the culture. Organizational knowledge is passed on through traditions and practices which are both openly recognized and unrecognized in the sense that staff members may be unable to verbalize the practice because of the routine nature and acceptance by the school community. Organizational knowledge, once accepted, becomes organizational practice as the community seeks to act on the shared beliefs.

Organizational knowledge combines with organizational practice to create a strong culture within institutions. Kelemen (2003) discussed the unifying factor of common goals and objectives around which strong organizational cultures unite. This unity engenders a greater organizational commitment from employees, which leads to greater success in attaining the established goals and objectives. Both material and symbolic rewards given to employees for following and strengthening the goals and values of the organization are part of developing a strong culture. Quality and productivity are also enhanced in systems with strong rewards, which are directly related to employee success in building the organizational culture (Yazici, 2011). Knowing that schools have organizational goals and a particular culture in place to attain and sustain those goals once again speaks to the importance of selecting personnel who understand
and will support the school’s mission as it is realized within the cultural boundaries. Wise (2003) showed that families who are satisfied with the product that they are receiving, as conveyed in the mission statement, will value the credibility of the organization and likely become one of the best advertisements possible for the school. In turn, effective public relations that strengthen the relationship of an organization with stakeholders also assist in improving the performance of the organization itself. Teachers are a central component of mission-specific goals being attained in a school. In Mennonite schools, the support base of the Mennonite conference or the Mennonite churches that own and govern the school are also important in the continued success of the school. There is an expectation of conformity to the Mennonite beliefs and values as experienced in the local church community. Teachers must be aware of these beliefs and values in order to fit well within the community and the school. Selecting teachers who will assist in student spiritual formation and understanding is examined in the next section.

**Spiritual Formation**

C. S. Smith (2005) reported and analyzed findings from the National Study of Youth and Religion. He spoke about a particular teenage girl who described the important influences in her life. For example, she spoke about the teachers at her Christian school when she said:

I love them all. A lot of them have been through a lot in their life and now they’re Christian so they tell us testimonies and it’s helpful just to hear that they went
through something hard, too, you know? One teacher, she’s been really like a mother-figure, too. (p. 114)

This is an illustration of the modeling that is desired by Christian schools to impact students’ lives on a day-to-day basis. The term *in loco parentis*, a Latin term meaning “in place of the parents” (Loss, 2014, p. 1), refers to the legal responsibility of teachers to act in the best interests of their students while they are at school in the absence of their parents. In Mennonite schools, this responsibility extends to guiding a student spiritually in a manner that fulfills the expectations of the parents who entrust their children’s care to school personnel (Roth, 2011). Parents and teachers in the Mennonite schools where I have served often use the term school family in referring to the people that make up the organization. Peshkin (1986) explored the world of a fundamentalist Christian school and found that the student-teacher and teacher-parent relationships that are built are genuinely seen as that of a supportive and caring family as well as a spiritual family.

Many people expect their church to rally around a family when a crisis occurs and there are potentially significant needs for a listening ear, help with meals, childcare, or other practical ways of helping. This same expectation is frequently found in Christian schools, and my experience has been that families sometimes see the response from the school family as exceeding the response from their church.

**Christian School Spiritual Formation**

Greenman and Goertz (2005) defined spiritual formation as “the continuing response to the reality of God’s grace shaping us into the likeness of Jesus Christ, through the work of the Holy Spirit, in the community of faith for the sake of the world” (p. 1).
Parallels to this definition are found, in previously discussed Mennonite school mission statements, where God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and issues of community, faith, and global awareness are frequently included. Teachers in Christian schools are expected to model this spiritual formation in their own lives, while being sounding boards for students of varying levels of spiritual maturity and development.

Sergiovanni (1992) also explored the idea of secular and sacred authority. His definition of secular authority referred to “the authority of rule or law (as represented in legal codes) and to systems of bureaucratic rules and regulations” (p. 12). Sacred authority referred to “the authority of religious tracts, the authority of professional or community norms and shared purposes, and the authority of the democratic ideal or other ideals” (p. 12). He further clarified that sacred authority is a more personal authority. From a Christian perspective, faith in God is a very personal experience, as is the day-to-day experience of interacting with other Christians in a faith-based environment. The majority of Christians support and follow laws and policies established by state, local, and federal government; however, God’s law supersedes that of secular authorities (Culver, 1974). A strong sense of community and adherence to the established norms of the organization result in strong organizational practice.

Individual Mennonite schools maintain different enrollment standards regarding the acceptance of students and families whose beliefs differ from the established norms of the affiliated church or churches. In schools that accept students regardless of their faith commitment, there is usually an understanding that the theological beliefs of the school will be taught unapologetically and that parents are to support the school in that
teaching, regardless of personal beliefs. School enrollment standards relate to this study as they affect the expectations in how teachers guide spiritual formation within the school culture.

A central premise in Mennonite education is that the sacred authority in schools is much more than passing out religious tracts, and it is the other ideals, such as the authority of professional or community norms and shared purposes, which differentiate a Mennonite school setting (Roth, 2011). These ideals are those that teacher candidates must embrace and be able to help transfer to their students. The particular ideals to which a Christian school subscribes usually come from these community norms and shared purposes, referred to by Sergiovanni (1992), as set forth by a particular denomination or denominations. Christian denominations are theologically centered on a statement of faith that is accepted and approved by the leadership of that denomination. In examining the process for teacher selection used by Mennonite school administrators, this study revealed how teachers’ spiritual formation is linked to the doctrinal statement of affiliated Mennonite churches or conferences.

**Mennonite Spiritual Formation**

Roth (2011) stated, “Like all religious groups, Mennonites have a strong interest in communicating their distinctive beliefs and practices not only to their own members, but also to others who might be interested in their understanding of the Christian faith” (p. 17). According to Loewen and Nolt (2010), the word Anabaptist is believed to have been used first in 1532 in reference to members of a radical protestant movement characterized by the belief in adult baptism, nonresistance, and the separation of church
and state. Mennonites are considered to be members of the broader Anabaptist movement, which also includes the Amish, Dunkards, Hutterites, as well as a number of other historical and current denominations. Given the possibility of individual congregational autonomy, it is difficult to characterize what beliefs a local congregation or conference may emphasize or deemphasize. Differences are reflected in the variations in theological focus that are found among Mennonite schools. In addition, brief definitions do not do justice to the many points of belief in a church statement of faith. For example, a reference to the belief in “nonresistance” in characterizing Mennonites is sometimes narrowly focused on the belief in not using military force. This characterization focuses on a small aspect of the reality of peacemaking as a way of life.

A majority of American Mennonite schools were founded in the 20th century as a way of providing an alternative to education in the public schools which were viewed as becoming increasingly focused on militarism and secularism. Many Mennonite communities, valuing education highly, decided to embark on the journey of providing K–12 education from a Mennonite perspective. Initially, the majority of students, faculty, and staff in these schools were members of local Mennonite churches. As more families became interested in Christian education, the Mennonite schools experienced an overall decrease in the percentage of Mennonite families, whereas the percentage of families from other denominational backgrounds increased (Mennonite Education Agency, 2015). Roth (2011) spoke to the origins and the mission of Mennonite schools in North America. He pointed out that the commitment to a private education includes the added burden of paying tuition. Parents make this sacrifice in order to gain the faith-
based mission aspect while maintaining the commitment to quality academic instruction and guidance in becoming productive citizens. In addition, nurturing Christian faith in the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition was also cited as a strong focus for parents in these schools. Currently 30 schools, educating students from prekindergarten through 12th grade are members of the Mennonite Schools Council, in association with the Mennonite Education Agency, which is the educational arm of Mennonite Church USA (Mennonite Education Agency, 2015).

**Participants and Inquiry**

Creswell (2007) discussed the concept of purposeful sampling in relation to qualitative studies. He clarified that qualitative researchers need to identify clear criteria when choosing participants for research studies. Specifically, using grounded theory methodology, the use of theoretical sampling means that “the investigator examines individuals who can contribute to an evolving theory” (p. 118). Glaser and Strauss (1967) first developed the qualitative method of research known as grounded theory. Their purpose for developing and using this method was to construct theory, which is arrived at through the collection and analysis of data. This research is a study of the processes used to select the teachers who will best assist in the spiritual formation of their students in Mennonite schools. Grounded theory methodology was used in this study in order to discover if there are common experiences, which may lead to theoretical understandings, around the process in which Mennonite administrators select teachers who will be most proficient in guiding the spiritual formation of their students. The head administrator (administrator, principal, or superintendent) in Mennonite school settings is
either solely responsible for selecting new teachers, or is a major participant in a process which may involve other administrators and committee members. This qualitative research, using grounded theory methodology, explored the selection of teachers in Mennonite schools.

The administrators who were interviewed for this study were selected through purposeful and theoretical sampling. They were either currently or previously employed for a minimum of five years as head administrator in schools holding membership in the Mennonite Schools Council (MSC), which works in partnership with the Mennonite Education Agency. A total of seven administrators were selected to participate in the interviews for the study, which elicited sufficient data for the purpose of achieving saturation through the emergent study. The participants were selected from MSC member schools in the United States. There are five member schools outside of the United States and none of the five head administrators met the criteria of five years of experience as head administrator within an MSC member school. The organizational structures of the schools vary in terms of the body or entity that governs the school. School governance and oversight for these schools are provided by a particular church congregation, group of congregations, or a conference within the Mennonite denomination. These administrators are charged with selecting teachers to fit the culture of the school, informed by the broader culture of the governing church, churches, or conference, and the denomination. These would be the larger cultures in which the organization lives and this affiliation creates an expectation of organizational allegiance.
As stated earlier, it is difficult to categorize the beliefs and values of all schools in an organization. However, this study was designed to identify the ways that individual Mennonite school administrators identify and select teachers with the ability to guide students in personal spiritual formation. This study, using grounded theory methodology, sought to bring forth useful processes to be used by Mennonite school administrators, as they seek to select the most qualified applicants for the teaching profession within their local context. Interview transcripts, relevant school printed materials, and field notes were used for data analysis and discovery related to the stated topic. As a member of the group being studied, revealing bias and assumptions is an important factor in my role as researcher.

**Assumptions**

As an experienced Mennonite school administrator, I bring assumptions to the research arena. I assumed that all of the administrators who were interviewed would place a strong emphasis on selecting teachers who, in addition to the skills needed to teach academics, would be effective in their guidance of the spiritual formation of their students. More specifically, it was assumed that the administrator and their supporting churches or conferences would seek teachers whose guidance conformed to a particular spiritual doctrine, which is characteristically Mennonite. My experience led me to believe that the interview process for selecting teachers at the schools would not follow a structured interview protocol and some would not be well articulated in writing or in formal policy. It was also expected that there would be a difference in the amount of attention given to spiritual issues, both on applications and during teacher interviews,
between the different school administrators. I also believed that there would be a combination of satisfaction with the selection processes and questioning their efficacy in identifying teacher candidates who would serve as the best spiritual mentors.

I expected that a plethora of qualitative data, in the form of stories about effective teachers that have been selected, would emerge throughout the interviews. I anticipated that the administrators would be able to share practices that have evolved over the years. A very basic assumption of the study was that the ability to foster students in spiritual formation is given equal, and sometimes higher, priority over the academic skills of the teacher. In other words, I assumed that some of the administrators would opt for a superior spiritual mentor over a brilliant academic teacher who struggles in the spiritual realm. The goal, of course, is to select a teacher who will be proficient in both realms. Finally, I expected to find enough commonalities in experiences and practices that theoretical learning would emerge from the study.

Conclusion

This first chapter serves as an introduction and broad overview of the research study. The need for a study of this type is apparent given the lack of previous scholarly research on the topic, practitioner interest, and the mission linked focus of spiritual formation in Mennonite schools. The lack of information related to teacher selection practices in PK–12 Mennonite educational institutions indicates support for the study as well. The second chapter serves to review the theoretical bases in the relevant core areas. These areas are organizational culture, goodness of fit, and spiritual formation. The accompanying theory serves as a foundation that informs further study of this topic now
that data analysis is complete. The third chapter outlines the methodology that was used in this qualitative study, namely grounded theory methodology. Specific procedures, processes, and methods are discussed. The study group is defined and the appropriate protocol for research using human subjects is addressed.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This study was conceived through the realization that abundant research has been completed in relation to predicting successful teaching skills in many domains of teacher proficiency. A domain particularly relevant to administrators in a Mennonite school setting is the potential a teacher possesses for successfully guiding students in spiritual formation. Scholarly literature has not been found by this researcher regarding how to assess strength in this domain during teacher selection in Mennonite or other faith-based school settings. The extensive data and analysis needed to create a valid and reliable scripted interview, related to the domain of guiding spiritual formation, is beyond the scope of a dissertation study. The idea of developing theoretical understandings related to the topic, within the context of a dissertation study, is reasonable and would begin a body of research that has not been seriously considered to this point.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) were the first proponents of grounded theory as a qualitative methodology. They were adamant in their view that the researcher must not be predisposed to extant theories and ideologies obtained through a review of literature prior to a study. Grounded theory methodology allows for emergence of a theoretical base through data analysis and theoretical sampling during a study, without preconceived notions of what theory may emerge. In later years, Strauss diverged from a strict adherence to this concept while Glaser remained solid in his stance. Writing a literature review for a dissertation study using grounded theory methodology was extensively analyzed by Dunne (2011). A review of the historical shift in thinking illustrates the
current conception that the question regarding a grounded theory review of literature is *when* it should be done, not *if* it should be done.

Dunne (2011) established the practical viewpoint that waiting to review literature until after the data collection and analysis have been done is not tenable for many researchers. He stated, “this is particularly true for PhD students, whose research funding, ethical approval and progression through the doctoral process may all be heavily dependent upon producing a detailed literature review prior to commencing primary data collection and analysis” (p. 115). M. D. Gall, Gall, and Borg (2006) also provided a comprehensive review of educational research, including reasons for writing a literature review. They believed that establishing a theoretical basis for future research and a ground work for research that will potentially lead to the development of grounded theory are valid reasons for the review of literature. In the current study, the review of literature serves as a springboard to open avenues of discussion within the interview process that may or may not be relevant to the final product, thus allowing for the emergence of theoretical discussion from a more informed base.

It is the researcher’s task to provide evidence of the relevance of his or her research and the original contribution it will make to scholarly literature. This would be impossible without conducting an extensive review of literature prior to conducting a research project. Thus, this review is justified and was conducted with attention to separating knowledge of previous research from decisions related to the direction taken in this study and avoiding falsely created avenues for the emergence of any theoretical underpinnings particular to this study.
This review of literature presents a knowledge base for the reader, which is organized around the conceptual bases of the study. In an exploration of the selection of teachers who will be able to appropriately guide their students in spiritual formation in Mennonite schools, the relevant conceptual base includes the topics of goodness of fit, organizational theory, and spiritual formation. This review begins with a brief summary of research related to employee selection practices within organizations as an overarching area of focus encompassing the conceptual base.

**Employee Selection**

A significant volume of scholarly research has been completed in the area of employee selection within organizations of all types. A review of general parameters related to employee selection practices, and then specifically the selection of teachers, is warranted as the overarching process that was studied. This review explores selection processes related to methodology, ethics, and teacher traits.

**Selection Methodology**

A literature review on the topic of employee selection practices quickly reveals that the art of interviewing is a subject that has engendered a significant amount of research (Arthur, 2012; Arvey & Campion, 1982; Haseltine & Gould, 2013; Lim, Winter, & Chan, 2006). The prevalence of an employment interview in the selection process is widely acknowledged (Macan, 2009). Moscoso (2000) cited a number of studies that indicated the interview is the predominant vehicle for employee selection in the last century throughout the world. Rutledge, Harris, Thompson, and Ingle (2008) drew attention to the fact that teacher selection, in particular, has not always been a careful and
deliberate process. The fluctuation in supply and demand within school districts sometimes creates a chaotic atmosphere for selection and has been described as bureaucratic, inefficient, and rushed. When the demand for teachers is great, the process of selection takes a back seat to expediency. Arthur (2012) provided an extensive overview of processing new employees, which includes recruiting, interviewing, selection, and orientation. In addition to reviewing the types of interviews, this author brought focus to the components of an interview, types of questions to ask, legal considerations, and how an interviewer prepares for an effective interview.

Interviewing has been and will likely continue to be the object of significant study and debate. Evaluating the process and finding methods of improving it have been ongoing issues of study (Baker & Spier, 1990; Metzger & Wu, 2008). Rutledge et al. (2008) posited the following conclusion in their study of teacher screening and selection. Administrators use a variety of tools in selecting effective teachers, although the definition of an effective teacher varies greatly as well, making it difficult to advocate for specific selection tools in all teacher selection. More research is needed in the areas of interview protocol effectiveness, inclusion of faculty members in an interview process, and the role of the district in the interview process (Macan, 2009). Interviewing and selection is limited by the variability of human interaction in the interviewer and interviewee, a problem that structured interviews seek to minimize. This variability can be seen in the subject of ethics as they relate to teacher selection processes.
Selection Ethics

The use of structured interviews versus unstructured interviews can be an ethical issue. Baker and Spier (1990) believed that using an unstructured interview protocol leaves employers open to charges of unfair discrimination or adverse impact. Lim et al. (2006) suggested that researchers may need to turn away from the validity of the interview and focus more on the differences between interviewers and cultural sensitivity in the interview process. The importance of rapport between the interviewer and candidate, and an appropriate interview style that accommodates cultural differences, are also seen as significant factors. Given the differences in personality and style of potential interviewers, the structured interview allows for less variance in delivery and interpretation. People exhibit diverse characteristics and abilities that may or may not affect their future job performance. Given this diversity, there will likely never be a foolproof method of interviewing and selection. The research model revolves around the continuous improvement in methods and instruments used.

Interviewing potential employees raises ethical considerations for both the interviewer as well as the interviewee. A person being interviewed is expected to give a fair and accurate representation of himself or herself—for example personal skills and potential reaction to job related scenarios. The interviewer is expected to give a fair and accurate representation of the workplace, the culture of the workplace, and the job description for the position being filled. Kirkwood and Ralston (1996) examined ethics as they relate to the teaching of employment interviewing. Their article cites 11 ethical standards, proposed by Johannesen (1990), that were repeatedly found in
communications textbooks and had relevance to the topic of employment interviews.

Each standard begins with the phrase do not: (a) use false or fabricated evidence to back an argument, (b) intentionally use poor reasoning, (c) misrepresent yourself as an expert on a subject, (d) use irrelevant appeals to divert attention from the issue at hand, (e) ask your audience to draw false emotional relationships to a subject, (f) mislead your audience by concealing your true purpose, (g) distort, in any way, the potential consequences of your advocacy, (h) use poorly reasoned or unsupported emotional appeals, (i) reduce complex issues into overly simplistic polar disagreements, (j) pretend certainty when uncertainty or tentativeness exists, (k) advocate something in which you do not believe yourself (pp. 31-32). On the part of the interviewer, these concerns are largely alleviated through the use of a true structured interview which is scripted, and from which the interviewer does not deviate. In an interview setting, the interests of both parties should be equally represented. On the other hand, the aforementioned standards may be more easily transgressed by the interviewee. The ability to identify dishonest responses from teachers who are being interviewed is important for all interviewers, and especially in the area of spiritual understanding.

The issues of validity and reliability with regards to structured interview protocol are well researched (Macan, 2009; Schmidt & Zimmerman, 2004), as employers seek predictive selection tools that are valid and reliable. It would be misleading, for both the employer and those not selected, to use an instrument lacking in reliability and validity. Metzger and Wu (2008), in a study of a specific commercial teacher selection instrument, were concerned that the structured interview has significant correlation to some measure
of teacher quality. A lack of correlation between the interview protocol and identification of skills in teacher candidates would prove the protocol ineffective.

Young and Delli (2002) invited the reader to consider the topic of the applicant’s pre-employment decision-making processes. Research indicates that it is more probable that teachers would be attracted to and accept a job when the interviewer shows warmth in his or her personality and is of a similar ethnic background (Young, Place, Rinehart, Jury, & Baits, 1997). While these attributes of the interviewer may influence the applicant towards accepting a job offer, it may be unethical to cast a particular person as interviewer if he or she is not representative of the applicant’s future co-workers. The amount of literature dealing with the ethical treatment of applicants during selection processes is encouraging. Christian ethics should be a central concern in any faith-based school employee selection process.

**Selection and Teacher Traits**

Edmonds (1982) discussed effective schools and his belief that all students will not achieve identical mastery levels, but that equivalent percentages of all social classes must be brought to minimum mastery or above. Spiritual formation in a Mennonite school is one of many domains in which growth and mastery is sought. While the Mennonite schools vary in the disparity of social classes, there may be a significant level of spiritual disparity among students in any school. The onus is on the teacher to work with all students for the ultimate goal of increasing achievement, regardless of external factors or the particular domain of learning. Stronge and Tucker (2000) agreed that many factors such as class size, funding, and stakeholder involvement are relevant in
discussions about student achievement and school improvement. But, they stated that the most influential factor within the school is the teacher. Stronge (2007) established six domains for summarizing research on characteristics of effective teachers: (a) prerequisites of effective teachers, (b) the teacher as a person, (c) classroom management and organization, (d) organizing for instruction, (e) implementing instruction, and (f) monitoring student progress and potential.

Marzano (2011) cited positive relationships between teachers and students as an important characteristic, which is aligned with effective teacher instruction. He indicated that student perception of his or her relationship with a teacher is based on how teachers act towards the student, not on how the teacher perceives the relationship. Marzano also discussed four actions that teachers perform that develop good relations with students: (a) showing interest in the students’ lives, (b) advocating for students, (c) never giving up on students, and (d) acting friendly. It was shown that positive relationships with students assist in achieving success with all other instructional strategies. Spiritual formation could be seen as a type of instructional strategy for the purpose of the current study.

Stronge and Hindman (2003) used words to describe effective teachers such as “caring, competent, humorous, knowledgeable, demanding, and fair” (p. 49). In the current study of selecting a teacher to guide student spiritual formation, positive relationships with students are significant. Teacher selection techniques are the basis for how an interview is conducted when assessing proficiency in different domains. The conceptual bases for the study—goodness of fit, organizational culture, and spiritual formation—are reviewed in the context of current literature and research in the following sections.
Goodness of Fit

Guiding spiritual formation in students, and the importance of identifying the characteristics of both general and specific organizational cultures, are enhanced by fit. The first part of the conceptual base for this study is the concept of goodness of fit in an organization. How does an administrator determine that a teacher candidate will be a good fit within the context of his or her particular school culture, in addition to his or her ability to guide students in spiritual formation? Spiritual formation is a major part of the desired culture within a Mennonite school setting. Teachers are largely responsible for guiding the students in spiritual formation. The teacher’s view of and ability to guide spiritual formation help determine his or her fit within the school culture. Thus, the three conceptual bases for this study are significantly intertwined.

Goodness of Fit Defined

Goodness of fit, person-organization fit, or person-culture fit (Burk & Birk, 2001; Chatman, 1989; Little & Miller, 2007; O’Reilly et al., 1991; Vandenberghhe, 1999; Van Vianen, 2000) are all terms referring to the degree to which a person and an organizational culture intersect effectively in a work environment for the good of the organization. Person-organization fit theory has developed to the point where specific diagnostic instruments have been designed to assess person-organization fit. O’Reilly et al. (1991) developed the Organizational Culture Profile (OCP), which is used to measure person-organization fit through 54 value statements that can assess individual and organizational values. These values may be used to assess the extent to which a value characterizes a specific organization, and a person’s predisposition towards the particular
organizational characteristics. None of the administrators in the current study mentioned the use of an instrument of this type in teacher identification and selection processes in their schools.

The idea that certain types of individuals are predisposed towards a certain type of organizational culture was explored by Wilkins and Ouchi (1983) and showed a positive correlation between the two. O’Reilly et al. (1991) used the OCP in a study of person-organization fit and found that the preferences in individuals for different organizational cultures are associated with differences in their personality characteristics. Their findings also indicated that the person needs to be competent in their job assignment in addition to matching the values of the organization for there to be a positive person-organization fit.

Organizational behavior is a complex phenomenon and is studied through different lenses. Within the everyday reality of an organization, an individual’s unique personality and the uniqueness of situations that arise affect his or her behavior.

Chatman (1989) analyzed two different approaches to organizational behavior research, the individual difference approach and the situational approach. When assessing individual differences, it is believed that personality traits, motives, values, and abilities are the best predictors of a person’s behavior. When a situational approach is used, it is believed that assessment of the characteristics of a person’s situation is the best predictor of his or her behavior. People tend to choose their situations, as in pre-assessing an organization for comfort in the position and workplace prior to applying for a job. On the other hand, people can also change their situation within the workplace. If a job does not provide enough challenge, a highly motivated employee will attempt to
enhance his or her performance and job description. Chatman defined person-organization fit as “the congruence between the norms and values of organizations and the values of persons” (p. 339). When selecting teacher candidates in Mennonite schools, if both the administrator and the candidate are seeking congruence, they both will have methods for evaluating each other and the organization. An important part of assessing goodness of fit is developing an understanding of the organizational values of an institution.

**Organizational Values and Goodness of Fit**

Wiener (1988) studied different forms of value systems in organizations. His research distinguished between the number of key values delineated in an organizational system as opposed to the degree to which employees agree with the values of the system. In other words, an organization may espouse numerous values but this is irrelevant if those values are not supported. Fewer values, but ones that are commonly shared, will lead to a stronger culture with better person-culture fit for those who are employed and retained. Values that are born out of tradition and history lead to stability and predictability in the way an organization functions. Those values that survive the test of time have been adopted as a valid and self-sustaining benefit to the desired culture.

The importance of values in relation to person-culture fit and the success of an organization were analyzed further by Bourne and Jenkins (2013) who proposed four different forms of organizational values. They described organizational values as embodying “those general values that guide organizational members in their selection or evaluation of behavior” (p. 497). The first form is espoused values, which are usually
written or verbal, authorized through the leadership and are usually in the form of statements or documents. The second form of values, attributed values, is generally viewed as those that represent the organization by the organizational members. The third form is shared values which represent the values that the organization and its members both hold as central to the organization. The fourth and final form of values is aspirational values. These are values that organizational members believe should one day be added to the values of the organization. These aspirational values may change as social life varies and the organizational membership changes. Espoused values are formed at the level of leadership and aspirational values can be formulated anywhere within the organization. The degree to which the four forms of values overlap can be both positive and negative. A high degree of overlap would lead to uniformity in mission and would aid in decision making. This same overlap, however, could lead to a lack of motivation for beneficial change within the organization. Not only do organizations hold values, but teacher candidates will have a set of personal values as well. This study of the teacher selection process in Mennonite schools revealed to what extent an administrator, within the context of application materials and personal interviews, discusses personal and organizational values with teachers he or she may employ.

**Personal Versus Organizational Values and Goodness of Fit**

Wiener (1988) postulated that applicants vary in their willingness to acquire the accepted values of any particular organizational value system. He discussed two related factors. The first is an applicant’s belief that they have a “moral obligation to engage in a mode of conduct reflecting loyalty and duty” (p. 541) within the workplace. The second
is the extent to which the core values of the applicant and the organization are congruent. Low and high manifestations of these factors are then paired to present a typology reflective of the applicant’s willingness to adapt to a specific culture. Type A was designated as high loyalty–high congruency. Type B was low loyalty–high congruency. Type C was high loyalty–low congruency. Type D was low loyalty–low congruency. Type A applicants are the most desirable. Type B applicants are also desirable, but Type C and Type D individuals, if selected, would need a very structured socialization process. This type of typology is indicative of the work that is being done to aid in the recruitment and selection of new employees by organizations that realize the importance of fit within the organization. Previously mentioned organizational culture analysis tools may be utilized in order to categorize applicants in relation to loyalty and congruency. I am not aware of any Mennonite administrators who are currently using these tools in determining goodness of fit.

Bowen et al. (1991) proposed a selection model of Hiring for Person-Organization Fit. The elements included in their model are designed to address both the need for specific skills and aptitudes in an employee as well as the need for a match between the values held by both the organization and the employee. The model is used to (a) assess the overall work environment, including a job analysis and organizational analysis; (b) infer the type of person required, in the areas of technical knowledge, skills and abilities, social skills, personal needs, values, and interests, and personality traits; (c) design rites of passage for organization entry that allow both the organization and the applicant to assess their fit using tests of cognitive/motor/interpersonal abilities, interviews by
potential co-workers and others, personality tests, and realistic job previews, including work samples; and (d) reinforce person-organization fit at work by reinforcing skills and knowledge through task design and training, and personal orientation through organization design.

Bowen et al. (1991) noted that frequently those with seemingly the best fit for personality and social skills are not necessarily the ones with the best technical or job-related skills. The authors also emphasized the need for an increased use of job simulation exercises. In a school setting, when selecting a teacher, a practice or demonstration lesson with students was a significant factor in selecting a new teacher. The authors proposed potential benefits and problems with selecting for person-organization fit. Potential benefits include improved employee attitudes, better job performance, less absenteeism, less turnover, and positive changes in organizational culture. Potential problems include (a) increased resources needed in selection, (b) the need for further development of selection technology, (c) increased individual stress, and (d) the lack of organizational adaptation. Assessing the values of the organization and the values of the person are important in the teacher selection process because the lack of congruency in values may lead to discontent and poor performance by an employee. However, as non-profit organizations, Mennonite and other faith-based schools are selective in the use of funds for outside consulting. The following section continues the examination of goodness of fit within the selection process.
**Personnel Selection and Goodness of Fit**

From a business perspective, Burgess-Wilkerson (2008) cited an example of a company with three divisions. Each of the divisions (Sales/Marketing, Research/Development, and Manufacturing) developed their own unique selection policies and procedures based on an analysis of the culture within the division. The company leaders believed that an interview process should begin with an examination of the organization’s vision, mission, values, and strategy. From this base, the organization would assess what applicant knowledge and skills were needed. Applicants should also be encouraged to evaluate their own personalities and goals prior to applying for a job. DiPiro (2011) interviewed Jack Welch, former CEO of General Electric, who suggested that an organization should never select the highest performer if they do not have congruity with organizational values because the potential conflict is not worth the person’s expertise. Applying this to a Mennonite school setting would suggest that a teacher who is excellent in teaching his or her subject area may not be worth selecting if his or her understanding of spiritual formation was not congruent with the school focus on spiritual formation.

Cable, Aiman-Smith, Mulvey, and Edwards (2000) studied the sources of job applicants’ beliefs about the company’s organizational culture as well as the accuracy of those beliefs. When attracting applicants for an opening, organizations have a potential conflict of interest. A desire for an appropriate person-culture fit may be at odds with the desire to characterize the organization in the most positive light in order to attract the best applicants. At the same time, applicants obtain information about an organization from
their own past exposure to the organization, from current and past employees, and from the company’s own literature and public relations efforts. The study suggested that recruiters would benefit from “1) assessing the prevailing beliefs of their target markets, 2) conducting a gap analysis to ascertain how these beliefs diverge from the image they wish to promote, and 3) developing written and verbal messages specifically constructed to reduce gaps” (p. 1084). The expenditure of considerable effort, expense, and time should motivate employers to seek the best person-culture fit in applicants as well as a proven method of determining that fit during the selection process. Lessons may be learned from personnel selection processes in a broader context and then transferred to a teacher selection process.

Various authors pointed to the importance of selecting personnel who are compatible with the organizational culture or where there is goodness of fit between the employee and the organization (Burk & Birk, 2001; Cable et al., 2000; Schein, 1990; Tom, 1971). Within this literature, two organizational needs are discussed when selecting new employees. One is the need for a person who can perform the skills required for the job and the other is attentiveness towards the right fit within the organization. Within Christian schools, because of the high value placed on student spiritual formation, there is a definite overlap between job performance and cultural fit.

DiPiro (2011) addressed the concept of creating a culture of selecting faculty members for excellence. Selection creates an opportunity to help change the current culture if needed or to help support the current culture if it is effective for the organization. He recommended a long-term view of selection, which focuses on the
needs of the organization and does not attempt to acquire the same skill sets that are being lost with departing employees. Little and Miller (2007) confirmed that organizational effectiveness is dependent on excellence within the personnel ranks, but added that there is little research with this focus that is available regarding personnel selection within schools, as compared to the business world.

The focus of the current study is on the processes and methodology by which Mennonite school administrators select new teachers who will best assist the spiritual formation of students, in addition to teaching subject matter to those students with excellence. The philosophy of selecting new teachers, in tandem with the knowledge of their particular school culture, assists administrators in choosing the applicant who fits best within that culture. Some administrators have a specific selection process that is written and closely followed, although others struggle to elaborate on the methods that are used in determining goodness of fit within their culture. The literature on selection practices is not focused on a Christian school setting although there is overlap in basic understandings. In addition, ethical considerations are of great importance in Mennonite schools when assessing goodness of fit, and must be taken into consideration as part of a teacher selection process.

**Ethics and Goodness of Fit**

Ethical culture is a descriptive term for one aspect of organizational culture that includes ideals such as a supported code of conduct, good communication, honoring commitments, and fair treatment of people. Ruiz-Palomino, Martinez-Cañas, and Fontrodonas (2013) conducted a study of ethical culture, employee outcomes, and the
mediating role of person-organization fit. Ethical culture was found to be a subset of organizational culture that results from the interaction of formal and informal systems designed to positively influence the ethical behavior among employees. The formal systems are those that are in policy and are directly delivered to employees. Informal systems are the actual behavior of fellow employees, and ethical norms found in the workplace. Their findings showed that ethical culture has a positive correlation with job satisfaction, affective commitment, and long-term allegiance to the organization. An interesting finding is that an ethical culture strengthens employee outcomes independently of the values and degree of positive ethical behavior found in the employee.

Organizational values have been frequently cited as a significant factor in determining person-organization fit (Bourne & Jenkins, 2013; Chatman, 1989; O’Reilly, 1989; O’Reilly et al., 1991; M. Smith, 1994; Wiener, 1988). Values within a particular culture, both conscious and unconscious, are cited as defining elements that help form the rituals, norms, and symbols within the organization. Organizations specifically seek employees who share their values, and applicants do likewise when seeking an organization in which to be employed. Agreement on values throughout an organization is also said to be one factor indicative of a strong culture. The ethical culture in the Mennonite schools is strong and integral to the Christ-centered mission of the schools. Compatibility of organizational values and individual values have a strong impact on goodness of fit and are analyzed in the following section.
Importance of Goodness of Fit

Lacking a process which actively seeks to identify goodness of fit, employers simply tend to use information gathered from the applicant, references, and unstructured interviews. These assessments of person-culture fit may be based on personality, appearance, writing skills, verbal skills, and quantity of work experience. Burk and Birk (2001) also pointed out the critical responsibility of the applicant in assessing person-culture fit and suggested that applicants should be encouraged to interact with other employees, prior to accepting a job assignment, while assessing the organizational values, norms, and assumptions.

In the current study, the selection practices of the included schools were a central focus of the participant interviews. All teachers are expected to have a comprehensive knowledge of their subject matter, professional skills commensurate with the expectations of a teacher, and personal interaction skills that are appropriate with colleagues, parents, and the students they will teach. In addition, these expectations are narrowed to a Christian worldview, and more specifically, an Anabaptist-Mennonite perspective. The idea of person-culture fit in Mennonite schools is very significant and one which demands a highly effective process within the teacher selection realm. The Mennonite Schools Council distinctives are illustrative of the focus that should be brought to discussions with teachers who may be selected. Goodness of fit within a Mennonite school context is predicated on valuing education that is Christ-centered, academically excellent, focused on peace and service, based on a community orientation, and offering faith-infused opportunities. The Mennonite school mission statements also
focus the goodness of fit in Mennonite schools on Christian discipleship, nurture, faith
development, and service to Christ. The next sections address organizational culture.
The discussion establishes the importance of both the administrator and the teacher
candidate understanding the organizational culture of the Mennonite school.

**Organizational Culture**

The second component of the conceptual base for this study is organizational
culture. The following literature review of organizational culture begins with a definition
of the term, followed by an exploration of organizational leadership, learning, levels,
socialization, and culture in schools. Organizational culture in schools are further sub-
divided into the areas of educational cultures, Christian school culture, and Mennonite
school culture in community.

**Organizational Culture Defined**

A review of literature on organizations and organizational culture uncovers a
plethora of definitions from a range of occupational arenas (Argyris, 1957; Blau & Scott,
1962; Ouchi, 1980; Schein, 1986). Organizations or associations have been a point of
discussion, and then study, since the beginning of humanity. VeneKlasen and Miller
(2007) discussed the natural tendency of humans to view our interrelationships and
formulate opinions about the advantages, disadvantages, and layers of power and
influence within our associations. Schools, as associations, are complex systems of
social and organizational interaction.

Argyris (1957) explored underlying assumptions with regards to formal
organizations. In order for organizations to succeed, management must guide employees
towards established goals. Argyris believed that there is no ideal organizational structure. He said that there could be optimum expression but not maximum expression of the principles of organization, due to individual and environmental conditions. Loyalty to the organization by employees was cited as a major factor in approaching this optimum expression. In 1957, however, Argyris was concerned about formal organizations employing methods such as task specialization, unity of direction, chain of command, and span of control. He felt that these conditions led to employee dependence, subordination, and passivity to leadership. His findings at the time led to three general conclusions:

1. There is a lack of congruency between the needs of healthy individuals and the demands of the formal organization.
2. The results of this disturbance are frustration, failure, short-time perspective and conflict.
3. The nature of the formal principles of organization cause the subordinate, at any given level, to experience competition, rivalry, inter-subordinate hostility, and to develop a focus toward the parts rather than the whole. (pp. 21-22)

Argyris proposed these conclusions as the default natural predisposition of organizations and recommended methods of counteracting these concerns. Other theorists continued this study of different types of organizations.

Blau and Scott (1962) were known for their work in the area of formal organizations and defined organizations in terms of a collection of individuals with common purposes, who expend energy in the pursuit of achieving goals together. Four
types of organizations were classified and studied: (a) “mutual-benefit associations,” where the prime beneficiary is the membership; (b) “business concerns,” where the owners are prime beneficiary; (c) “service organizations,” where the client group is the prime beneficiary; and (d) “commonwealth organizations” where the prime beneficiary is the public-at-large (p. 43). Blau and Scott wrote a detailed sociological analysis of the dimensions of organizations based on this typology. Schools, as organizations, exhibit characteristics of each of these types and are complex in their makeup and subsequent culture. When selecting teachers for a school faculty, the administrator should understand the psychological and behavioral aspects of organizations and the particular culture of the school. Mennonite schools, as organizations, have developed cultures that fall within the general understanding of organizational behavior and also have characteristics specific to their local culture. The administrator, as leader of the organization, greatly affects the culture of the school as well.

Organizational Leadership

William Ouchi is known for his studies of American and Japanese management styles within company organizational structures. His Theory Z, introduced in 1981, was an employee-centered view of organizational management, which summarized Japanese corporate culture and the benefits to productivity. Ouchi (1980) broadened his business management frame of reference to generalize a definition of organizations as, “any stable pattern of transactions between individuals or aggregations of individuals” (p. 140). Organizational theory covers a wide range of institutions and frameworks. Ouchi’s definition could be used to define a school or school district as an organization just as
easily as a business, humanitarian, or political organization. He also believed that all healthy organizations, by definition, must reflect the social values from the broader culture. Organizations will only fail when the main objectives of the organization become unnecessary in the eyes of society and specifically those they serve. Therefore, establishing relevance in the eyes of their constituency is especially important for schools that are charging tuition for their services. When money is involved, constituents expect to receive the services for which they are paying. Mennonite schools serve a range of stakeholders who are attracted to their particular mission within a wide field of other educational organizations. Maintaining this margin of difference is critical.

O’Reilly (1989) defined culture in the context of a corporate setting. He proposed the following two elements within a working definition: (a) culture as control, and (b) culture as normative order. Control systems within an organization are for the purpose of efficiency and consistency, establishing “the knowledge that someone who knows and cares is paying close attention to what we do and can tell us when deviations are occurring” (p. 11). These systems frequently fall into the category of management styles that Ouchi (1980) felt were ineffective. Outcomes and behaviors are monitored through control systems, but are often difficult to monitor. Norms are expectations within a culture that help to define attitudes and behaviors that are acceptable and unacceptable. O’Reilly raised normative issues which include quality, performance, flexibility, and how to deal with conflict. More specifically, norms can be viewed along two planes, intensity and consensus. Strong cultures are created and perpetuated when employees feel strongly about the norms that exist and agree on the continuation of those norms. When a
culture is strong in this way, change can be very difficult and norms held by upper management are not always consistent with those occupying lower levels in the organizational structure. School cultures also exhibit the specific characteristics of intensity and consensus, which may affect and be reflected in the selection practices within the school. The current study revealed the level of intensity and consensus that the school administrators have identified and the level to which he or she perpetuates this within the culture.

Van Maanen and Schein (1979) categorized and then gave examples of what organizational cultures consist of within the general modes of thinking, feeling, and doing. Examples included: (a) long standing rules, (b) a specialized language, (c) ideological parameters of understanding, (d) common understanding of critical work aspects, (e) accepted prejudices, (f) etiquette models, (g) rituals and customs related to contact with people, and (h) common sense regarding behavior within the organization. Van Maanen and Schein further defined a process, organizational socialization, which perpetuates the culture through time. This socialization is achieved through the inculcation of the traditions and norms into the new employees as a result of the intentional efforts of the established employees and leaders. This will be different in various organizations, but is both an intentional and unintentional learning process that must take place. The process carries some theoretical assumptions. First, new employees are experiencing anxiety and seek to learn appropriate behaviors as quickly as possible. Second, new learning through the socialization process cannot be accomplished through written expectations, but require people within the organization to provide clues and
acknowledgment of success in learning. Third, stability and productivity within the organization is largely predicated upon successful socialization of new employees. Fourth, the adjustment of new employees to the new organization is amazingly similar from employee to employee. Fifth, individual uniqueness is still allowed and new contributions to the organization may be achieved. Sixth, to be of value, a theory of organizational socialization cannot focus on the level of individual characteristics, specific organizations, or particular job titles. Organizational socialization is therefore a process that occurs once an employee is selected. The task of an organizational leader is to select employees with the best potential to conform to the culture that is in place, unless there is a goal to initiate change in the culture. Thus, the task for a Mennonite school administrator is to know the spiritual formation expectations of their school culture, and identify the teacher candidate who is able to conform to that culture.

This progression of organizational leadership theories is helpful in identifying the focus that Mennonite school administrators should place on the organizational aspects of a school. This begins with a broad understanding of different types of organizations and their characteristics, the culture being served by the school, the specific norms that perpetuate the acceptable culture, and how employees are inculcated into the organization. Significant study has taken place in relation to organizations and dynamics within organizations as discussed in the following sections.

Organizational Learning

Schein (1986) contributed significantly to the literature on organizations, specifically in the areas of organizational culture and organizational learning. He warned
against inaccurate definitions of organizational culture and ones that do not possess the depth to distinguish between culture resulting from management style, climate, or the more specific aspects of culture. Schein’s definition of organizational culture assumed that the organization has a significant history, and included basic assumptions created by the group, which help them cope with internal and external problems. The definition also assumes that these assumptions have worked well for the organization, are accepted as valid, and are taught to new members of the organization. Schein distinguished between the aforementioned Theory Z (Ouchi, 1980) and McGregor’s Theory X and Theory Y (McGregor, 1960) in his discussion of organizational culture. These theories are focused on human relationships specifically and should not be seen as definitive constructs in terms of the totality of organizational culture.

The study of culture is traditionally seen through the lenses of anthropology, sociology, social psychology, and organizational behavior (Ouchi & Wilkins, 1985: Schein, 1990). This creates biases in the manner by which organizational culture is defined and studied. Ouchi and Wilkins (1985) believed that the study of organizational culture is more closely akin to sociology than any of the other traditions. They share the idea that organization is a social phenomenon, possessing its own characteristics, and distinguishing the separate parts. The environment is very distinguishable from the member’s predispositions and individual desires. Sociology is more apt to view the organization as a dependent variable and an organizational culture lens tends to view the organization as an independent variable. Interviews with Mennonite school
administrators were instructive in understanding how they view the organization, as a
dependent or independent variable.

Organizational Levels

Regardless of these differences, Schein (1990) saw analysis of culture within an
organization as lying within three distinct levels. The first level is observable artifacts
that can be seen and felt. This category includes “physical layout, the dress code, the
manner in which people address each other, the smell and feel of the place, its emotional
intensity” (p. 111) as well as more tangible artifacts such as “company records, products,
statements of philosophy, and annual reports” (p. 111). The second level is
organizational values. The values of the culture can be studied through interviewing,
surveying, and listening. Values include “norms, ideologies, charters, and philosophies”
(p. 112). A sense of organizational values is ascertained most clearly through
observation and open-ended questioning of group members. The third level of
organizational culture is basic assumptions. These assumptions are “taken for granted,
underlying, and usually unconscious” and they “determine perceptions, thought
processes, feelings, and behavior” (p. 112). Basic assumptions require further in-depth
study of an organization through extended observation, focused questions, and intensive
self-analysis of members of the organization. Understanding the organizational levels
that exist within a school is important for the administrator in interviewing new
candidates and for the candidates in assessing their comfort level with the school. That
being said, the culture of the school may be in transition or even be a culture that is open
to change in the basic constructs of the organization.
Campbell (2009) used the term “winning organizational culture” (p. 328) to define a cultural atmosphere that welcomes innovations in a continuously changing marketplace. Campbell stated that the organizational culture can have a profound impact on the workforce and that it “becomes the ego that instructs the egos of the individuals within the organization, providing individuals with direction on the proper way to act, both internally and externally, when carrying out the day-to day activities of the enterprise” (p. 341). Experts in organizational culture were asked 12 questions related to organizational culture development. A strong emphasis was given to consistency and continuity in norms, values, philosophies, and feelings. Individuals want to be respected, listened to, and given the opportunity to make a significant contribution to the organization. An open dialogue between an administrator and prospective teacher candidate should focus on the spiritual expectations of the school, and in that regard, an honest evaluation of the organization’s openness to change and at what levels change may occur. In a Mennonite school this would mean an understanding of the amount of leeway that is given in regards to spiritual beliefs and practices.

Schein’s (1970) original work on organizational psychology described several systems level concepts or models of organizations. This work also summarized his thoughts on refining the definition of the term organization. An organization is better viewed as an open system where there is ongoing interchange with the environment. The interchange, both incoming and outgoing, includes raw materials, people, energy, information, products, and services. Clarity must be given to the multiple purposes or functions that exist within the organization and its environment, which includes ongoing
interactions. Organizations must be viewed in terms of dynamically interacting subsystems, and the fact that changes in one subsystem affects other subsystems. An organization may be seen more in terms of processes than characteristics.

Based on previous research, Schein (1992) addressed the idea of how to study culture within an organization for the purpose of solving problems. He used the term “cultural analysis” (p. 148) as a method to help members interpret their own cultural assumptions. Culture is not composed of individual assumptions but of shared assumptions within a group. Assumptions within the culture need to be sorted into those that help the organization to achieve its goals, and those that are seen as hindrances to the organization. Agreed upon changes can best be built upon current culture as opposed to starting from the beginning with totally new assumptions. Finally, assumptions that need to be changed for the good of the organization will rarely encompass the whole organization. Once a new teacher is selected and has experience in the organization, the administrator will have the opportunity to assess how his or her assumptions regarding the skills of the teacher have been realized. If these skills closely match the expectations of the Mennonite school culture, the teacher will be given more responsibility and voice in discussions around changing organizational assumptions. The next section addresses aspects of organizational culture in schools.

**Organizational Culture in Schools**

Studies related to the organizational culture in schools spoke to the differences between business or corporation cultures and educational cultures (MacNeil, Prater & Busch, 2009; Shaw & Reyes, 1992; Willower & Smith, 1987). In addition, the cultures
of different grade level configurations in schools possessed different characteristics. A study comparing teachers’ organizational commitment and value orientation within elementary and high schools revealed some of these differences. The results point to the complexity of school organizational culture. Shaw and Reyes (1992) used the three levels of culture proposed by Schein (1986) for the comparison of school cultures. Value systems in schools were characterized as a normative orientation, which emphasized organizational values that were symbolic or cultural, and a utilitarian orientation, which was based on materialistic or monetary values. The study showed a difference between elementary and high school teacher commitment, with teachers in elementary schools displaying higher levels of commitment. Elementary teachers are significantly higher in their level of normative commitment and organizational commitment. Value orientation and organizational commitment were also directly correlated. Schools where normative commitment is high, produce higher levels of teacher commitment, however school size did not indicate differences in organizational culture. Although this is only one study, it points to the complexity of school culture in reference to the age range represented from elementary students through adult teachers and the subsystems of grade levels and departments found in the educational system. The Mennonite schools in this research are of varying grade configurations from Preschool through 12th grade.

Willower and Smith (1987) addressed complications in applying organizational culture concepts in schools by noting that student and teacher groups are subcultures with differing norms and values. These accepted norms and values within teacher and student groups also differ from school to school. They studied two separate public school
cultures, and found that the organizational cultures of the schools did not cut across schools’ constituent groups. Both the students and the teachers were fragmented and divided, whereas some norms pervaded both schools, such as colleagues not criticizing each other in front of students. Both schools had friendly cultures in regards to student and teacher interactions. School leadership at both schools kept on top of problems that surfaced. Willower and Smith also surmised that a strong educational culture will not necessarily strengthen all educational purposes across the board. For example, they stated, “school cultures that stress academics could stint critical thinking or social skills—further, strong cultures have a tendency to stress conformity and limit individual initiative” (p. 94). This study revealed whether Mennonite school administrators place a higher importance on proficiency in spiritual formation or strength in teaching a subject area, when the choice needs to be made.

In general, giving credence to organizational culture is the most important aspect for a leader to consider according to MacNeil et al. (2009). In their study of three categories of schools (Exemplary, Recognized, and Acceptable), comparisons were made across 10 dimensions of school climate. Twenty-nine schools in a large southeastern Texas suburban school district were assigned one of the three categories based on student performance on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS). The Organizational Health Inventory (OHI) was used for the comparison. Anecdotal evidence from successful principals indicated that attention given to school culture and its development, as a learning environment of excellence, is foundational to healthy teacher morale and student achievement. The OHI (Miles, 1971) measure 10 dimensions: Goal Focus,
Communication Adequacy, Optimal Power Equalization, Resource Utilization, Cohesiveness, Morale, Innovativeness, Autonomy, Adaptation, and Problem-Solving Adequacy. The findings showed that Goal Focus and Adaptation (tolerating stress and maintaining stability in response to external environment) in Recognized and Acceptable schools were the most effective dimensions in cultural discrimination. These findings suggest that the dimensions of Goal Focus and Adaptation are significant contributors to healthy school climates. The study was done using elementary, middle, and high schools. Although this study was not done in Christian school environments, it is helpful to note the findings. A similar study in Christian schools could determine the transferability of these findings to faith-based school settings. The current study indicated the extent to which Mennonite school administrators give credence to the organizational culture of their school in the teacher selection process.

**Educational Cultures**

A review of organizational culture from a broader perspective leads to a more narrow focus on organizational culture in educational institutions. Senge (2000) characterized organizations as systems. With regards to education, he saw the model of education as an Industrial Age system with an abundant amount of restrictions and conformity. His proposal was to see school as a living system where past systemic structures are open to inquiry and questioning as to purpose and continuing effectiveness. Senge said that he has one wish for all institutions, but schools in particular. That wish is that “we dedicate ourselves to allowing them to be what they would naturally become, which is human communities, not machines” (p. 58). Senge and Kim (2013) pointed to
the fragmentation of learning communities a contributing factor for widespread institutional failures, and called for integration within learning communities in the areas of research, capacity building, and practice. Senge, Scharmer and Winslow (2013a, 2013b) reviewed their 30 years of research and writing on learning communities. They discussed the core competencies of organizational learning, which call for transitions. Learning communities must transition from reacting to creating, from knowing to learning, from parts to connection, and from blaming to understanding.

Sergiovanni (1991) recognized that school cultures may tend to be either weakened by too much fluidity or be ones that repress individuality and innovation by being too strong in terms of rigidity. He called for an alternative, a resilient culture, which maintains integrity while being able to stretch and bend with change. He saw “cultural connections and covenantal relationships as the foundational pillars of collaborative cultures” (Sergiovanni, 2004, p. 51). This model of school culture relies on loyalty and commitment to community. This type of community has heart and soul along with purpose and sentiment, which parallel a spiritual commitment to each other as stakeholders. Earlier work by Tonnies (1957) referred to community by kinship, community of place, and community of mind. Kinship is relationship, place is a common space, and mind refers to shared goals and values. Sergiovanni (1994) called for changing the metaphor in education from schools as organizations to schools as communities. In an organization, leadership depends on compliance and control, using rules, regulations, and monitoring. These dynamics can be seen between administrators and teachers and between teachers and students. In communities, however, connections
between people are not based on contractual obligations, but on commitments between people. Communities connote a sense of working together for a common purpose, where organizations impose a system of rules and regulations from a hierarchical structure. Mennonite doctrine stresses the importance of community and this importance is clearly seen in Mennonite education.

Mennonite schools see their role as a partner with the Christian families and their churches. The strength of this community bond supports the development of the whole child more fully than any one of these institutions by themselves. Respect for others and their voice is taken into account when decisions are made and when responding to a family on issues such as discipline. Many Mennonite schools subscribe to the idea of restorative discipline, for example. Discipline is not simply punitive, intending to hurt the individual. Discipline should include a major component of restoring the individual to a right standing in the community (school setting). The student needs to know that they will be fully reunited as a community member once they have corrected any wrongs they have done to others. It is important that a teacher in a Mennonite school setting understands this approach and is willing to embrace it as a disciplinary practice.

When taken in the context of education, a community would be a place of belonging and more family-like. Sergiovanni (1994) suggested that teachers need to make a decision between having a professional to client relationship with students (affective neutrality) or a parent to child relationship (affective). Returning to the concept of spiritual formation in students, relating to students in the context of community resonates more clearly than an organizational approach with me and the
Mennonite schools in which I have served. My leadership style has always been one of shared leadership and servant leadership because of the community orientation and putting others before yourself. This does not mean abdicating leadership, but accentuating it by using the abilities of others to their full extent. The necessity of selecting teachers in a Mennonite school context who are able to teach and foster spiritual formation from a community orientation is clear, based on the denominational focus in this area.

The onus is on the head administrator and other designated persons within the school to select teacher personnel who are truly able to address both the educational needs of students, and their spiritual needs by opening spaces as opposed to filling spaces. To develop to their full potential, in light of Sergiovanni’s work, the student must be central to the process, not simply a repository for new knowledge. Experiential learning comes with taking risks in a caring community where a student knows they are accepted and nurtured. Truly, a supportive community as the centerpiece of school culture is necessary for a student to realize his or her full potential in a Mennonite school.

**Christian School Culture**

Court (2006) suggested that religious and academic ideals in a faith-based school culture and a secular common culture create unique complexities. Her research focused on proposing a model of how one might study religious school culture in the context of her vision for an ideal school culture. She also suggested that the scarcity of studies within religious school settings may be attributed to the difficulty in gaining access to these venues. Court borrowed from Polanyi’s (1958) four fundamental aspects of a
society in forming her own model of studying an ideal school culture. The four elements are (a) the sharing of convictions, (b) the sharing of fellowship, (c) cooperation, and (d) the exercise of authority. These areas begin to address the complexity of a Christian school culture where personal relationships with students are central in effectively modeling and guiding student spiritual formation. In this study, the complexities of gaining entry to the culture being studied were significantly decreased through my previous years of work in a Mennonite school setting, and with the administrators who were interviewed.

Mills (2003) reviewed the general understanding of organizational culture and more specifically school culture. Her research concern was related to a Christian school definition of school culture that accurately reflects Christian schools and their biblical values. In describing the dynamic aspects of a Christian school, she cited the powerful relationships among stakeholders that arise through the spiritual connection found in a belief in and devotion to God. In contrast to a hierarchical structure, communal interdependence is characterized as a culture where every member has the wherewithal to fulfill his or her calling or role without suppressing others. Service to others and a Christ-centered vision are given as tenets of a truly Christian school community. The culture of a Christian school should be one where biblical values are modeled and overtly taught by all staff members. In this sense, assisting in the spiritual formation of students is the opportunity of all staff members. At the same time, all community members can learn from each other, meaning that adults learn from the growth and development of
their students as well. Within a Mennonite school culture, there tends to be a strong focus on the community, as opposed to the individual.

**Mennonite School Culture in Community**

Members of the Mennonite Schools Council have adopted five distinctives of Mennonite education: (a) Christ-centered, (b) Educational Excellence, (c) Peace and Service, (d) Community, and (e) Faith-Infused Opportunities (Roth, 2011). The idea of community is a central factor in Mennonite theology, both within the churches and the schools. There is a growing body of literature that describes the culture of schools as communities (Kofman & Senge, 1993; Palmer, 1997; Senge & Kim, 2013; Sergiovanni, 1991, 1994). Community speaks to the idea of being connected, in education, for the purpose of learning and growth. Palmer (1997) believed that community is necessary for teaching and learning and that community can help renew “connectedness at the heart of authentic education” (p. 4). He portrayed an image of teaching, with community at the center, where “to teach is to create a space in which the community of truth is practiced” (p. 4). Palmer’s vision was not engaged through technique, but in never-ending variety guided by the identity and integrity of the teacher. Palmer delineated the extremes of traditional learning models as teacher-centered and student-centered while he proposed a third model. Palmer stated:

Perhaps education should be neither teacher-centered nor student-centered but subject-centered. Modeled on the community of truth, this approach facilitates educational experience in which teacher and students alike are focused on a great thing, in which the best features of teacher and student-centered education are
merged and transcended by putting not the teacher or the student but the subject at the center of our attention. (p. 5)

Palmer envisioned the subject of study as a way of expanding the students’ boundaries while at the same time expanding their sense of community with student and teacher as learners around the great thing. There is a dichotomy between opening space and filling space, and teachers have traditionally been trained to fill space. Palmer saw the classroom as a space where discussions become a complex communal dialogue that opens the room to discovery amongst themselves. Teachers set the tone for what will be the focus of the classroom and the time spent in the classroom. When selecting teachers, an effective administrator should be able to determine how the teacher will approach the students and the classroom space, with regards to spiritual formation as well as subject matter.

Kofman and Senge (1993) spoke about “communities of commitment” and “learning organizations” (p. 5). Their work was focused on the business world and they saw basic dysfunctions within the culture at large. These cultural dysfunctions are fragmentation, competition, and reactivity. While we break issues into fragments, organizational problems are largely systemic. Being overly competitive leads to quick fixes, surface results, and measureable results that are short-term in nature. Reactiveness is in relation to outside forces, “yet the wellspring of real learning is aspiration, imagination, and experimentation” (p. 9). Spiritual formation in students needs a process, in the context of community, with time to experiment and discover. Kofman and Senge believed that these dysfunctions have been a part of past progress but are also leading to
current crises in our outer world such as ecological and social crises, and our inner world, which are psychological and spiritual in nature. Their vision for a learning organization embodied three foundations—a culture of love, action based on dialogue, and a systemic view of life and learning. Learning organizations should be accepting, listening, generative, and filled with meaningful action. Kofman and Senge pointed to the fact that spiritual disciplines are normally practiced in communities with the fellowship of others where it is safe to face the dangers of learning new things.

To summarize, teachers who are selected to guide the spiritual formation and learning of students in a Mennonite school must understand and embrace the culture that is valued and perpetuated by the stakeholders of the school. A parent to child relationship is characterized by love and thoughtful guidance, and is the preference over a professional to client relationship between the teacher and student. Shared and servant leadership not only takes place between administrators and staff, but also between teachers and students. Powerful relationships are built through a spiritual connection between individuals. Learning happens in the context of community where students learn from their teachers and teachers learn from their students, thus creating a strong connection and feelings of trust and respect. Learning should be focused on the great things that teachers and students can learn together, albeit at different levels of understanding. The teacher is to open spaces for learning as opposed to filling spaces. Safety in learning comes through being connected and nurtured in community. These are the values and ideals that permeate a Mennonite school culture and the characteristics that administrators are looking for when selecting teachers in those schools. We now
consider the domain of spiritual formation beginning with a broad view of the term and narrowing to a Mennonite understanding of the concept.

**Spiritual Formation**

Spiritual formation is a significant part of the conceptual base for this study. Spirituality is defined across a wide range of belief systems and personal interpretations (T. L. Gall, Malette, & Guirguis-Younger, 2011; Tan & Wong, 2012). These beliefs and interpretations are not confined to a religious framework or a belief in a higher power. It is important to distinguish between a broader non-religious understanding of spiritual formation and the focus on Mennonite spiritual formation that is relevant to this study. Within the context of spirituality lies the idea of spiritual formation or growth in spiritual understanding and practice. It is the focus of this spiritual understanding that becomes operative within the context of teacher selection processes in Mennonite schools.

**Spiritual Formation in a Secular Context**

Spiritual formation is viewed, by some, in a very general context (Fleming & Cannister, 2010; Gay, 2000; Ng, 2012; J. Watson, 2003; Welch & Koth, 2013). In England and Wales, public school teachers are charged with assisting in the spiritual development of their students as well (Gay, 2000; J. Watson, 2003). These researchers addressed the issue of how spirituality is defined in a secular context, where the individual teachers vary in their understanding of the term. Watson based her findings on a close study of academic articles related to the understanding of spirituality in schools and concluded that there is considerable variability. The topic of spirituality is aligned
with citizenship but is still elusive with regards to definition. Gay posited the following definition of spirituality in the context of English schools:

An appropriate working definition appears to be that it encompasses the development of beliefs, values, self-knowledge, awareness of others and a perspective on life; the capacity for reflection on oneself and the world; the capacity to ask the ultimate questions in life; an awareness of something beyond and above everyday existence and the development of the skills of worship. (p. 63)

In the context of this definition, a logical question would be to ask what is being worshiped. Spirituality, in a general sense, becomes difficult to define for such a diverse group of people as are found in a national school system. Ng (2012) conducted a phenomenographic study of English primary school students (ages 7–9) enrolled in a spiritual development program that was based in the study of literature and specifically focused on an experiential and relational view of children’s spirituality. Student learning was assessed through data that included writings, drawings, discussion and interviews. Ng concluded that spirituality was being addressed by assisting the students in developing their own spiritual meaning. Spirituality was not being taught, but was being experienced by providing students with skills, space, and time to construct their own meaning of spirituality for themselves. This is a very different understanding of spirituality than would be accepted within a Christian denominational framework, as found in a Mennonite context.
Tisdell (2003) differentiated between religion and spirituality and pointed out the difficulty in arriving at a definition for spirituality. Religion is tied in with belief in or obligation to God, whereas spirituality may or may not reference a relationship with a higher power. Tisdell proposed traits that are tied to spirituality, such as, connection of all things as a whole, continual presence in learning environments, pathway to constructed meaning, found throughout artistic endeavor, movement towards a true sense of self, and the involvement in unexpected experiences. Welch and Koth (2013) operationally defined spirituality as, “a dynamic process in which an individual forms personal meaning and purpose of his or her sense of self and its transcendent relationship with others and the world at large” (p. 616). As seen in these broad ideas relating to spiritual formation, a teacher claiming to be interested in the spiritual formation of students may be far from the mark in addressing the expected outcomes from a more focused Mennonite perspective.

**Spiritual Formation and a Higher Power**

Teachers in Mennonite schools are expected to model specific spiritual disciplines, from a Mennonite perspective, and guide students in their knowledge and growth in practicing these disciplines. Mennonite spiritual formation centers on an understanding of a higher power, as does spiritual formation in other religions, but the differences become crucial in teacher selection within this domain. Religious groups differ in their understanding of a higher power and spiritual formation (Hyman & Handal, 2006). It is beyond the scope of this study to review the concept of spiritual formation across all world religions.
From a religious perspective in general, spiritual formation connotes a relationship with a higher power or higher being, frequently referred to as a god. A major theme in religious spiritual formation is the process of experiencing a transformational life that attains a higher level of being in line with the teachings of the spiritual leader around which the religion is formed (Jones & Mason, 2010). Although there are similarities in the process of spiritual formation in non-Christian religions, the following examples are given within strictly Christian contexts.

Within the Eastern Orthodox tradition, according to Barbu (2012), “the spiritual formation of a Christian is the art of seeking holiness and union with God through the ministry of spiritual fatherhood (and motherhood)” (p. 28). The spiritual guide (spiritual father or mother) helps develop and sustain the baptismal grace of the disciple through their example, God-inspired words, and the sacraments of the church. In Eastern tradition, a child is baptized into the Church without making the decision on his or her own. Later in life, this gift of baptism can be ignored or activated through the choice of the person and with the assistance of the spiritual father. “Spiritual direction is concerned with seeking, understanding and fulfilling God’s will in one’s particular situation as the wisdom of the spiritual father is shown in the ability to apply the spirit of the tradition to the here and now” (p. 32). Barbu used an educational analogy by viewing the teacher as the spiritual father, the school as the church, and the textbook as the Bible. While Mennonites would agree with the concept of seeking holiness and union with God, the idea of infant baptism as a part of spiritual formation would be directly in conflict with an
Anabaptist understanding of baptism being reserved for those who understand and desire this religious rite.

In a Catholic context, the primary task of assisting in spiritual formation is the responsibility of the church, with a strong system of schools available to assist in the process. Earl (2005) discussed the need for well planned programs of spiritual formation in Catholic schools, described the role of the principal as a leader in modeling a meaningful relationship with Jesus and the Father in the Holy Spirit, assisted by the sacramental life, prayer, study, and serving others. Johnson and Castelli (2000) observed that the spiritual and moral development of students is spread throughout the Catholic school curriculum with the support of parents and teachers. Liturgy, celebration, prayer, rituals, ceremonies, values, beliefs, standards of behavior, and other religious practices are all valued and seen as instrumental in the spiritual formation of the students. Culture building and community were seen as central facets in the spiritual development of students in Catholic schools. A Catholic understanding of the role that the parochial school can play in spiritual formation parallels a Mennonite understanding of Christian education in many ways, such as the importance of curriculum, standards of behavior, and community building. Doctrinal differences regarding how teachers within these settings model spiritual formation exist, however.

According to Sink, Cleveland, and Stern (2007) there was a need for more rigorous empirical research on assisting student spiritual formation in Roman Catholic, Jewish, and Protestant Christian schools. They believed that these schools have done a commendable job throughout their histories, but additional research would be effective in
strengthening current practice. The current study addressed a specific aspect of spiritual formation, in a particular subset of Protestant Christian schools (Mennonite), by understanding how administrators select teachers who will be proficient in guiding their students in spiritual formation. A better understanding of this particular teacher proficiency is gained through a review of scholarly literature that speaks directly to theories of spiritual development.

**Spiritual Formation and Developmentalism**

Spiritual formation is a conceptual base for this study, and a review of the literature reveals significant study that has been completed in posturing spiritual formation in light of human developmental theory. This theoretical tie warrants a closer look at developmental theory. Many authors begin with or inform their study of spiritual formation with a base of comparison to the theories of respected developmental psychologists such as Piaget, Kohlberg, Erikson, and Vygotsky (Estep, 2002; Fleming & Cannister, 2010; Fortosis, 1992; Fowler, 2001; LeBlanc & Slaughter, 2012). Fowler (2001) indicated that his Faith Development Theory (FDT) was developed through the interplay of developmental psychologies and a liberal theology taken from Christian arenas. Fowler was significantly influenced by Erikson’s stages of psychosocial development (ego psychology), Kohlberg’s stages of moral development, and Piaget’s theory of cognitive development (constructive-developmental approach). Fowler (1981), in his seminal research, gave a comprehensive presentation of his stages of faith development summarized in seven specific stages:
1. **Stage 0**—Infancy or Undifferentiated Faith (birth–2 years)—focus on trust/safety
2. **Stage 1**—Intuitive-Projective Faith (3 years–7 years)—focus on the imagination
3. **Stage 2**—Mythic-Literal Faith (children in school)—focus on justice
4. **Stage 3**—Synthetic-Conventional Faith (adolescence–adult)—focus on conformity
5. **Stage 4**—Individuative-Reflective Faith (20s–30s)—focus on struggle
6. **Stage 5**—Conjunctive Faith (mid-life)—focus on transcendence
7. **Stage 6**—Universalizing Faith (old age)—focus on enlightenment. (p. 113)

Fowler addressed these stages of faith in terms of a religious view (believing in a god) and a universal view (possibly believing in a higher power). He viewed faith as a three-tiered structure which includes the self, significant others, and the ultimate other (center of value and power). Fowler’s study of faith development relied on the interaction of these three realities and how their interrelatedness changes over time. This view does not bring focus to the specific meaning of spirituality in a Christian sense. In addition, Fowler’s view assumes a type of spiritual formation progression through all stages of a person’s life, as opposed to the view that spiritual transformation begins as a choice at any age and progresses through stages independent of age.

Estep (2002) spoke of the strong effect that developmentalism had on viewing spiritual formation in stages. In particular, he analyzed Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky’s perspective on developmentalism, believing that it had been overlooked as a
springboard for understanding spiritual development. Vygotsky’s view is nonlinear and highly focused on the social and cultural aspects of human development, which may be a better parallel to the process of spiritual formation than traditional developmentalism. Estep believed that the faith community is imperative for spiritual formation and, as a product of developmental theory, would require relationships equipped for developing faith. The importance of the faith community, as formed by particular denominational beliefs, should be viewed as shaping a Christian thought process which is continually expanded as a part of lifelong learning and development. Vygotsky (1997) stated, “Education may be defined as a systematic, purposeful, intentional, and conscious effort at intervening in and influencing all those processes that are part of the individual’s natural growth” (p. 58). In a Christian school setting this manifests itself as teachers, with the assistance of the family and the church, help guide students toward independence in all areas, including spirituality. Despite the strong tie between developmentalism and spiritual formation, models of stages of Christian spiritual formation from a specifically Christian view have been developed.

**Stages of Christian Spiritual Formation**

Willett (2010) developed a Biblical model of stages of spiritual development based on I John 2:12-14:

> I am writing to you, little children, because your sins have been forgiven you for His name’s sake. I am writing to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I have written to you, children, because you know the
Father. I have written to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one. (New American Standard Version)

Willett developed his three stages as a metaphorical categorization of spiritual development with milestones associated with each stage. It is important to note that stages of spiritual development, focused on a biblical model, are dealing with a progression or transformation in a person regardless of their age, not throughout a specific chronological time span. Regardless of that distinction, Willett analyzed his model in light of human development theory in his article as the other authors have done. His model is broken down into stages, milestones, and core issues:

1. The Childhood Stage—The Birth of Faith
   
   Milestone 1—Experiencing Grace and Forgiveness
   
   Core Issue—self-concept and identity
   
   Milestone 2—Embracing God as Father
   
   Core Issue—concept of God
   
   Milestone 3—Growing up Together
   
   Core Issue—relationship supporting spiritual growth

2. The Young Adulthood Stage—The Ownership of Faith
   
   Milestone 4—Owning a Firsthand Faith
   
   Core Issue—resisting pressure to conform
   
   Milestone 5—Linking Truth and Life
Core Issue—grounding life in God’s Word

Milestone 6—Defeating the Enemies of Spiritual Growth

Core Issue—lived-out faith in God

3. The Parenthood Stage—Empowering Faith

Milestone 7—Empowering Others

Core Issue—empowering others to grow toward mature faith

Milestone 8—Seasoned by Time and Experience

Core Issue—developing/enjoying a deep, rich, mature faith

Willett pointed out the other-centered progression of John’s writing in that the goal isn’t self-actualization, but a focus on the growth of others in faith and spirituality. He discussed Eric Erickson’s concept of generativity, which is the idea that people strive to create and nurture things that will outlast them. Erikson and Erikson (1981) were pioneers in the field and spoke from an evolutionary rather than a Christian viewpoint. They viewed generativity as a period when adults are prepared to be, for their children, what is needed at the child’s particular stage of development. There are overlaps in the general ideas of Christian spiritual formation and developmental theory, but this is not a close parallel when God is removed from the model.

Fortosis (1992) presented difficulties in formulating stages in the narrow channel of specifically Christian spiritual formation. His concerns included: (a) the fact that people may begin to follow Christianity at any age, (b) there are vastly different levels of exposure to Christian thought prior to salvation, (c) inner motives and attitudes are difficult to assess or categorize, and (d) the temptation to assess spiritual maturity solely
on actions or behavior. Fortosis also proposed three stages of Christian formation following religious conversion: (a) Stage One: Formative Integration—characterized by fluidity and evolution of ideas, egocentric reasoning, theological dogmatism, and less biblical knowledge and discernment; (b) Stage Two: Responsible Consistency—characterized by solid convictions, other-centered reasoning, less theological dogmatism, and greater biblical knowledge and discernment; (c) Stage Three: Self-Transcendent Wholeness—characterized by secure theology fostering flexibility, self-transcendence for the sake of others, thorough biblical knowledge and wisdom, unwavering faith and being a confronter of public/private injustice.

As Christian school teachers are charged with the task of assisting in the spiritual formation of preschool through high school age students, these students will be at varying levels of maturity in the various models. Fortosis (1992) stated that teachers must be careful to encourage whatever level of maturity a student is on, without discouraging the enthusiasm and new life found in those who have recently begun their transformation. In many ways, this can be compared to academic differentiation in the classroom as teachers address the varying levels of academic ability in students. Discernment and wisdom are necessary in responding to the different needs of students.

Students will enter the classroom at many different stages of spiritual maturity. A teacher who is able to effectively guide students in spiritual formation should understand the stages of spiritual maturity and be able to reach out to students at their level. In guiding the students in their own personal spiritual formation, spiritual disciplines must be modeled and taught. Willard (2000) spoke about the “disciplines for life in the Spirit”
(p. 256), which include solitude, silence, prayer, fasting, worship, study, fellowship and confession. R. J. Foster (2002) added to the list of spiritual disciplines and categorized them into three groupings: (a) the inward disciplines—meditation, prayer, fasting and study; (b) the outward disciplines—simplicity, solitude, submission and service; and (c) the corporate disciplines—confession, worship, guidance and celebration. Much has been written about spiritual disciplines (R. J. Foster, 2002; Holm, 2008; Junkin, 2009; Macfarlane, 2009; Rickabaugh, 2013; Root, 2012; Steibel, 2010; Willard, 1999) in the context of spiritual formation and growth in the Christian life. Each of these authors and many more spoke to the different disciplines and their importance in spiritual life. Practice of these disciplines overlaps, and terminology may be different depending on the author. Although Foster used the word fellowship, Willard’s use of the word celebration also encompasses fellowship. Solitude and silence happen at the same time and yet one can be in solitude without being silent, and meditation is most effectively captured in solitude. Growing in the spiritual disciplines is part of spiritual formation. Teachers in Mennonite schools are expected to model these disciplines and guide students in their knowledge and growth in practicing them.

**Specific disciplines.** Macfarlane (2009) proposed that practicing the spiritual disciplines offers school age children an opportunity to set aside the worldly distractions of life and grow in “self discovery, integration, and growth in Christ-likeness” (p. 37). A primary discipline is time alone with God in solitude and silence, while listening for the voice of the Holy Spirit. As a college professor, Macfarlane required that students in his class on spiritual formation spend 24 hours in silence and solitude sometime during the
course. This is a time for regeneration, which Macfarlane believed is not being encouraged as it once was as a part of a Christian believer’s life. Separation from God creates tension with the central purpose of Christianity, which is developing a relationship with God and growing in Christ. Junkin (2009) likened the relationship of a Christian with God to our earthly relationship and spending time with those we love, especially in light of the importance of knowing the love of God. Mennonite school teachers are to build relationships with students where the love of God is evident.

As a part of spending time alone with God, listening is a discipline that is crucial to growth and spiritual formation (Holm, 2008; Junkin, 2009). Listening happens through prayer, meditation, and reading scripture. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to speak through our thoughts, help in the interpretation of scripture, and help us imagine the direction to take in our actions as we seek the will of God. Prayer, as a spiritual discipline, is to be experienced in community and as an individual. Holm (2008) described the prayer of fellowship in the daily lives of Christians together, which “expresses the cares, needs, joys, thanksgivings, petitions and hopes of all” (p. 165). Willard (1999) presented the idea that faith is built in the context of prayer. He cited two kinds of prayer, living prayer and dead prayer. Living prayer speaks to prayer where communication with a living God is taking place and is integral to personal spiritual formation. Dead prayer is performed out of a sense of obligation and is perfunctory in manner. The act of meditation and prayer is a part of the experience of students and teachers in Mennonite education.
Study is a spiritual discipline that requires use of the Bible as a textbook for life. To study scripture, through the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, is to grow in our relationship with God. Rickabaugh (2013) distinguished between propositional knowledge and knowledge by acquaintance. Propositional knowledge is declared or expressed as true through study, whereas knowledge by acquaintance “demands personal presence—first hand familiarity” (p. 208). Rickabaugh stated, “One can have a great deal of propositional knowledge about God, while not having ever known God in the knowledge by acquaintance sense” (p. 215). Studying scripture is central to spiritual transformation. Study includes learning facts and concepts, but the most important part is to know God more fully and to experience transformation. In an adolescent who is experiencing a very difficult time of life, the idea of spending time reading scripture and meditating may provide stability and consistency in the midst of change. Self-understanding in a student comes from understanding their place in the eyes of God (Macfarlane, 2009). The idea of biblical study begins at the youngest ages in Mennonite schools and is developed throughout the entire school experience. Memorization of scripture is a basic practice that also starts in early childhood in the schools.

Holm (2008) stated that “hospitality has wide currency as a metaphor for classroom and other educational practices where space is created for all to contribute and where the stranger and diversity are welcome” (p. 165). In a discussion of hospitality as a spiritual discipline, there are synonyms that are used such as fellowship, celebration, and community (R. J. Foster, 2002; Holm, 2008; Palmer, 1998; Willard, 1999). A classroom is a place of diversity in all aspects of the word, and the idea of a welcoming
space to learn and grow resonates through Christian, religious, and secular education alike. A sense of community is frequently spoken of in a Mennonite school context and throughout the scriptures as well. Through a study of the biblical writings of the apostle Paul in I Corinthians and Ephesians, Turner (2013) discussed the dual purpose of developing in individual and community spiritual formation. In this model, members of a community encourage and demonstrate progress in spiritual growth for each other, in addition to providing a means of accountability for each other. Mennonite schools, as communities, are ideal places for practicing the Christian life and for accountability to others. In order to guide students in spiritual formation, a teacher’s personal experience in the spiritual disciplines must be evident in their lives as a model in the classroom and a voice of experience in their teaching.

**Disciplines in community.** Steibel (2010) reviewed writings about Christian education and spiritual formation, and spoke about community as a major part of the literature as well. Teaching about religion is a cerebral undertaking, but Christian education is a matter of living together and experiencing growth in faith together as a body. Students and teachers benefit from sharing time and space on a daily basis. Celebration as a community happens in Mennonite schools during weekly, and in some cases daily, chapel times. These times bring the community together for the purpose of meeting God in a variety of the spiritual disciplines—community, prayer, worship, praise, celebration, study, confession, and fellowship (Roth, 2011). The strong sense of community in Mennonite schools is linked with the view of the school as a family and a strong support system for the student and their personal family.
Service to others is a spiritual discipline that comes as a result of growth in spiritual formation and the transforming work of the Holy Spirit in a student’s life. Service is another focus that is frequently discussed and modeled in Mennonite schools. As with most aspects of a Christian life, the motive is as important as the action. Service can be performed as an obligation, a requirement, a punishment, or for the purpose of self-focus or show. When any of these motivations are the basis for service, one’s attitude will not be conducive to positive spiritual formation. C. R. Foster (2007) discussed the difference between self-righteous service and true service. He characterized true service as (a) emanating from our relationship with God and His prompting, (b) being free from a need to be announced, (c) being offered to enemies as well as friends, and (d) springing spontaneously from our day to day existence in response to human need. An important goal in Mennonite education is that service to others and to God becomes more important than service to self.

Students and teachers can learn from each other about the spiritual disciplines and can discuss how to effectively practice them. They can even be tested on this body of knowledge in Bible classes. The true goal of growth and positive progress in spiritual formation, as a result of practicing the disciplines, is not easily assessed. Opportunity to practice the disciplines is the main ingredient for forward movement in this area. Not only must there be opportunity, but there must be significant positive role models who are practicing the disciplines with the correct motivation. This is a major focus for Mennonite schools when new faculty and staff are selected.
**Spirituality and Students**

A study by Fleming and Cannister (2010) revealed what high school students believed were the most influential factors in their own spiritual formation, as exhibited by the people who were central in shaping their spiritual lives. Admiration of the person’s faith was the most significant factor. This faith is seen through transparency, on an age appropriate basis, and a significant relationship built over time. Other important factors included the person’s caring about the students’ interests and passions, modeling, sharing about their own experiences, and teaching spiritual truth. These traits are difficult to predict while interviewing a potential teacher candidate, giving further support to a research study of this nature.

LeBlanc and Slaughter (2012) studied the effect of Christian and public high school education on college students in both the areas of subsequent academic achievement and spiritual formation. Their study showed that Christian high school graduates reported that the school experience had a significantly greater influence on spiritual formation than did their public school counterparts. The major areas of influence in relation to spiritual formation were helping others, intelligently defending their beliefs, sharing their faith, personal responsibility, and personal honesty in the areas of doubts and beliefs. These findings are not surprising as the mission of a Christian school focuses on the development of a specific spiritual and moral mindset and subsequent worldview. That being said, many students who are not being educated in a Christian school setting still learn and practice these same values in the context of their
own faith walk with the support of friends, family, and church. However, the Christian school culture strengthens this spiritual experience.

The importance of the preschool through high school years in the spiritual formation of children and young adults cannot be overstated (Stonehouse, 1998). Combining the fact that the majority of Christians make their initial commitment to follow Christ before they reach the age of 18 (Fortosis, 1992; C. S. Smith, 2005), and the significant impact that teachers have on the lives of school-age students, reinforces the importance of the student-teacher relationship. Parents are concerned about the impact of the school experience on their children’s lives. For those who address their concern for the spiritual influences in their children’s lives by sending them to a Christian school, the teacher’s ability to guide the spiritual formation of their child is of paramount importance. Forrest and Lamport (2013) spoke to the significant difference in Christian education by stating, “Christian education is more than just content; it is spiritual transformation” (p. 112).

Macfarlane (2009) believed that the doctrine of regeneration in adolescents must include “a means to engender a pattern of living empowered by the Holy Spirit that encourages true self discovery, integration, and growth in Christ-likeness” (p. 37). This begins in adolescents through recognition of their own identity as they begin to see themselves through the framework of God’s view. Advancing through stages or types of spiritual formation is challenged by a myriad of other influences in a person’s life. In listing the numerous technological and other distractions that bombard teenagers, Dean (2004) said that these same distractions “challenge Erikson’s notion of an integrated
identity while simultaneously underscoring his original insight: Adolescents do internalize the struggles of their historical moment, which is precisely why personal integration eludes so many young people in contemporary culture” (p. 13). The normal tendency in people is to address the immediate and the urgent, sometimes overlooking what is important. A technologically focused world is constantly presenting the immediate and urgent through sound bites and fanfare and distractions of online offerings (Bugeja, 2007). The Christian school teacher helps the students focus on the important issues of spiritual transformation in an academic context.

Caring about and nurturing spiritual transformation in school age students cannot be accomplished in the context of behavioral adjustment techniques. Obedience to God solely because of a fear of consequences is not the goal. A relationship of love and trust in God can only be nurtured by teachers who care about the heart of the student and model God’s love to the students (King, 2006). In a Christian school context, a standard curricular area in addition to the academic subjects is a Bible curriculum. Although this is the primary area where Bible knowledge is taught, synthesis of biblical understanding and practice is spread throughout the curriculum. C. R. Foster (2007), concluding from his Carnegie Foundation research, stated that students also learn spiritual formation from teachers who reach beyond the curriculum and lectures, and share from the heart as a way of modeling. Through telling stories of their own experiences in faith development and spiritual disciplines, teachers are able to encourage students to ask faith questions and move beyond the obstacles of disinterest and fear of the unknown (Macfarlane, 2009; Steibel, 2010). Care must be taken not to present the idea to students that there is a
perfect Christian life that can be lived, but that spiritual formation is a matter of becoming increasingly Christ-like in all aspects of their being over time. Spiritual formation is a lifelong process (Fleming & Cannister, 2010; Willard, 1999). The ability to share from the heart, in regards to personal faith development, is another characteristic that may be difficult to detect in selecting a Mennonite school teacher.

**Teacher as model.** LeBlanc and Slaughter (2012) studied the effect of both public and Christian high school experiences on the spiritual formation of college level students. Their research indicates that students place a higher value on intangible aspects of their school experience. Student suggestions for improvement of their schools included: (a) morally grounded teachers who inspire, (b) teachers who listen to students and include them in making decisions, (c) teachers who place more emphasis on learning in real-world scenarios, and (d) teachers who allow discussion of issues that are critical to the students. In a study of the spiritual formation of adolescents in New England, Fleming and Cannister (2010) identified that the youth of today desire mentors who are growing in their own spiritual lives. They stated, “Students will eagerly follow those who practice what they preach, but just as vehemently reject those who are putting on an act” (p. 63). Teachers relate to students on a daily basis and hear details of their lives. It is important for Christian school teachers to use this knowledge to pray for the students, their families, and their personal concerns (Turner, 2013). Depending on the nature of shared information, this may be accomplished through public prayer in the classroom or private prayer for the students. Christian school educators have a dual responsibility of
guiding the spiritual formation of their students and attending to academic excellence in their teaching (Banke et al., 2012). Fleming and Cannister (2010) also stated:

Students can be told about various spiritual disciplines and practices and attend every Christian youth event, but if they do not have people in their lives to lead them through a process of spiritual growth, they may feel a lack of relational investment and lost on the path of spiritual transformation. (p. 64)

The importance of a capable spiritual mentor in the lives of the students is evident in the preceding examples.

Dunn (2001) addressed the characteristics of youth workers, pastors, teachers, and campus ministers in assisting with the spiritual formation of students. He contrasted the idea of telling students as a method of spiritual guidance with his theory of pacing students towards a life that is Christ-centered. In telling students a fact or an idea, the main focus is on getting your point across. Pacing requires an investment in the life of the student. This investment is given in terms of time and expertise as the teacher listens to the student, seeks insight regarding the student’s stage of development, discerns how to relate to the student, and paces with the student in his or her own particular journey of spiritual formation. Pacing allows a teacher to deepen his or her influence in the lives of students as he or she builds trust and a relationship that is dependable. How Mennonite school administrators discern a teacher’s ability to pace students in his or her spiritual formation is a critical question in this study.

**Models from scripture.** In order to lead in spiritual formation, a Mennonite school teacher must experience spiritual formation as modeled through the life of Jesus
and the Holy Scriptures. The Bible is filled with educational analogies, and one in particular is central to the understanding of an appropriate relationship between the student and teacher. In speaking to His disciples, who were also students in a very real sense, Jesus said, “The student is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like their teacher” (Luke 6:40, New International Version). This quotation gives a sense of the importance placed on the influence of the teacher in Christian schools. This influence is modeled and manifested educationally, socially, relationally, behaviorally, and spiritually. Each of these areas is seen as an important part of addressing the holistic needs of the students.

Junkin (2009) addressed the idea of modeling spiritual formation in the midst of personal questions and failures. A Christian perspective maintains that Jesus Christ was the only perfect human, while maintaining His divinity as well. Teachers cannot live perfect lives, and so teachers also model how to take responsibility for mistakes, how to learn from mistakes, and how to help others walk through similar experiences. In a study of Christian school leaders and spirituality, Banke et al. (2012) conducted a phenomenological study with 12 administrators. The majority of those surveyed cited people other than family as having a major influence on their spiritual development. One respondent stated, “Probably the biggest influence in my life is working under men and women who demonstrated spiritual leadership for me in a variety of places” (p. 248), with teachers being listed among those people of significance.

**Modeling love for the student.** Knowing God’s love and sharing God’s love is a foundational aspect of spiritual transformation. “Nothing is so fundamental to the
Christian journey as knowing and feeling that we are loved. Nothing” (D. L. Smith, 2014, p. 74). Rickabaugh (2013) stated that the knowledge of God is seen in the face of Jesus who was a living example of a wholly and completely formed spiritual life. For Christians who work with youth, the “ultimate goal is to foster the spiritual growth of students, leading them to be genuine life-long disciples of Christ” (Fleming & Cannister, 2010, p. 55), with the understanding that ultimately this decision is the student’s choice in responding to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Teachers are responsible to guide and lead, not to push and force.

The Bible, as God’s word, is viewed by most Christians as the text for a meaningful process of lifelong learning and service to Christ. As such, Christian schools view the Bible as a central tool in teaching young people, from a Christian worldview, for the purpose of lifelong learning and development. Teachers are the main conduit for teaching this worldview to the students. Palmer (2003) stated:

The teacher is a mediator between the knower and the known, between the learner and the subject to be learned. A teacher, not some theory, is the living link in the epistemological chain. The way a teacher plays the mediator role conveys both an epistemology and an ethic to the student, both an approach to knowing and an approach to living. (p. 65)

Toward this end, the teacher becomes the critical link in espousing a biblical worldview regardless of the subject that is being taught. Selecting teachers who align with the Christian school’s statement of faith and doctrine is therefore critical as well.
Summary of Spiritual Formation

Spiritual formation, in essence, is a transforming experience that is characterized by an active life—an active mind and an active body (Gay, 2000; Junkin, 2009; Mulholland, 2013). Transformation begins with encountering God in a personal way, and proceeds through “experiencing the living God in the community of faith” (Junkin, 2009, p. 86). A Christian teacher is challenged with seeing all students as Christ sees the student. This means seeing the potential in the challenging students as well as the students who may be perceived as easy to teach and guide (Holm, 2008). Challenges that students pose come in behavioral, educational, emotional, and social forms. Even when discipline or redirection is necessary, teachers are to keep in mind what the student can one day become, as opposed to what they are demonstrating in the moment. Rickabaugh (2013) drew a distinction between knowledge about things and people and knowledge of things and people, which speaks to the relational aspect of teaching. This relation is not just between the teacher and subject, but more importantly, between the teacher and his or her students. The teacher in a Mennonite school is asked to focus on spiritual formation from a Mennonite perspective, as discussed in the next section on spiritual formation.

Mennonite Perspective on Spiritual Formation

When a particular Christian denomination sponsors a school, the inculcation of a Christian worldview is informed by that denomination’s statement of beliefs. Whereas there are different subgroups of Mennonite churches, the majority of schools who are members of the Mennonite Schools Council are associated with Mennonite Church USA
This review of spiritual formation from a Mennonite perspective relates specifically to MCUSA churches and affiliated schools.

Loewen and Nolt (2010) explained that the name Mennonite was given to the followers of Menno Simons (1496–1561), who joined the Anabaptist movement after leaving the Roman Catholic priesthood because of theological differences. Anabaptist refers to the belief in re-baptizing believers who had been baptized as infants in the Roman Catholic Church. They believed that baptism was an outward expression of accepting Jesus Christ as savior and could not be appropriately administered until a person was able to understand and desire this of their own free will. Mennonites are one of many Anabaptist groups that still exist. Grislis (1993) related Simons’ own account of his conversion experience, which illuminates some of the theological underpinnings of the present Mennonite church beliefs.

Then I, without constraint, of a sudden, renounced all my worldly reputation, name and fame, my unchristian abominations, my masses, infant baptism, and my easy life, and I willingly submitted to distress and poverty under the heavy cross of Christ. (p. 60)

This was a major step in the spiritual reformation of Simons’ religious beliefs and his subsequent leadership of the Mennonite church movement.

The most recent statement of faith for MCUSA is the Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective adopted in 1995. This statement is composed of 24 separate articles. Articles 17 through 23 deal specifically with aspects of discipleship in the
Mennonite Church. Article 17 is titled Discipleship and the Christian Life and is summarized as follows:

We believe that Jesus Christ calls us to discipleship, to take up our cross and follow Him. Through the gift of God’s saving grace, we are empowered to be disciples of Jesus, filled with His Spirit, following His teachings and His path through suffering to new life. As we are faithful to His way, we become conformed to Christ and separated from the evil in the world. (General Conference Mennonite Church & Mennonite Church, 1995, p. 3)

Article 18 is titled Christian Spirituality and is summarized as follows:

We believe that to be a disciple of Jesus is to know life in the Spirit. As the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ takes shape in us, we grow in the image of Christ and in our relationship with God. The Holy Spirit is active in individual and in communal worship, leading us deeper into the experience of God.

(General Conference Mennonite Church & Mennonite Church, 1995, p. 3)

Each of these articles is expanded to give more detail to the meaning of the article. In Article 17, expanded concepts that are central to Discipleship and the Christian Life are:

(a) experiencing God through the Holy Spirit, prayer, scripture, and the church; (b) Christ in our lives; (c) grace; (d) love and truth; (e) salvation and discipleship; (f) nonconformity to the world; (g) simplicity; (h) peace and justice; (i) allegiance to God; (j) truth; (k) faithfulness in marriage; (l) the body as God’s temple; and (m) compassion and reconciliation. Article 18 includes an expanded description of concepts on spirituality that include: (a) being the image of Christ, (b) relationship with God, (c) Christ in us
bearing fruit, (d) prayer, (e) study of Scripture, (f) reflection on God, (g) corporate worship, (h) singing hymns, (i) witness, and (j) service.

Although most Christian denominations have a statement of faith in some format, it was expected that individual congregations within that denomination would vary on their interpretation and degree of focus on the specifics of the statement. The MCUSA website indicates that “Mennonite beliefs and practices vary widely, but following Jesus in daily life is a central value, along with peacemaking” (Who are the Mennonites, 2013). It was expected that this study would reveal both similarities and differences in what individual Mennonite schools emphasize in spiritual formation and the theological beliefs and practices exhibited by the faculty members they select.

In the context of a study in Mennonite schools, the term spiritual formation is used in reference to a Protestant Christian understanding of the term. The term Protestant refers to Western Christian churches, aside from the Roman Catholic Church, which were established from and follow the principles of the Reformation. The Reformation was a distinct point in history, during the 16th century, where church members broke away from the Catholic church because of theological differences and re-formed their theology, giving rise to Protestant churches (Hamm, 2014). Christians follow the teachings of Jesus Christ as written in the Holy Bible (believed to be inspired by God and inerrant), although there are varying theological beliefs and interpretations of scripture that have given rise to different Christian denominations (D. L. Smith, 2014).

Spiritual formation is understood to be the process whereby a follower of Jesus Christ seeks to imitate Christ in his or her actions, thoughts, and relationship to God.
This happens through an acceptance of God’s word in the Bible and following the plans and precepts found therein (Barbu, 2012; Greenman & Goertz, 2005). It also takes place as a result of the leading of the Holy Spirit in the life of the person, and through the reinforcement and encouragement of others in the community of faith, such as churches, Christian schools, and other Christian organizations (C. S. Smith, 2005; Willard, 2013). Simply stated, spiritual formation is “not about doing or saying the right thing or thinking that you have reached a certain level, it’s about a commitment to be conformed to the likeness of Christ in daily life” (Fleming & Cannister, 2010, p. 59). There are nuances in the definition of processes as complex as spiritual formation, as illustrated by Forrest and Lamport (2013), who contended that it is “the process of coming to grips with our finite humanness and developing an understanding that our sufficiency lies in the person of Christ” (p. 111). Spiritual formation is both an inward process and an outward manifestation of a changed life, which is a personal experience for each person. Mulholland (2013) addressed the outward manifestations of spirituality by saying that “genuine spiritual formation is a process of being formed in the image of Christ for the sake of the world” (p. 15). Assisting spiritual formation in students is the domain of the teacher in a Mennonite school.

**Summary of Literature Review**

Chapter 2 of this study, as a literature review, has focused on scholarly literature that is relevant to the conceptual bases of the study. As qualitative research, using grounded theory methodology, the literature is used to position the study within a framework of existing theory. A review of employee selection practices is central to the
basic tenet of the study. A more focused view of teacher selection practices led to three conceptual base components. The first component is the importance of selecting employees for goodness of fit within the school. The second component is organizational theory and the importance of understanding organizational culture prior to selecting employees for inclusion within an organization, and more specifically a school. The third component is spiritual formation theories, narrowing to a view of Mennonite spiritual formation in students. These conceptual bases, and the subsequent literature review, provide a foundation for this study, which explored how Mennonite school administrators select teachers equipped to guide students in spiritual formation. Chapter 3 examines the methodology for this study.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to explore the methods and processes utilized by a group of seven Mennonite school administrators in identifying and selecting new teachers. These administrators were selected from Mennonite Schools Council member schools in the United States. More specifically, I was interested in discovering how these administrators determine which applicants they believe will become the best fit for the organization in guiding students in the area of spiritual formation. Mennonite educational institutions range from early childhood through university and seminary levels of the educational spectrum. For the purpose of this study, the administrators were involved in schools ranging from the Pre-Kindergarten through 12th grade levels of education. Structured interview protocols are often used in public schools to identify personal and professional traits of quality teacher candidates. However, structured interview protocols specifically for Christian schools do not exist and Mennonite schools do not have this type of instrument available for assessing teacher proficiencies in the spiritual realm. This fact makes the idea of how teachers are identified and selected in Mennonite schools an interesting topic for research.

This study explored the essence of selecting a new teacher who will be an effective spiritual mentor and guide for students. The central research question guiding this study was: How do Mennonite school administrators identify and select teachers who are able to guide students in their personal spiritual formation?
This study generated theoretical knowledge, which contributes to the scholarly literature on selecting teachers in Mennonite schools and encourages further study of teacher selection practices in faith-based schools in general. Mennonite schools teach and mentor students in many areas of their lives—academically, socially, physically, and most importantly, spiritually. As with other areas of expertise and natural ability, assessing an applicant’s personal spiritual beliefs and then predicting the potential for modeling the organizational beliefs and guiding students in spiritual development is a challenging administrative function. Commonalities in this process have been identified and will be available to Mennonite schools, and more broadly to faith-based schools.

In the remainder of this chapter I give an overview of the study from a methodological viewpoint. Choosing a qualitative approach using Grounded Theory methodology shapes the areas that are addressed. The general topics that follow are research design, participants, data collection, data analysis, and trustworthiness of the study. Overviews of these areas inform the reader as to how and why this study was conducted.

**Research Design**

As a researcher, it is important to identify what assumptions are being made about your research. Creswell (2007) provided a summary of assumptions characteristic of qualitative research in the areas of ontology (nature of reality), epistemology (relationship between researcher and researched), axiology (role of values), rhetoric (language of research), and methodology (process of research). This study used qualitative research methods compatible with the topic of study and the assumptions of the researcher. The
reality that is being pursued can only be found in the experiences of those administrators being interviewed. Qualitative research, unlike quantitative research, places the researcher in the context of the participants in the study, rather than distancing the researcher from the research field and the data. Instead of trying to design the study in a way that eliminates bias, it is recognized that the researcher has bias that should be revealed and subsequently dealt with in context of the research. In writing Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 of this dissertation, qualitative terms are used and the style of writing is personal and engaging, seeking to provide a thick and rich description of the experience and findings. An inductive methodology, which facilitates an emergent design, was used in collecting and analyzing the data. A qualitative approach to this study aligns with my assumptions as a researcher. I view this research as exploratory in nature, with the goal of discovering reasons, motivations, and opinions that lead to the identification and selection of teacher candidates in the context under study. My goal for the study is to provide insights and theoretical discussions that help to illuminate the research topic and inspire further research. The topic and end goals cannot be adequately explored in a structured and objective format where I, as researcher, am removed from the field of study.

Once the philosophical assumptions are identified and matched with the purposes of the study, the researcher’s specific paradigm or worldview should be identified (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 2000). I hold a constructivist viewpoint and conducted this research from that paradigmatic viewpoint. Also, in relation to the topic of this study, constructivism is the worldview that resonates most soundly for me. I am
searching for an understanding of the world in which we live and work. This research is subjective in nature and led me to seek out the complexity of experiences as lived by the administrators in the study. The participants’ views and experiences are central to this study and were explored through personal interviews and document review. Within the context of qualitative research, Creswell (2007) described four worldviews that predominate—postpositivism, constructivism, advocacy/participatory, and pragmatism. Bogdan and Biklen (1998) believed that most research approaches are rooted in positivism, with the exception of qualitative research, and center on identifying facts and behavioral causation.

**Grounded Theory Methodology**

Within the family of qualitative research approaches, I used Grounded Theory (GT) methodology in this study, for the purpose of generating emergent theoretical knowledge related to teacher identification and selection in Mennonite schools. GT methodology was first proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and GT was defined by these researchers simply as “the discovery of theory from data” (p. 1). A decade later, Glaser (1978) stated that “grounded theory is based on the systematic generating of theory from data, that itself is systematically obtained from social research” (p. 2). GT methodology has developed and emerged since 1967 through the research and writing of various authors. An inductive research design is appropriate for areas where previous research has not been conducted, as in this study of the processes used by Mennonite school administrators for teacher selection.
Charmaz (2006), who studied under both Glaser and Strauss, defined GT as “a method of conducting qualitative research that focuses on creating conceptual frameworks or theories through building inductive analysis from the data” (p. 187). Unique to GT, the researcher is involved in analyzing data during the data collection. Thus, the shape of further data collection is informed by the emerging results of analysis. Emergent categories are grounded in the data from the beginning. Parallel with the process of interviewing Mennonite school administrators, the data were analyzed and compared for the purpose of identifying emergent areas of inquiry. This process allowed for clarification of data by the administrators who were interviewed and subsequently indicated when there was a need to conduct additional follow-up interviews for the purpose of theoretical saturation. Researchers have differed in their ideas of the degree to which a GT study should be shaped, differing in the specific prescribed steps that should be followed while gathering and analyzing data. The very nature of qualitative research and the basic assumptions of GT methodology contribute to this tension and ambiguity, between research results and emergent processes.

As a GT study, the types of questions asked, the forms of data collected, and the methods of data analysis were shaped within the methodology. Charmaz (2006) presented a compilation of best practices in constructing GT as she presented her conclusions which were informed by lead authors in the field of GT and her own research experiences. GT interview questions are shaped at the beginning of a study in a way that elicits full description and experiential dialogue on the participant’s relevant experiences. Initial questions are to be broad and open-ended, avoiding simple yes or no questions,
which lead to the emergent nature of the process. The participants’ responses then guide the ensuing questions in a direction most relevant to their experiences. GT utilizes a method of data coding and data analysis, explained more fully below, which is characterized as a zigzag pattern where coding and analysis build on each other as they are occurring simultaneously throughout the study.

As Mennonite school administrators experience the process of selecting new teachers who possess the ability to assist in the spiritual formation of their students, they inherently use methods and processes developed through their years of experience. Some of these methods were specifically written in policies, teacher applications, and planned interview questions, and some were unwritten and possibly unidentified. These methods developed during repeated experiences in the interview process conducted by the administrator and anyone else that assisted in teacher selection. Identifying the common processes that effectively lead to selection of teachers, who become known as effective spiritual guides for their students, greatly benefits new and veteran administrators alike. Qualitative analysis using GT methodology in studying selection practices was a logical match. The identification of theoretical knowledge that can be utilized by practitioners was an exciting prospect.

**Participants**

Sampling methodology is widely addressed and agreed upon in the practitioner literature on GT methodology (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2007; Glaser, 1978; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In conducting a GT study, there are two types of relevant sampling techniques—initial and theoretical. Initial sampling simply starts the researcher along the
path of emergent data and analysis—a beginning point. As a study of teacher selection practices in Mennonite Schools Council member schools, the obvious initial sample for this study was head administrators in schools belonging to this organization. Aligning with the specific area of selection practices, the initial sample was further limited to experienced administrators as opposed to beginning administrators or those just beginning their association with a Mennonite school. Theoretical sampling began when the emerging data and coding led to emerging categories and preliminary theoretical strands. At this point, I was seeking to obtain data that would help develop and further analyze identified categories of data. Through the process of theoretical sampling, certain participants were re-interviewed through follow-up phone conferences, but no additional participants were needed. When the theoretical sampling led to saturation of all categories, the data collection was ended.

The participants in this study were head administrators from member schools of the Mennonite Schools Council (MSC) located in the United States. As head administrators, the participants are the main (and in some cases the only) person involved in selecting new teachers at their schools. This category of schools delimits the number of participants available, as there are 30 schools in the council. Further limiting the participant group, I interviewed only those who have been head administrator at their school for at least five years. This length of experience allowed the administrators enough time to have acculturated to the school climate and to have participated in a significant number of teacher interviews. MSC membership is open to schools offering any grade levels in the range of Pre-Kindergarten through 12th grade, which have a
significant relationship with Mennonite Church USA or a related Anabaptist group. The group from which participants were selected is composed of both male and female administrators. Pseudonyms were used in this study in order to provide anonymity to the participants. Due to the small size of the study group, and the collegiality of the administrators, it would be easy to identify participants if specific demographic information would be revealed.

The participants were interviewed in person in their school offices or conference rooms, or by phone conferencing depending on their location and schedules. Two schools are in Ohio and a cluster of schools are located in Pennsylvania, making them easily accessible during one trip. The other MSC member schools are in diverse locations such as South Dakota, Iowa, Indiana, Virginia, Oregon, Arizona, and Florida. Interviews were the main method of data collection for this study. However, documents such as board policies on employee selection and teacher applications were collected as supporting documentation. Individual school websites also provided data for review and analysis during this study.

Prior to data collection, I gained entrance to the various school venues by introducing the study to potential participants and asking for their agreement to participate in the study. Having been a member of MSC in one form or another for 29 years (previously two separate groups—Mennonite Secondary Education Council and Mennonite Elementary Education Council), I did not have difficulty in entering the field and completing the interviews. I have known each of the participants for many years, worked alongside them in professional and collegial settings, and developed close friendships.
This was a personal bias that I addressed, although the topic of study did not create tension or controversy that was significantly affected by personal bias.

Potential participants were contacted via email for the purpose of introducing the study and asking for their participation in the study. Questions were answered via email or phone, at their request. This was the initial contact for the purpose of determining if they were willing to participate in the study. Once participants had indicated their willingness to participate in the study, full disclosure was made regarding the research process. This disclosure included information about audio taping, anonymity, secure storage of data, and the right of the participant to end participation at any point in the study. Signed approval, documenting their willingness to participate, was obtained from each participant and is being kept on file with the study results.

**Data Collection**

Once the pool of participants was confirmed, I scheduled specific interview dates, times, and locations with each of the participants. All participants were initially interviewed in person. These initial interviews ranged in length from one to two hours. One of the interviews was conducted in the conference room of a public library and the remaining interviews were conducted in the administrators’ offices. Follow-up conferences were conducted through phone calls. Audio-recordings of the interviews were made and subsequently used in typing word for word transcripts of each interview. I requested and obtained copies of board policies regarding employee selection, a teacher application, and any other documents that the administrator believed would be helpful in assessing the interview/selection protocol of the school. Once the interviews were
completed and data analysis had begun, participants were contacted for follow-up interviews on an as needed basis.

Interviews, as the primary method of data collection for this study, were transcribed, coded, and analyzed according to GT methodology. Stern (2012), Glaser and Strauss (1967), and Glaser (1998) agreed that interviews and observations are the most widely used sources of data in GT studies, although Glaser (1992, 1998) believed that any type of data can be used. The documents obtained from participants included professional applications, faculty employment policies, professional reference forms, teacher evaluation forms, teacher job descriptions, teacher observation forms, interview questions, and school mission statements. These documents were helpful in assessing what was deemed as important in the selection process, particularly in relation to identifying teacher strengths in the spiritual domain. The documents and website information also led to formation of additional open-ended questions for the participants.

The interviews, document collection, follow-up interviews, and member-checking activities took place over a four-month period. Detailed records were maintained throughout the study. These included interview dates, collected documents, audio recordings, transcribed interviews, field notes, coding memos, and theoretical memos.

All data, recorded and written, are stored in a secure location in my personal residence and will not be made available to third parties. Names of participants are being kept anonymous through the use of pseudonyms. Although the topic of this study was not controversial, some of the data included stories and descriptions that cast certain people, practices, institutions, or organizations in a negative light at times. Anonymity
helped participants feel at ease in answering all questions in a full and unhindered manner. In addition, depending on the participant’s personal beliefs, discussing the spiritual aspects of teacher identification may have been more guarded without anonymity. Despite the seemingly non-threatening nature of the research, all precautions were taken in order to ensure the comfort level of the participants.

Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for the study was gained through the Kent State University IRB. Approval for this research study was needed because it was classified as human subjects research. I completed the appropriate Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) Program through the University of Miami in preparation for final IRB approval. Because audio-recording was used in this study, an Expedited Review (level II) approval from the Kent State IRB was received.

Data analysis methods, validation, and verification were a focus throughout this research study. Qualitative research must be conducted with a focus on guarding against researcher bias and reactivity, how the research affects participants, and the trustworthiness of the study. The remainder of this chapter addresses these issues, beginning with data analysis methods.

**Data Analysis**

Glaser (1992) stated that “qualitative analysis means any kind of analysis that produces findings or concepts and hypotheses, as in grounded theory, that are not arrived at by statistical methods” (p. 11). As such, this study was based on the analysis of transcribed interviews, documents, and researcher memos. Emergent design was followed as different levels of coding and memo writing lead to the refinement of
categories and an eventual core category and phenomenon. Data analysis was conducted using the Strauss and Corbin (1990) method of coding data as described in the following sections.

**Data Analysis by Coding**

Line by line coding was used in analyzing research data from the interview transcripts. Simultaneously, research memos were written both in the field while collecting data and during the subsequent analysis of the data. Memos were written to catch thoughts, ideas, impressions, and future directions which helped analyze and associate the numerous coded lines of data. In-depth interviews of participating administrators were audio-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed. Interview data were coded and separated into categories and subcategories using physical segments of the data, which were easily manipulated on tack boards, as opposed to computer analysis. As a researcher, I personally prefer kinesthetic learning methods where I can physically categorize and easily manipulate the data throughout the analysis process. Documents were collected while on-site at each school. When documents were sent electronically or downloaded from a website, physical copies were made. These documents were placed in file folders for easy access and storage during and after the data analysis. Transcriptions of the interviews and all memos and notes were filed as well. For the purpose of data analysis, I used the coding methodology as discussed by Strauss and Corbin (1990). Their definition of coding is simply stated as the “process of analyzing data” (p. 61). They also pointed to coding as a process that is accomplished through comparison-making and questioning. Further, the coding process discussed by Strauss
and Corbin is composed of three types of coding—open coding, axial coding, and selective coding, which are described in the following sections.

**Open coding.** Open coding is a line-by-line analysis of interview transcripts where coding is done in as many different ways possible. Each interview transcription was analyzed according to words, phrases, and passages within the interview. Field notes were used to enhance and inform my analysis of the data. Three categories were pre-determined to give structure to the data analysis process. These categories were fit, Mennonite culture, and spiritual formation. Memo writing was an integral part of the process as ideas emerged during the interviews, immediately following the interviews, and during data analysis. Open coding involves identification of concepts and properties that emerge through the analysis of words and phrases, and additional related properties that develop in an ongoing fashion. Theoretical sensitivity to the data is analysis that is both theoretical and sensitive, as the phrase implies. This analysis of a word, phrase, or sentence involved questioning the concepts that were shared in order to examine all possible meanings. Then, comparisons were made between the pieces of data for the purpose of establishing initial coding labels. I physically cut copies of the printed and color-coded interview transcriptions into pieces of data, which could be pinned to three large tack boards, one for each of the three pre-determined categories. I then assigned codes to the data pieces and also determined the best categorical fit for the data, which led to placement on one of the three boards. I also developed subcategories within the three main categories. Emerging ideas and codes came from asking the questions of who, what, where, when, and why in relation to all of the pieces of data.
Axial coding. The next step in analysis was axial coding. This is a process where dissected data is put back together within the categories and subcategories. Attention was given to what relationships were found within and between the categories—identifying and pulling out relationships that focus on the central idea of a category. Categories and concepts are related using both inductive and deductive reasoning. Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggested focusing on certain issues during axial coding. This included specification of categories around the conditions that developed the category, the situational context, the action and interaction as seen in related strategies, and the subsequent effect of these strategies. This data then gave rise to the subcategories. The tack boards were used again to reposition the words and phrases within the categories and subcategories as new ideas and relationships developed through the addition of data. As subcategories were developed, they were then used while reviewing new transcripts, field notes, memos, and other supporting documentation. In addition to my comfort level with the physical analysis of the data, I have not been involved in using digital models of qualitative data analysis. This would be an option for data analysis in future research studies.

Selective coding. Selective coding is the process of integration and refinement of emerging theoretical ideas. A core category and central phenomenon were selected and compared to all the other categories. At this point, relationships were formalized into theoretical frameworks. Grounded theory methodology allowed emergent themes to develop within the core category. The pre-determined categories were analyzed around
conditions, contexts, strategies, and consequences, which led to these emergent themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

I identified the core category and analyzed interrelationships with and between the other categories. This indicated which categories and subcategories needed further analysis. This stage of coding was completed using the results of the open and axial coding stages and was further informed through document analysis. The selective coding process was strengthened through the previous work of peer-debriefing, member checking, triangulation, and negative case analysis, as discussed in the following sections. The selective coding process culminated in the formation of a core category and central phenomenon through my analysis and interpretation of the data. I met with a peer reviewer several times during the data collection and analysis phases for the purpose of obtaining suggestions and alternate ways of viewing the study. This helped me be confident of the process and results. During the selective coding phase, I worked alone and the resulting analysis in Chapter 5 of this study is my own research narrative related to my findings.

**Data Verification and Trustworthiness**

The aforementioned peer reviewer and I discussed the various stages of data collection and the open coding and axial coding stages of the data analysis. My peer reviewer drew from previous experience in completing a dissertation and conducting qualitative research in her educational setting throughout the years. She read the first three chapters of this dissertation and each of the transcribed interviews. We discussed the data and came to agreement on the data analysis, which helped verify my findings in
this study. Each of the participants in the study was provided with a copy of his or her interview transcription for review, commentary, and correction if needed. There were no instances where corrections were made and the participants agreed that the interviews were transcribed with accuracy. I then completed the selective coding and final analysis of the data.

Data verification was also accomplished through member checking activities as proposed by Creswell and Miller (2000). Follow-up phone interviews with each of the participants helped clarify and focus previous data, both within and between interviews. Results of the open and axial coding stages of the data analysis were shared with the participants through phone conferencing. They were given the opportunity to ask questions of clarification and to verify and comment on the results. Their comments were helpful in providing me with an understanding of how the results would be interpreted and in refining the final data analysis and reporting activities.

Within the context of qualitative research, the trustworthiness of the research methodology is important and was addressed by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are each discussed in relation to trustworthiness in qualitative research.

**Credibility**

Credibility of a qualitative study is established through triangulation, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, and member-checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, triangulation was accomplished through the use of multiple sources, venues, interviews, and documents. Interviews, follow-up interviews, document review, and
website review were all conducted in reference to each of the participants and their schools. This wide range of data provided multiple levels of verification of accurate data in the study. Peer debriefing is the process of using a non-biased peer, through personal consultation and review of the study, to examine all aspects of the research. This process helped me verify the efficacy of procedural aspects of the study. In addition, it provided verification of the data analysis results, and a sounding board throughout the process. Member checking was conducted with the previously mentioned peer debriefer who drew from her previous experience in qualitative research.

Negative case analysis was conducted when data that were contrary to the established pattern emerged. Consistency in data was anticipated, but one case of inconsistent data in this study led to follow-up interview calls to determine if the negative case was isolated or if it would lead to corroborating experiences in other settings. This case is discussed in Chapter 4. Negative case analysis helps establish the credibility of a study through comprehensive review of all data for the purpose of establishing consistency. Member checking was done, as discussed in the previous section of this chapter, by taking preliminary findings back study participants for verification of the data and the analytic results. I met with the participants, through phone conferencing, to review transcripts and summarize the open and axial coding results. Their input was used to clarify, verify, and illuminate the study further.

**Transferability**

Transferability in qualitative studies is understood to mean that the results of a research study are applicable in similar contexts. Establishing the transferability of a
study is another aspect of showing trustworthiness. The primary purpose of this study was to assist Mennonite school administrators in evaluating and performing the process of teacher identification and selection related to guidance in student spiritual formation. Another desired outcome was to assist administrators in other faith-based schools in performing this function and to inspire parallel research in those settings. Lincoln and Guba (1985) discussed the use of thick rich description in establishing the transferability of a study. A thick and rich detailed written summary of the field experiences from the study, the research process, and the findings of the study are presented in Chapter 4. I presented a written contextual review of the participants’ schools and of the data analysis in order to help readers understand the behavior and responses of the participants. This detailed view of the context of my research illuminates and expand the reader’s knowledge beyond simple transcribed responses. With sufficient detail given to writing about the phenomenon under study, conclusions can be drawn as to the likelihood that research conclusions and theory can be transferred to other times, situations, people, and settings. Transferability is also enhanced through triangulation of the data using multiple sources, field locations, and data types in studying a single process such as teacher identification and selection. The wide geographical locations of the schools and different local communities also enhanced the transferability of the results to other educational settings. These research conditions increase the trustworthiness of the study through transferability.
Dependability

Dependability was enhanced through the use of extensive field notes, coding memos, and theoretical memos in my research binder and folders. Merriam (2009) also suggested this audit trail as a method of establishing trustworthiness. The audit trail is composed of a written description of data collection methods, how categories were established within the coding process, and how other important decisions were made throughout the study. This audit trail is also seen in the memo writing process undertaken throughout the data collection and data analysis phases of the study. The idea is to help readers understand the process from beginning to end as fully as possible. Audio recordings, transcriptions, and coding assisted in creating a clear pathway through which the study unfolded.

Dependability was also enhanced by collaborating with the peer debriefer who conducted external audits during the research and analysis of data. The peer debriefer has extensive knowledge and background in conducting qualitative studies, which strengthened the input given to me as the researcher. An assessment of the adequacy of data and results was conducted throughout the process. Feedback on ways to strengthen the research methodology and analysis were continual points of discussion during the study. Other previously mentioned aspects of the study also strengthen the dependability of the research process. These include the member checking activities, audio recording, transcription, and a well-organized system of record keeping.
Confirmability

Confirmability of the study was addressed using the techniques of an audit trail, triangulation, and reflexivity. The audit trail, previously discussed in regards to dependability, included a clear description of the research path and steps taken throughout the research—raw data, data analysis procedures, field memos, coding memos, and process notes. Triangulation was also conducted as described in the discussion on credibility of this study. Reflexivity is identifying how I, as the researcher, affected the process and outcomes of the research. My personal biases were clearly revealed in Chapter 1 of this study, and were considered throughout the research process. During interviews and data analysis, I was aware of my biases that come from working in the research context of Mennonite schools for 29 years and my personal knowledge of the participants and their schools. Additional bias was found in my being a member of the Mennonite Church for 30 years. As a professional, I believe that I was able to identify, address, and control potential bias throughout the research process in an effective way. All of the discussed methods of assessing trustworthiness were used in this study and were adapted in a manner that was appropriate to this study.
CHAPTER IV
RESULTS OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to describe the processes whereby Mennonite school administrators, whose schools are members of the Mennonite Schools Council, identify and select teachers who are equipped to guide their students in spiritual formation. This study was conducted using Grounded Theory methodology. As a qualitative research study, the results are presented in a narrative format emerging from the semi-structured interviews, follow-up phone interviews, and document reviews, that were used to gather the data which were analyzed for this study.

The first section of the chapter examines the larger context of Mennonite organizations and churches in which the schools operate. The second section is presented in two parts. The first part provides demographic information of the participants in the study who serve or have served as head administrators. The second part elaborates on generalized biographical information about the participants in order to maintain anonymity. The third section presents the processes used by schools to identify teacher candidates, which includes the importance of the process, advertising openings, interviewing applicants, and a negative case analysis.

The findings from the semi-structured interviews, related to the processes of identifying and selecting a teacher, are presented. The findings are a synthesis of the interview responses from all of the participants, resulting in emergent concepts and themes that were revealed during the open and axial coding stages. The predetermined categories of fit, Mennonite culture, and spiritual formation are used to identify the
conditions that interact within these categories. The previously described selective coding process gave rise to emergent themes, which became the basis of the story describing how teachers, who are equipped to guide students in spiritual formation, are identified and selected. Finally, the data verification processes that were conducted in conjunction with this study are discussed.

**Context of Schools Included in the Study**

Each administrator who participated in this study was chosen because of his or her current or past affiliation with a school or schools maintaining membership in the Mennonite Schools Council. As indicated by the organizational name, each of the schools is associated with the Mennonite Church denomination, either formally or informally. For some of the schools, the affiliation is formal, through actual ownership by a Mennonite church, a group of Mennonite churches, or a Mennonite conference. For others, it is a less formal partnership with local Mennonite churches or a Mennonite Church conference or conferences. At the time of this study, the Mennonite Schools Council was composed of 30 member schools in the United States, Canada, Puerto Rico, and Albania. Each of the member schools is organized by grade configurations within the pre-school through grade 12 continuum. Only schools in the continental United States were studied in the research.

Most of the Mennonite churches, affiliated with schools in this study, are members of either the Conservative Mennonite Conference or Mennonite Church USA (composed of 21 different area conferences). These are only two of 40 different Mennonite groups represented in the United States, although Mennonite Church USA is
the largest of these groups and the Conservative Mennonite Conference is the second largest. All Mennonite churches also fall within the larger context of the Anabaptist church movement, formed in the 1600s, which advocates the baptism and church membership of those who can confess their faith (as opposed to infant baptism), nonresistance, and the separation of church and state.

In addition to the area conferences, Mennonite Church USA is subdivided into several different church-wide agencies. One of those agencies is the Mennonite Education Agency. The Mennonite Education Agency works with affiliated educational institutions from early childhood through college/university/seminary and continuing educational platforms, as well as educational initiatives within member churches. While the Mennonite Schools Council is not governed by the Mennonite Education Agency, there is a close partnership in furthering the cause of Anabaptist Mennonite education.

In addition to the Mennonite Schools Council membership, and affiliation with area Mennonite churches and conferences, each of the schools in this study is composed of student populations with families from many other Christian denominations as well. Most of the schools also enroll students who identify with other religions as well as those who do not profess any particular faith. Students and parents without a profession of faith, or who are members of another religion, are asked to sign an agreement to support the Christian mission of the schools. The preceding information is given to illustrate the complexity of organizational and religious ties that are found within the various school cultures. Even within the spectrum of Mennonite churches, there is significant variation in theological understandings on certain issues.
School and Participant Demographic Information

Theoretical saturation in this study was achieved through semi-structured interviews with seven participants in addition to the review of relevant documents from each of the seven schools. In a study of identification and selection of teacher candidates who are equipped to guide students in spiritual formation, relevant documents reviewed included teacher applications, board and administrative level policies related to teacher selection, teacher job descriptions, and teacher evaluation instruments.

The Mennonite Schools Council is a relatively small and closely knit association of schools and administrators. The administrators gather for professional development, association business, and fellowship three or four times each school year. Anonymity for a particular school and administrator would be very difficult within the Mennonite Schools Council and its member schools if pseudonyms were directly linked with other specific school or personal information. Therefore, the identity of participants involved in this study was protected through the use of pseudonyms, which are not directly linked to identifying information.

The pseudonyms and participant/school biographic and demographic information are discussed separately. For the purpose of studying the identification and selection of teachers equipped to guide students in spiritual formation in Mennonite schools, and following data analysis of the interview transcripts and related documents, the direct linkage of participants with their biographies and school demographic information is not deemed as relevant. The participant pseudonyms used throughout the study are Ann, Bill, Curt, Diane, Ed, Frank, and Gale.
Demographics of Schools

The seven schools represented in this study are all Mennonite Schools Council member schools within the United States. The schools are located in rural, suburban, and urban settings in the Mid-Atlantic, Mid-West, and Southeast regions of the United States. The grade configurations represented in the schools are: Preschool–8th, Preschool–12th (3 schools), Kindergarten–12th, 1st–12th, and 9th–12th. The total enrollment numbers in the schools range from 75 students to 1,433 students with an average enrollment of 498 students. All of the schools are on a self-contained campus, with the exception of one, which is a multi-campus school system. As private schools, tuition and fees are charged for each student who attends the school, and a board of directors governs each school. For many of the schools, the board of directors is selected by or from a local affiliated Mennonite conference.

Participant Biographical Information

The seven participants in the study range in age from 43 to 67 years of age. Each one is either currently serving as head administrator of a Mennonite Schools Council member school or has left that position within the last year. Four of the seven participants have served in two different member schools during their career. All seven of the participants have attained a Master’s degree, with one person holding a doctoral degree and three others currently enrolled in doctoral programs in education. Four of the seven participants received their Bachelor’s degree from a Mennonite college or university and all seven were raised in, and continue to hold membership in, a Mennonite church.
Each participant in the study has a minimum of five years of experience as head administrator at their school, providing multiple years of experience in identifying and selecting teachers. The seven participants’ experience as head administrators of a Mennonite Schools Council member school range from six to 33 years, with a combined total of 118 years as head administrator and 163 total years employed in member schools. The head administrative job titles at the schools are Head of School, Principal (two schools), and Superintendent (four schools).

**The Process of Identifying Teacher Candidates**

The interview format of this study revealed the specific steps used at each of the schools in identifying a teacher candidate pool for each teaching position that needed to be filled. It is important to understand the identification process, for each of the schools, for the purpose of creating a holistic view of final teacher selection. The process of identifying candidates to interview is a narrowing process, which prepares a field of applicants who appear to be a good “fit” for the school. The final selection decision was spoken of across the board as being the single most impactful task that a head administrator performs for his or her school. In speaking of the selection of teachers, Bill said, “I really believe it’s the most critical, most important thing that I do . . . it’s the teachers that you bring on that are going to create the culture.” Frank corroborated the feeling by saying, “Teacher selection, I always felt was one of the most important things in my area of responsibility. I just had to get that right, or get the best fit, and I really believe it was about fit.”
Advertising Job Openings

The following sequence encompasses the common practices used by the schools to publicize the fact that there is an open teaching position. Job postings are made to the career centers of some or all of the Mennonite colleges and universities. Some of the schools post their job openings in Mennonite publications such as “The Mennonite” and “Mennonite World Review.” The decision on where to post job openings depends partly on the perceived difficulty in finding a strong pool of candidates. Teaching positions with a smaller candidate pool would be advertised more widely. In addition, most of the schools post openings in area Mennonite church bulletins or on their bulletin boards, depending on the policy of the specific church. One administrator stated that Mennonite church publications were not getting many results and they rarely post openings in these publications anymore. In this instance, the school is in a very large Mennonite community with a large pool of alumni and a significant network of constituents within the broader Mennonite church structure.

The practice that was cited as having the most impact was announcing an opening to the school families and faculty/staff members. The school stakeholders, parents and employees, have the greatest interest in attracting quality people to teaching positions. In speaking about the importance of this connection, and hearing a “call from God,” Bill said,

I talk to our current faculty and I share it with all of our parents. This is what we’re looking for, you are the greatest connectors that we have and I think people are often called when someone says something to them like “Hey, I think you
would be good at this, do you want to consider that position?” or “I would love for my children to have you as a teacher.”

Administrators related the idea of “creating conversation” in the community, regarding job openings, which also ties in with the significant idea of “community” as a causal condition within Mennonite culture to be discussed in later sections of this analysis.

Open positions are also normally posted on the schools’ websites and on social media outlets, where the job description and application can be downloaded easily. All of the schools found the online connection to be an important link for identifying teacher candidates. In thinking about the school’s transition to online postings, Diane said, “And then we began to put, to post, the openings on our website—and it was amazing, we started to get all sorts of applications, including ones from Mennonite students in public universities.”

**Interviewing Applicants**

Once applications and supporting documents are received—transcripts, teaching licenses, references—the applicant pool is generally narrowed down to three or four applicants who will be interviewed. This “screening” is done through a combination of “paper review” and “reference checking.” Diane was representative of the other administrators when she said that “reference calls are exceedingly important,” and she asks questions like, “How does this person relate to others?” and “What kind of rapport do they have with students?” The responses to written questions on the application give an indication of the candidate’s church affiliations and theological position. Diane was the only administrator who specifically mentioned checking social media websites in
reference to screening candidates, and said that it is mainly to look for “reasons not to hire.” The schools differ somewhat in the number of personnel involved in the interview process, but most value the concept of “multiple interviewers” in order to broaden the perspective. These may include assistant administrators, grade level principals, department heads, and corresponding grade level teachers, depending on the opening. The head administrator is involved in the interview process at all of the schools. In the multi-campus school, the head administrator normally screens the applications to determine which people he thinks may or may not be good prospects. He will then be the last person to interview the candidate who has been recommended by the assistant administrator and others in the process. In the other schools, the head administrator is involved in all interviews.

One administrator described a three interview process for teacher candidates. The first interview of three to six candidates is considered an “introductory” interview for “getting a sense” of who the people are in their professional, personal, and spiritual lives. This pool is narrowed down to two or three candidates who are involved in a second interview, which is considered the “faith interview” for determining the candidate’s potential “fit” with the school from a spiritual and faith perspective. These interviews lead to a “final interview” where the final candidate is invited to ask questions and the contract is offered. Each of the schools has a two or three step interview process somewhat similar to the aforementioned.

Although not a consistent practice in all of the schools, some administrators indicated that teacher candidates were occasionally called in to teach a lesson with
students while being observed by school personnel. While this is not a frequent practice, it would aid in decision making when there is a “tight” field of qualified applicants. Gale and Diane said that they should probably “do this more often” in the process of selecting teachers, but the process is time intensive. Another practice of getting a “better view” of a potential candidate’s proficiency in the teaching realm was cited by Ed and Frank, and is discussed later in this chapter. They valued the ability to hire people who have substituted or have worked in other volunteer or paid capacities at the school. This provides an opportunity to observe how the person relates to students and colleagues, and how they might function as a full-time teacher.

**Negative Case**

A negative case refers to data that is not consistent with the patterns found within the previous data analysis. Further analysis helps to verify the data and provide possible causation for the negative case, or to explore the idea further with other participants. The process for identification and selection of teacher candidates, for one administrator, departed from the normal routines explained previously. This administrator compared hiring at his school to hiring in “a business setting.” In this case, the administrator described a very “tight-knit” community where hiring decisions could “alienate” donors and “influential” churches. The hiring was seen as a very “political” process and a specific avenue for identifying teacher candidates was developed. The problem arose when several candidates applied for a teaching position and one or more of them had “close connections” with a major donor or someone within an influential church congregation. This was a scenario that repeated itself frequently in his school. When the
candidate with close connections was not hired, the donor or people in the church
congregation would feel “mistreated” or “alienated.”

The administrator of this school said that he, and his assistant administrators,
normally knew well ahead of time when a position would be vacant, and there was not a lot of turnover in teaching staff. They would watch for potential candidates and “bring them on board” before the position opened, as a substitute or temporary fill-in for the position. In this setting they would be “nurtured” and a direct view of their potential contribution to the school community could be observed. Once in the school setting and functioning well, the candidate would simply be offered the available teaching position. The head administrator would do this, without posting the job or interviewing multiple candidates.

There is no written hiring policy in this instance, and the head administrator is responsible for all hiring. In speaking about the “tight-knit” community, the administrator said, “If you choose the wrong person, you could have a certain funding group that may be difficult to energize to come back. And so, I have been really reluctant to be too public on too many things.” In explaining the process, this participant stated, “No one is ever rejected in the process.” He compared that to a “normal” interview process and said, “if five people are interviewed, only one is accepted and four are rejected—with our process, one person is accepted and no one is rejected.” I questioned the administrator about people who might be dissatisfied once they realized that a teaching position had been filled and the position had never been posted. He responded,
“In this case, they never knew they were in the mix,” which was a better outcome to him than “rejecting” the candidate as part of the hiring process.

Follow-up phone calls to all participants in this study were made to review information and inquire about new questions that emerged, for the purpose of verification. Participants were questioned about the idea of “politics” being involved in hiring. All would agree that there certainly are causal factors that could lead an administrator to be influenced to hire someone because of their connection to a “major donor” or a more “influential” church. As with the administrator in the negative case cited above, the other administrators selected the best candidates for the positions rather than the ones who might be hired for “political” reasons. They simply worked through the issues related to posting job openings and interviewing multiple candidates. Those issues included dealing with donors or churches who feel that “their candidate” should have been hired because of the “close connections” with the school, and dealing with the feelings of candidates who have not been selected. All participants were very clear on the fact that they were opposed to “political” hiring and work against that by speaking openly on the subject with their boards and involving multiple school personnel in the interview process in order to avoid bias. Bill said, “I don’t feel like it is an undue or unnatural pressure,” and he shared that sometimes, as administrator, he might have a bias towards one candidate for personal reasons, not political reasons. He said, “In that case I try to refrain from weighing in too heavily on the decision.”

One administrator, when questioned about “political” hiring, observed that giving preference to Mennonite candidates could be seen as political. All participants in the
study would agree that when “all things are equal” between two candidates, they would opt for a Mennonite candidate. This is clearly the preference in an attempt to maintain a Mennonite culture within the schools. They also would all agree that hiring the best candidate, as described in further analysis, is chosen over hiring the Mennonite candidate. One participant, referring to the preference to hire Mennonite teacher candidates said, “So, we’re up front about that. We are allowed to hire teachers who are not from the Mennonite faith, but that is our preference, and we don’t apologize for that.” Another statement, from Gale, that helps summarize the general sentiments of the administrators was:

But even within the Mennonite candidates, if I don’t find a strong candidate—if I don’t find a teacher I feel is going to really be able to move us to the next level, then I am going to look at other candidates. So that’s something that to me has been very important. I always look at the mission of the school . . . and I have to put teachers there who are best prepared to move us towards that mission.

While the steps in the process of identifying teacher candidates are important to know, the process of identifying the specific teacher to select is the culminating process that is of central importance to this study. The next section expands on findings that have resulted from data analysis of the in person participant interviews, follow-up phone interviews, and the relevant documents.

**Identifying and Selecting the Teacher**

The participants in this study were interviewed in person at their work locations, with the exception of one who was interviewed in a public library meeting room. The
interviews were recorded as audio files and subsequently transcribed for the purpose of data analysis. Participants were asked questions related to their perception of the identification and selection of teachers equipped to guide students in spiritual formation within their local schools. Predetermined interview questions and questions that emerged throughout the interviews brought to light an abundance of information which was identified with the selected categories of “fit,” “Mennonite culture,” and “spiritual formation.” The next section of this chapter elaborates on the conditions that led administrators to believe that a teacher candidate is a good fit within their organization. In addition, conditions creating a Mennonite culture in the school are discussed, along with conditions that create positive spiritual formation within the students.

**Fit**

As a process for identifying which potential candidates will be an excellent fit for their schools, each administrator spoke in notably similar ways regarding the conditions that indicate a good “fit.” The analytical process of coding led to three main conditions that interact in accounting for a good fit within the schools. These three conditions can all be viewed in terms of appropriate alignment between the school and the teacher candidate in theological position, professional preparation, and student-centered disposition.

**Theological Position**

As indicated previously, the schools seek Mennonite candidates for teaching positions, leading to alignment and fit within the school culture, but not at the expense of the other conditions of professional preparation and student-centered disposition.
Without exception, each of the schools requires that candidates be in agreement with or at least support the Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective (CFMP; Appendix A), which was adopted in 1995, and serves as a foundational document for Mennonite Church USA. The CFMP is composed of 24 articles and provides guidelines within the denomination for: (a) interpretation of scripture, (b) understanding belief and practice, (c) unity among churches, and (d) instructing new church members.

Through participant responses and a review of the school applications, it was determined that two of the schools include a summary of the CFMP in their application, and four of the schools include an online link to the CFMP on their application. One does not refer to the document in the application, but the administrator stated that they ask about the applicant’s support of the CFMP in the verbal interview. Typical application statements related to the CFMP included: “I have read and am in agreement with the Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective and the school’s mission statement and philosophy of education. If any exceptions, please explain.” “Are you familiar with the Confession of Faith from a Mennonite Perspective? If so, do you respect and support this confession?” (Appendix B—Mennonite School Teacher Applications). Ann made the following comment regarding applicants who are not Mennonite church members, and the CFMP: “Not necessarily that any individual would agree 100% with that, but that they would be able to not undermine the confession of faith.” The ideas of “supporting,” “respecting,” and “not undermining” make room for non-Mennonite candidates whose beliefs do not exclude them (by either their choice or the school’s choice) from being employed in an organization that is guided by the CFMP.
When asked if certain parts of the CFMP are more important to the schools than others, Bill stated that:

Certainly some of the early articles talk about God, and Christ, and the Holy Spirit, and what it means to be church—some of the later articles, whether it has to do with certain practices of the faith, certainly, in my mind, were less important.

Others echoed that these articles represented the most important theological points of alignment, but also cited the articles on baptism, stewardship, peace, justice, and nonresistance as foundational to an understanding of Anabaptist theology. Another point of agreement among the participants was the wide range of theological perspectives, even within the Mennonite churches, despite the CFMP. One administrator summarized it this way:

From my perspective—the Mennonite Church—take any issue or theological point with issues the Church seems to be centered around—and there are both ends of the spectrum. So, if you want to think about, um—I don’t know, pick an issue. If you want to think about women in leadership—whole spectrum. You want to talk about alcohol use—whole spectrum. You want to talk about sexual orientation—whole spectrum.

The diversity of beliefs held by potential teacher candidates, even those who are Mennonite, is widening. The CFMP, and other theological documents created by the individual schools, are very important in clarifying doctrinal positions. This clarity is critical as both the schools and the candidates assess theological fit.
Interview questions also take an important place in assessing the theological position and personal Christian experience of the candidates. A representative selection of questions on teacher applications include: “What are your convictions regarding an Anabaptist/Christian lifestyle with their specific applications to current cultural practices?” “How would your teaching at this school be related to or expressive of your Christian faith?” “Are you a born-again believer, with assurance of salvation in Jesus Christ? Please explain.” “What are some personal convictions regarding a Christian lifestyle that may differ from current cultural practices?” “Describe the manner in which you would be a Christian witness to the students and the community” (Appendix B).

Another administrator stated that a good theological “fit” is the number one thing that they are looking for in a teacher. Others would agree, but would add that they are looking for the “entire package” which includes the next condition for fit, that of “professional preparation.”

**Professional Preparation**

The second condition within the category of “fit,” as focused by participant interviews, was “professional preparation” of the teacher candidates. Each of the school administrators expressed that “strong academics” are a significant part of their school culture. Some have developed as strong academic schools and others have expressed a recent successful focus on strengthening this area of their school. When asked to rank the top areas of teacher proficiency he was seeking in a new teacher, Gale expressed the fact that strong academic candidates are normally available in the candidate pool. For this reason, he did not rank it at the top, but indicated that he looked at “a person’s ability to
teach and to manage a class” along with his or her understanding of pedagogy. He also mentioned an “increasing desire to have this be a strong academic school.” As a group, the administrators were looking for teachers with “teaching degrees” who are “certified” or “licensed” despite the fact that private school teachers in most of their states are not required to maintain the same licensure as public school teachers. Diane emphatically stated, “We want it all. So, we want excellent teachers that any school would want, but we also want excellent teachers who live out the core values in the mission of the school.”

Frank said that he was attracted to his school because of the “integration of faith into a high quality education,” which he firmly believes are inseparable for Christian education to have validity. Several administrators cited “academic achievements” by students at their schools as “reasons for celebration” and credited the teaching staff for the part that they play in these successes. The participants in this study agreed that many of the students may “take academics too seriously,” creating a very “stressful academic environment.” In discussing the seriousness of professional preparation for teachers, administrators expressed agreement that their organizations are first and foremost schools, and not churches. Although, as previously stated, they would all agree that they want both “academic excellence” and “spiritual formation” for the students.

Bill viewed the ability of teachers to “connect” with students, their “professional capacity” and their guidance in “spiritual formation” as interwoven. He said, “I think if a teacher cannot teach very well, on the verge of incompetence—I don’t care what kind of spiritual formation—they’re not going to be respected and that’s not going to happen.”
He also said that the ideal teacher has the “it factor” which included the teacher being “really good at what they do—I mean, they know their stuff!”

Ann serves in a state accredited school, which in her situation means that she needs to hire “qualified teachers.” In her state there is not an exception given for private schools, in regards to teacher certification or licensure, so this would be the initial “fit” factor that she would investigate in candidates. Curt viewed his school, when he was first hired, as one where “academic rigor” was not as highly valued. He worked diligently to change that, adding 18 new courses and several honors courses, and saw the culture come to value academics more highly. He initially screened applications and resumes for punctuation, spacing, and grammatical errors. If the applicant didn’t take time to make these documents “look professional” and show “competence,” they did not get an interview. He summarized the participants’ feelings well by saying:

I always say God calls us to do our best and to be excellent in what we do. So I always looked for somebody who had both credentialed positive leadership experience and their references were good, as well as being Christian. I think that sometimes smaller Christian schools settle for subpar—for the sake of them (the applicant) being an exact fit spiritually.

He also echoed the sentiment that Christian schools are schools first, and not churches. The schools consider themselves to be “partners with” the church and the family, not “in place” of them.
Student-Centered Disposition

The final condition identified in the category of “fit,” for teacher candidates, is possession of a “student-centered disposition.” Without exception, each of the administrators characterized their schools as being student-centered as opposed to teacher-centered. While referring to the idea of evaluating substitute teachers for their potential as a future full-time teacher, Frank pointed to the inability to “understand” children and “connect” with children as a major red flag. His expectation of teachers was that they “have an understanding of the emotional, spiritual, physical, and psychological development of children.” He would ask teacher candidates to describe a typical student in the grade level they would be teaching: “What are the issues that they are working on, what are their fears, anxieties, and joys?”

Each of the administrators expressed the need for teachers to truly know their students. In speaking about the “spiritual needs” of the students, Ed said, “If you don’t love the child, you can have all the Bible classes in the world, and there’s not much Christian there.” His school, along with others, allocates time during the school week for small group interaction between students and teachers. Every child is “aligned” with one teacher, and their job is to “mentor” them, and find out what their “needs” are, while creating an atmosphere where a teacher always “has the student’s back.” Ed stated it in a very powerful way when he said, “If another teacher complains about a student in a faculty meeting, the mentor teacher should be standing up and defending—they should be hurt by anybody that would demean their student!” Defining aspects of teacher “fit” aligned with teacher/student relationships, Frank shared:
It is important for me to see that the teachers would view every child as a special creation of God. That they would love that child, adolescent, or young adult, regardless of their actions, regardless of what they gave or didn’t give to the teacher, so to speak, because that is, at the end of the day, what I was expecting, that “agape love.”

Agape love is a sacrificial love that expects nothing in return, which can be compared to Christ’s love for us. Evaluating a teacher’s student-centered disposition is very subjective and difficult to measure or quantify, yet each of the administrators could verbalize what they were looking for with great clarity and ease. When asked how she identified this quality in a teacher, Diane explained that a new evaluation instrument had been developed at her school. Parents are asked to rate their student’s experience on a Likert scale from one to five. A sample statement was, “At ABC School, my student feels that he/she is known, loved, and valued by God.” While this statement is evaluating the spiritual experience of the student, this same type of statement could be used to evaluate the “relational” experience of the students with their teachers. Ann talked about how part of her teacher selection process involves evaluating their “sensitivity” and “what they can bring to the students.” She is trying to discern,

Are they a person who, aside from having the academic knowledge that they need, is adaptable and recognizes students where they are at, what they need, and are they able to fit those pieces together for the good of the student?

Another common expectation of teachers, which illustrated a student-centered mindset, is that they would become “involved” with students both in school and out of
school. Teachers were seen as “dedicating time and energy” to make sure that the student experiences were of “high quality.” They would “take an interest” in the student and get to know them beyond simply an academic level. Curt described a “culture of caring” at his school, where “you care about the student, and students will sense that and naturally want to talk with you about faith issues.” He talked about faculty and staff members who cared for the students socially, emotionally, and spiritually. The school environment that is student-centered has no time for “teacher-centered thinking,” and this disposition was critical to “fit” within the Mennonite school environment as discussed in the next section.

**Mennonite Culture**

The second selected category, which was used to organize conditions around which school administrators in the study identify and select teachers, is Mennonite culture. Within this category the three conditions that rose to prominence were “community building,” peace-making,” and “Christ-centered living.” Christ-centered living necessitates community building and peace-making within a Mennonite Culture, and is reinforced specifically in the culture of the Mennonite schools that were represented in this study. These conditions were identified and selected, through data analysis, before I realized the significance of one participant’s response to a request to describe the culture of his school, as explained in the following section.

The correlation between the selected conditions, as identified through axial coding, and the description of Mennonite culture by this participant, provided verification for the coding process. Gale preferred to use Palmer Becker’s (2008) model of the core values of Anabaptist Christians, when asked to define Mennonite culture. The core
values are described in the form of three key statements: (a) Jesus is the center of our faith; (b) Community is the center of our lives; and (c) Reconciliation is the center of our work. Participants in this study used the concepts of peace-making and reconciliation interchangeably.

When describing Mennonite culture, and more specifically Mennonite school culture, the administrators spoke of several other influences. In characterizing their school cultures, the Mennonite Schools Council created the following five distinctives of Mennonite education: (a) Christ-centered, (b) educational excellence, (c) peace and service, (d) community, and (e) faith-infused opportunities. In addition, the Mennonite Schools Council created four graduate level courses as part of the Anabaptist Learning Institute. Anyone who completes all four courses receives an Anabaptist Educators Certificate. These courses were created to “unify the Anabaptist community under a common set of educational experiences that encourages dialog about faith and values.”

Finally, the Mennonite Schools Council and the Mennonite Education Agency commissioned a book to be written by John Roth (2011). The title is *Teaching That Transforms: Why Anabaptist-Mennonite Education Matters*. This book, in part, describes Mennonite culture as found in Anabaptist-Mennonite education. These initiatives, along with the collegial relations among the Mennonite Schools Council administrators, serve to strengthen and unify Mennonite culture in a school setting.

**Community Building**

Across each of the transcribed interviews, the term “community” was frequently noted. Community building is a hallmark of Mennonite culture and of Mennonite
schools as identified by the school administrators. “Chapel services” and “small group meetings” were cited as central elements in building a sense of community in the schools. Some schools have shorter chapels each day of the week, with one of those days being used for small groups, and others choose to have one extended chapel a week. Administrators talked about a “caring” community as being of “great value” and a “strong value” within the schools. In describing the community building that takes place in the schools, administrators related the frequent use of the term “school family” by parents and employees. At its core, Gale defined community as being, “the way we make decisions—the way we interpret scripture—the way we operate as a group.” He contrasted this understanding with many school settings where a hierarchy is very pronounced and there is a “top-down” leadership model. He goes on to say that “if there’s an issue, if there’s a concern, if there’s a decision about how we move ahead, we place great value in collaboration, because that’s a part of community.”

Most of the schools are transitioning to a “global community” as more and more international students are enrolled in the Mennonite schools. One administrator talked about having 60 international students on campus, and another one talked about having a 40% non-Caucasian student body, including students from 20 different countries. In addition, many of the schools are in communities with growing minority populations who are benefitting from a quality Christian education as part of the school community. Part of transitioning to a broader community includes ethnic pride activities and anti-racism education. Diane described this change in demographic makeup and said that, “It is paying off—there is just a warm, accepting kind of unity where people value each other.
One where we understand that we are stronger because of our differences, rather than weaker.” Gale spoke highly of the “broadened community” and said that “students are being educated in a setting where they are getting to know people from other countries—it just completely opens this community to a completely different world.” Frank talked about his school highly valuing the idea of “loving each other” and “loving others in the community.” Community can be seen in concentric circles including “school community,” “church community,” “local community,” and “global community.” Mennonite culture embraces each of these community foci.

Each of the schools is also experiencing a changing dynamic in the school community as it relates to church membership. As the schools have grown, the percentage of Mennonite students has decreased, whereas the percentage of “non-Mennonite” and “un-churched” students has increased. One administrator described their school as “truly Anabaptist yet warmly ecumenical.” She believed that if “we are clear about being Anabaptist,” and not ashamed about that, we are able to be ecumenical and “reach out” and “embrace” people that are different than us. It is clear throughout the interviews that these changes are seen as a benefit to the strength of the “school communities.”

Using the previously mentioned phrase “community is the center of life” translates into a practice that is happening in a few of the schools. Senior students are asked to present a speech, at the end of the year, as a culminating event where they talk about their academic and faith journey through high school. In one particular school, this is celebrated by the home, church, and school community. Students present their
speeches to an audience of anywhere from 30 up to 200 people. It is a “celebration” of ending one stage of life and beginning another, and one to be celebrated by important people in the senior’s life. Ann looks for teachers who have a strong sense of “emotional intelligence.” When interviewing, she looks for answers to many questions related to community building:

- Do they recognize the students—not just even the students, but the culture, the faculty, the community—do they sense who they are talking to and grasp how they need to respond appropriately—recognizing social cues from those around them?

A teacher who is interested in building community is “other-focused” and attentive to the needs of those around them.

When asked how he determines if a prospective teacher candidate “values community,” Gale said that it mostly revolves around how the teacher answers questions:

- How much does the teacher see his or her own teaching being impacted by and impacting other teachers? The teacher needs to express an understanding that they are not just a one-room classroom here. I will ask them direct questions about what it means to be a part of a team and part of a community. I will listen for how often they talk about things that relate to others, department relationships, the whole faculty, their church community, and the school community.

In order to be a person who builds community, a teacher cannot be “self-centered” and ignore the feelings and needs of others in the community. A central aspect of building
this community is peace-making, which is the next condition of Mennonite Culture to be discussed.

**Peace-Making**

The idea of “peace-making” has been central to Anabaptist theology since the beginning of Anabaptist thought in the 1600s. One of the 24 articles in the Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective is entitled “Peace, Justice, and Non-Resistance.” In this broader context of peace-making in Mennonite culture, non-violence means not going to war but also living at peace with your neighbor. Each of the schools attempts to create avenues where “peace and service” are modeled for the students, and where students are given opportunities to exemplify these characteristics through discussion and opportunities for service. Frank talked about the school’s position of “striving to resolve conflict through peaceful and nonviolent means.” These opportunities are found wherever relationships exist—student/teacher, teacher/parent, and student/parent. The interaction between a changing school culture and peace-making was illustrated by an administrator who said that they now need to recognize that some of the students are “pacifists” yet some believe in the idea of a “just war.” So, room is being made for differing theology as an ongoing interpretation of peace-making.

Within the context of peace-making, each of the administrators talked about a specific type of discipline that is valued and practiced in the Mennonite school culture. The discipline system was given several different names, one even excluding the word “discipline.” “Restorative discipline,” “redemptive discipline,” and “restorative justice” are terms that were used interchangeably. The basic idea is that discipline should be for
the purpose of “changing hearts,” not to make people “suffer” as an end in itself. Ed’s form of restorative discipline relies on having students answer questions in writing about why their actions were inappropriate. Answers that don’t indicate an understanding of why the actions were wrong and how broken relationships can be restored elicit additional follow-up questions. Then, discussion with the students about their answers leads to taking actions that restore relationships. Ed said, “We don’t tell people that they are wrong, we ask them to tell themselves that they are wrong, but with our questioning.” Curt used the term “restorative justice,” and explained it this way.

Instead of suspensions and expulsions, we worked at making sure the person who caused the harm knew how that harm affected other people—we would usually work at bringing the two together to work at some real authentic sort of resolution.

The administrators acknowledged that this process could be time-consuming, but that it was worth it in the sense of truly making peace instead of avoidance.

The administrators agreed that they are seeking to select teachers who practice peace-making as a “way of life.” Ann would ask candidates several questions about “how they handled conflict” because she felt this would give her a lot of information about their personality. She echoed the desire for teachers who practiced “restorative justice.” She wanted to know if they were “willing to work through a situation with the student” and not just punish the student repeatedly for the same offense with no change in behavior. Bill was also looking for teachers who would model a “life of service” because the act of serving others is seen as an offering of peace. Serving others tears down “walls
of misunderstanding” and allows people to see the heart of those who are serving. Throughout history, Mennonites have been known for their acts of service, both locally and globally through church-wide organizations such as Mennonite Central Committee and Mennonite Disaster Services. Peace-making is just one aspect of what a Mennonite culture embodies, and it arises from the goal of Christ-centered living, which is discussed in the next section.

**Christ-Centered Living**

The third condition that is linked with the category of Mennonite culture is “Christ-Centered Living.” Once again, this concept was repeated over and over again as the school administrators described their school cultures. Several administrators talked about “following Jesus” as a core value for the school. Others used the phrase that “Christ is central” within the Mennonite culture of the school. Curt described one attribute of the ideal teacher as being “someone who is passionate about Christ and their relationship with Christ.” It is not surprising that those who profess to be Christians value Christ and His work in their lives. But beyond that, the schools put the teachings and practices of Jesus Christ at the “theological focal point” of their Christian understanding.

Diane described her school as “a school that works to be centered in Christ, and not major in a lot of doctrinal issues.” This sentiment was echoed in other interviews, as the schools become more diverse in the church denominations that are represented at the school. In describing the “spiritual focus” of his school, another administrator said, “The idea isn’t that we produce everyone in our self-image, but that they grow into the likeness
of Christ.” Gale encapsulated the Christ-centered living aspect of Mennonite culture by saying:

Following Christ has to be a part of everything we do, so our graduate profile says we’re preparing radical followers of Christ. Following Christ has to be more than just going to church, and being on committees, and doing good things . . . as great as all those things are, it has to impact my life and be real to me.

Bill talked about himself and his colleagues by saying, “we try to have a faith that is Jesus-centered—focused on who Jesus was and knowing what that means for us.”

Within a Mennonite culture, discovering what following Jesus “means for us” is partially experienced through peace-making and discovered in the context of community. He went on to say, “we are looking for team players who relate well to others, but also who bring a level of individualism and uniqueness to a group to add to the community.” The participants in the study shared what it meant to exhibit Christ-centered living with passion and commitment, which illuminated the importance of this theme. The idea of living a Christ-centered life was expressed repeatedly as being “counter cultural.” The passion with which this was discussed indicated that each participant agreed with the concept of being a “radical” follower of Christ as a lifestyle. Gale mentioned that there was a lot of discussion on his campus about using the term “radical follower of Christ” in the graduate profile for his school. He said that some people really liked the terminology and others did not. But, he used the following rationale for including it in the graduate profile, which helps tie together the themes that emerged in Mennonite Culture:
It is our understanding that, as Anabaptists, from the very beginning . . . that Christ has called us to be disciples in very unusual ways. The whole Sermon on the Mount speaks to that. Here is what you have heard . . . lots of people think like this, but I am telling you . . . and Christ presents a very different way of living and thinking. It goes against most of what our culture is teaching, particularly about finances, about the way we live, about the way we interact, our standards for sexuality . . . the list goes on and on. This way of living is very radical because it’s very much against our culture.

These conditions found within the category of Mennonite culture—“community building,” “peace-making,” and “Christ-centered living”—are integrally related to the final categorical designation of Spiritual Formation. Spiritual Formation occurs within the context of a “caring Christian community” where the adults are modeling “Christ-centered living.” And in the Mennonite Culture, “peace-making” is in direct correlation with the concept of living a life that is centered on Jesus Christ. The next section of this chapter presents the conditions found within the category of Spiritual Formation.

**Spiritual Formation**

The categorical designation of Spiritual Formation is explained through three conditions that lead to spiritual formation in students. These conditions are relationships, listening/dialogue, and faith journey. Listening and dialogue are integral aspects of forming close relationships. A teacher’s faith journey is only shared in depth with students through a close relationship. The participants in the study named these three conditions as the central pieces in modeling and assisting students in spiritual formation.
In addition, a theme of spiritual formation as a formal process is discussed as an introduction to the presentation of data.

**Spiritual Formation as a Formal Process**

Each school setting has certain formal processes that are designed to assist spiritual formation in the students. These are described as formal because they are program related and help students and teachers practice spiritual disciplines. The following formal programs are common in most of the schools: (a) Required Bible classes, (b) Daily or weekly chapel services, (c) Service days in the community, (d) Senior speeches on faith journey, (e) Daily devotions, (f) Prayer, (g) Small groups, (h) Bible study groups, (i) Singing, and (j) Spiritual retreats.

During the interviews with participants in this study, the topic of these more formal processes or activities did not arise frequently. While integral to spiritual formation and a person’s faith journey, the participants took these for granted as a normal aspect of Christian school life. Because there were so few references to the “programmed” aspect of spiritual formation, a new question emerged in later interviews and follow-up phone calls. Once participants were questioned about what curricular and programmed aspects of school life helped in spiritual formation, if any, the answers came quickly and were very uniform among the schools. Each of these formal or programmed events is designed to help students grow in spiritual formation through practicing various spiritual disciplines, and yet spiritual formation is brought to life in a more vivid way through relationship, listening/dialogue, and a faith journey.
Relationship

One of the participant schools developed a system-wide program for building relationships as a result of a school accreditation question, which asked if each student has a “supportive relationship” with at least one adult in the school. This led to the creation of a formal “advisory system” with a one to one student/teacher connection in place for all students. This same school also holds “small group” meetings once a week where students stay with the same mentor teacher throughout their four years of high school. Over time, “deep relationships” can be built with both the teacher and other students. The theme of “relationship” was the strongest one that resonated throughout the interviews. When asked which is more important in a teacher candidate, strength in following the Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective or strength in building relationships, Gale said:

I don’t think you could have someone who really believes in the Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective without being strong in building relationship! If a person is not able to build relationship, education is not going to flow well—that has to be a part of it—that would be a non-negotiable. I have to start with a candidate who has strength in building relationship—because I can be brilliant and know all of the information, but if I don’t know how to relate and how to build relationship, I’m not going to transfer that to anyone else.

Another administrator discussed how students can be “turned on to” an academic subject with which they have always struggled, simply by having a positive relationship with the teacher who teaches that subject. They added that teachers cannot “demand” that
students have a positive relationship with them and said, “demanding respect only lasts a short time, but mutual respect lasts a lifetime.” Positive relationships are built around “mutual respect.” Linking relationship with the previously discussed theme of community building, the administrators agree that “you develop community through relationships.”

Frank described the relationship that he wanted between his teachers and students as being “very positive, very affirming, and very loving” which leads to having “more than just this person who’s standing in front of my classroom teaching—there’s a relationship there.” In directly connecting spiritual formation with relationships, Ed stated that, “spiritual formation primarily comes through relationship—so faith is primarily caught, not taught—this is why Christian education is best done in relationship.” He also described the culture of his school as “a teacher-student driven relationship building school where the most important or the highest achievement of our teachers is to develop the relationship with the students.” Repeatedly, and in different ways, the administrators linked failure to build relationships to students with failed teaching and little to no progress in spiritual formation. Receptivity to “guidance” comes through “trusting” and “loving” relationships. Bill said, “If relationships aren’t there, spiritual formation is not going to happen!” Diane put it this way; “You can’t teach students much if they don’t like you!” Her description of “liking” a teacher was not a feeling that is developed on a peer level, but one that comes from mutual respect that is built from a meaningful teacher-student relationship. She looks for teachers who will build a classroom atmosphere of “acceptance, welcome, and trust.”
The importance of social interaction in students’ lives led one school to reduce the number of speakers in chapels and replace some of the regular chapel times with small group meetings where relationships can be “built” and “strengthened.” Small groups are normally led by teachers who are proficient in developing relationships within those small groups. Curt talked about selecting teachers by assessing their “personality:”

I wanted to know if their personality was such that I thought they could relate to kids—not necessarily with a goal to being well-liked—but did they have a philosophy that teaching was about more than just conveying information—it was about relationship and interaction with students.

When asked how he would answer a teacher candidate who asked what they were expected to do in the area of spiritual formation with students, Bill replied, “Live and model your faith authentically—build relationships with students to the point where they can see your faith lived out.”

Another aspect of relationships, recounted by most of the administrators, was the fact that returning students who talked about their memories of school would always talk about relationships with teachers and not subjects or events. Gale said:

I have the privilege of hearing alumni over and over, coming back, and they will almost always point to a specific conversation that they had with a faculty member, at a particular time when they needed that. In many cases, the faculty member will not even remember it. We need to be encouraging our teachers to have those kinds of interactions . . . because they are transformative.
All of the administrators talked about the importance of being able to discern if a candidate can relate to students or not. Humans are “relational” beings who thrive in a setting where they know they are “valued.” A major part of relationship building is being heard and being able to talk through situations, which is discussed in the next section.

**Listening/Dialogue**

The second condition attributed to the category of spiritual formation is listening/dialogue. Ann envisioned a high school as a “safe place” where a student would be able to have “relevant conversations” based on what was actually going on in their lives. “So often, just a conversation in the van on the way to the ball game, kids will be talking about baptism or death and what that means—and this is the opportunity for teachers to share.” Teachers have the opportunity to talk about “day to day events” with students, not just the subject matter. Teachers have the opportunity to “share everything” with the students in a way that builds “community” and “builds up the student” and helps the student to become an “independent thinker.”

Several administrators talked about the ability to discern the quality of a teacher’s listening skills during an interview. Does the teacher “talk non-stop” during the interview or do they give “short but reflective answers?” Does the teacher speak quickly, as though they “have all the answers” or do they show the ability to “process” what they are hearing? Gale said that he overheard a student say that, “one of the things they appreciated at their school was that teachers allow them to discuss anything there, particularly their faith, and that for a lot of them, that was a new thing.” Administrators shared about students who could “talk openly” with faculty, which led directly to spiritual
formation “opportunities” where the teacher could help students “reflect” on their situation or question. Diane talked about “prophetic listening,” and teacher candidates who talked too much are not “good listeners.” She defined prophetic listening as:

Listening that brings out the best in a student, and often leads them to their own answer—through active, caring, and loving listening—where you help them find the answer that God is placing within them—rather than just giving your opinion and closing the conversation.

The listening and dialogue skills that assist spiritual formation help students understand that they don’t have to “measure up to something” before they go to a teacher for spiritual help. Diane has teachers who:

Accept students for all of their doubts, all of their confusion that they might be bringing, but knowing that this teacher is solid in their faith and they can talk to them and leave feeling cared for, not feeling put down for where they happen to be at in their life.

She also looks for teacher candidates who:

Can be a “spiritual guide” for students—someone that would present, would share, their understanding of what it means to follow Jesus, but do it in a way that doesn’t push it down their throats, really respects who they are, their right to make a choice—but lives it out, that loves them, that demonstrates what Christian life is about, and then to be able to verbalize why you live the way you live to them.

With the changing demographics of schools and teachers with diverse backgrounds, the teachers and students have to “work harder” at “understanding one another.” This gives
people the ability to interact with others who are on different “ends of the spectrum.” Curt commented that we “sometimes want everybody to look the same—I am a leader that doesn’t necessarily see the value in that.”

Bill described an ideal teacher that “students are drawn to—because of them being authentic, being real, understanding, and not judgmental—being willing to say I understand where you’re at or I understand that you are mad at God right now.” Ann’s personal experience at church was a place where people would “gloss over” issues being discussed, but the school was a place where you could “dive into” those discussions a little “more deeply.” That is the level of discussion that she wants for her students to experience. Echoing a previous administrator, Ann also said that an ideal teacher “asks the right questions and leads the student down some avenues that might lead them to Christianity, without shoving things down their throat—offering them opportunities to explore things that make sense to them.” The administrators agreed that teachers who are skilled in listening and dialogue are able to “share at the appropriate times,” and to “listen at the appropriate times”—to “be there for the student.” These are the teachers who are best equipped to guide students in spiritual formation. They also lead by modeling their faith journey, as discussed in the next section.

Faith Journey

The final condition attributed to the category of spiritual formation is the “faith journey,” “faith pilgrimage,” or “spiritual journey.” Each of these phrases was used by different administrators in exploring this aspect of spiritual formation. Gale defined life as a “spiritual journey which takes me into a deeper understanding of God and Jesus
Christ.” He listens as a teacher candidate describes his or her spiritual journey for how it “affects him or her—looking for teachers where the spiritual part is just part of who they are—something they aren’t tacking on—something that just flows naturally and comfortably as part of who they are.” The administrators agree that they can tell a lot about “who a person is” by hearing their faith journey, hearing about the “mentors in their lives,” “what they struggled with,” and “how they handled their struggles.” They are looking for candidates with a “vibrant faith,” a “relevant faith,” a “real faith.” Frank summarized it this way:

So I was fine with someone talking about the fact that they went through some challenging times spiritually, that there were times of doubt, or questioning. It is more important for me to learn how they worked through that, and what stayed constant for them during that time. Who were the key people they went and talked to during that time—what was, and is, their support system?

He said it is important for a teacher to understand the struggle side of things because they will have students going through struggles too, and they can “relate more fully” when their faith journey has included some “rocky places.” The theme of faith journeys that would inform a teacher’s future discussions with students about spiritual formation resonated with all of the administrators.

Another administrator agreed with the importance of knowing details of the candidate’s journey through life by stating, “I always feel that I learn a lot about a person by asking about their faith journey—looking for a faith that was relevant, not perfect.” The idea of a faith journey is not viewed as a “straight and level path” that is easily
experienced. The participants repeatedly shared the importance of “learning through struggles” and how these experiences helped teachers grow in “wisdom” as they guide students in spiritual formation. Gale, when interviewing teachers, looks for experiences that indicate the importance of the candidate’s spiritual journey, “that show it is a matter of the heart . . . how they talk about their faith journey, how excited they are, and how animated they are as they talk . . . how comfortable they are in talking about this journey.” The ability to “verbalize” what they have experienced is a key quality that administrators are searching for in a candidate. It is this ability to verbalize that allows the teacher to “dialogue” with the student after “listening” to where they are on the faith journey.

Another way of seeing the faith journey in a teacher is the “modeling” that they do as a “follower of Christ,” including when they “make mistakes,” and when they need to “apologize to students,” and when they “integrate their faith” throughout all of their teaching. Diane thought that it is “a more Anabaptist approach to talking about life to say how did we live our life in practice and in relation to each other, rather than what do we believe in our head.” The ideas of “modeling” and “more is caught than is taught” were repeated frequently in interview comments related to faith journey as a component of spiritual formation. Diane concluded by saying that “we want teachers who can help kids experience that they are on a journey, walking with God, following Jesus, and continuing to grow in relationships, with the people around them as they follow Jesus.” The “experience” is seen as more relevant than the “head knowledge” in guiding students in spiritual formation.
After reviewing the categorically aligned emergent themes in the study, an additional strong theme is discussed in the next section. This theme arose from questions that emerged as I realized that most of the answers from participants were describing the characteristics that they were seeking in a teacher. But the next step was to understand how they know if a teacher candidate has that characteristic.

**Selection of Teachers**

The pre-identified categories of fit, Mennonite culture, and spiritual formation all helped characterize and focus on how Mennonite school administrators identify teachers who are equipped to guide their students in spiritual formation. As I conducted the interviews, the difference between describing or identifying the categorical attributes of the ideal candidate versus selecting one candidate among many emerged. This realization helped form a new question in the remaining interviews, and became a topic for discussion during follow-up calls with the first several interviewees. The question centered on how the administrator identifies the one candidate who will best fulfill the qualities that they have identified. The themes that emerged were Scientific Process and Intuition. These are discussed in the next two sections.

**Scientific Process**

The administrators were asked how they identify the candidate that will best fulfill the attributes that they are looking for in spiritual formation. The theme of a scientific process emerged as the initial phase in identification and then selection of a final candidate. The participants identified the objective aspects of the selection process as the scientific process in relation to teacher identification and selection. This includes
the “paper screening” of a candidate for professional qualifications and preparations, answers to professional and spiritual questions, and the checking of references. “Reference checking” was identified by all of the administrators as a very “significant and meaningful” part of the process where “valuable information” is identified and used in the continued screening of candidates. References would be asked questions that shed light on how a candidate “relates to young people,” and how their “faith journey” is evident in their church and workplace, and how well they “listen to” and “process the concerns of” other people.

Several of the administrators agreed that methods of obtaining a “prior view” or “prolonged” view of the teacher’s ability to teach and relate to students were ideal. Ed reinforced his process of targeting teachers who were already “known within the school community” by having them fill an open position “temporarily.” During this time he would observe how they functioned, and if they filled the role in an acceptable or commendable way they might eventually be hired permanently. Frank relied heavily on using prospective teachers as short-term or long-term substitutes within his school. This was a significant part of his process for eventually hiring a teacher who he had “prior knowledge” of in relation to his or her teaching skills. He was able to get a good view of how they “relate to students” and their “peer engagement” skills. Diane and a few other administrators occasionally have teacher candidates teach a “practice lesson” in an actual classroom with students at their schools. Diane found this to be especially helpful in a particular situation where she disagreed with the choice presented to her by the rest of the administrative team that was involved in the “screening process.” The three final
candidates taught a lesson to students and were observed by the administrators.

Following that process there was unanimous agreement on which teacher should be selected to fill the position. Diane said, “It worked well, and I often wonder if we should do more of that?” The drawback is the additional time and scheduling that is required. These processes of “getting a better view” of teacher candidates was seen as part of the scientific process of teacher selection.

Another factor that was cited as helping make the process of selection a more “objective” one is using “multiple people” as part of the process. Ann said, “I usually had someone else in the office with me—either my board chair or a faculty member.” Bill concurred with the value in having multiple people in the process by saying, “conversation with others who have been part of the process is invaluable.” The perspectives of several people help lead to consensus, which seems “more scientific” and “reliable.” Bill added to this body of thought by explaining the value of a group discussion from a different perspective. He and his team consider how the abilities and strengths of a particular candidate might “compliment” those of other teachers in the building, or “provide a different perspective.” He said he often asks other interviewers, “who does this person remind you of, or who will this person be most like on our current faculty?” He is looking at the “whole package” of what the entire staff brings to the students. In talking about her team discussing potential teacher candidates, Ann said, “I remember those conversations being on the person’s ability to fit the culture, fit the school—aside from meeting the professional expectations.” Gale shared that he likes to get “multiple views” by “comparing notes with other people.” These are the aspects of
selecting a teacher, in addition to the “paper screening,” that were seen as part of the scientific process that were more objective in nature. From a more subjective point of view, the theme of intuition emerged and is discussed in the next section.

**Intuition**

Participants were able to identify what characteristics they were looking for in a teacher with great clarity and detail. As the researcher, my question then became, “but how do you identify which candidate will best exhibit that particular characteristic in the classroom?” The characteristic might have been “the ability to listen,” “the ability to form deep relationships,” or “the ability to share their faith journey in a way that will guide spiritual formation.” The theme of intuition came quickly to the forefront as the participants described their process of selection. Trying to define intuition was challenging and subjective in and of itself.

Bill talked about how he comes to a decision on a final teacher candidate once the screening process has “narrowed the field:”

There is an intuitive sense that pulls together everything—what you’ve read, what you have spoken to references about, things that the candidates have said in the interview, their body language, whether they are a relaxed communicator or an uptight or tense one. So, it is very complex and multi-layered—all those factors go in and somehow you intuitively get this sense of the person.

Frank explained that once the screening process is completed, and after gaining experience over the years, he has begun to rely more and more on intuition in making the final selection. He said, “I’m not a big intuition guy—I don’t rely on intuition a lot in the
rest of my life, but I rely on intuition more and more in the teacher selection process.”

Bill also related spirituality to intuition by saying that, “our intuition is often set by prayer, or the level of prayer that we put into it.” This is a sentiment that was agreed upon by the other participants.

Ann spoke in detail about intuition as a part of the selection process. She said:

Intuition plays into it a lot for me usually. It plays a very strong role. For me it goes to the emotional intelligence piece, and it’s usually a gut feeling of—can they relate to people well—that’s almost a stronger piece for me than their academic knowledge because I feel relationships are so important in the classroom between teachers and students—so if there’s a good relationship they are going to pick up on that—if they feel safe in the classroom they are going to do better academically—and so I do rely heavily on that internal sense of—does it feel right?

She concluded by explaining that she feels that “years of self reflection” help build the “intuitive sense.” This idea of gaining more “confidence” in making a final selection of a teacher to fill an opening was affirmed by all of the participants.

Gale referred to an idea that he read about in Gladwell’s (2007) book entitled Blink. The idea is that “one gets a fairly quick read” on a person in an interview and that you don’t really need an extensive amount of time to know a lot about them. Gale said:

The longer I do this, the more I trust my own read of a person, my instinct about a person. As much as I don’t really believe in . . . just sort of gut instincts a lot of times . . . but that’s where I would combine the science with the intuition. But I
feel like I could sit in an interview, and ask almost any question, and I can tell you whether or not that person fits in my school.

He concluded by adding that he also does the “scientific work” of looking at all the paper documents, and the references, and “tests” his thoughts with other people.

Personality inventories of applicants are not used by the participants in this study, when identifying and selecting teachers for their schools, as occurs in some other settings. However they each described the “personality characteristics” that would fit in their schools as discussed throughout the previous sections of this chapter. There also is sensitivity to personality types that fit with different grade levels of students that came through in the interviews. One administrator talked about “voice quality” and a “teacher’s interests” as factors that he looks differently at depending on what grade levels the teacher would be teaching. Frank related the following:

Over time, with experience, there is an intuitive piece that begins to develop.

Early in my career I relied very heavily on all of the mechanics of the hiring process. But, as time went on, I was able to figure out sort of a profile of the teacher, even a profile of a teacher teaching different grade levels. There is an instinctive or intuitive portion to it.

The administrators felt strongly about the “quick sense” that you get from candidates in an interview setting. An administrator needs to predict the candidate’s ability to foster a meaningful relationship with students from a relatively brief interview contact with that applicant. The administrators agreed that they can sense that “ability to connect” in an interview pretty quickly, just as students sense the ability in a classroom setting. Another
word, which was used interchangeably with intuition and instinct, was the ability to “sense” which teacher possessed the “strongest and best mix” of qualities that were being sought. Gale talked about the brief time in an interview, and assessing the teacher’s ability to relate, by saying, “for your strongest candidates, that’s going to happen quickly, that you sense some connection, just an ease of being able to talk together, of answering questions.” He believes that being at ease in an interview is not the only way to “sense” if a person will relate well to students, but he thinks that “a teacher who is not able to relax at all in an interview may have that difficulty in the classroom.” A more extensive and deeper look at the phenomenon of intuition is beyond the scope of this study. However, the concept of intuition or instinct was clearly a part of the process of teacher selection for the Mennonite school administrators that were interviewed. The remainder of this chapter describes the member checking activities that were conducted and how they helped in verification of the results that have been presented to this point.

**Member Checking**

In qualitative studies, member checking is a method whereby data, analytical categories, emergent themes, and researcher interpretations are discussed and verified with participants in the research project. Six of the seven participants in this study were available for phone conversations that focused on the results of data analysis. Three participants were available to participate in a conference call together, and the other three participants provided feedback through individual phone conference calls. Initially, I explained the idea of grounded theory methodology and the coding process that was used for data analysis of the interview transcripts, follow up phone conversations, and related
documents. I then shared the results of the data analysis as found in the categories, conditions, and themes that emerged. Verification of analytical results is an important step in a qualitative study. The participants were asked to reflect and share on what themes resonated with their experiences, and what areas diverged from their experiences. They were also asked if the categories and themes made sense from their perspective. The discussions were frank, informative, and collegial in nature. The categories of fit, Mennonite culture, and spiritual formation were discussed, along with their emergent themes. The remainder of this section is a summary of these discussions and the reflective comments made by the study participants, with a concluding summary of the member checking activity.

**Fit**

Within the category of fit, the emergent themes of theological position, professional preparation, and student-centered disposition were explained and discussed. Theological position was characterized by agreement with and support for the Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective, having a relevant faith testimony, and maintaining an active membership in a Christian congregation. Professional preparation included training, a bachelor’s degree, and licensure in the appropriate subjects and/or grade levels. For some teacher candidates, this also included advanced degrees and teaching experience beyond their student teaching, and other relevant professional experience and training. A student-centered disposition included an understanding of the developmental level of students, an ability to communicate effectively with students, and a love for the
students. The participants all agreed that these were major themes that were important when assessing fit for each of their schools.

Bill indicated that the themes within the category of fit were “really right on.” They resonated well with his perspective on fit between teachers and his school. Diane also confirmed the themes that were presented as being “very important” when discussing fit. Gale shared an interesting perspective on the use of the word “position” in relation to theological understandings. He talked about the importance of faith as a “way of living your life,” indicating that a good fit with his school was more than just a “theological position.” Further explanation and discussion revealed the inclusive nature of this terminology and the coding of faith journey within the category of spiritual formation.

The category of fit enveloped a more general area where teacher candidates and schools “screened” each other prior to submitting an application (on the part of the candidate) and requesting an interview (on the part of the school). This seemed to resonate with the group and allowed for the use of the word “position” in this context. Ann, in speaking about the category of spiritual formation which is discussed further, also verbalized her view that fit covers broader themes that relate more to an initial “screening” that happens between the school and the candidate, which corroborated the use of the term theological position.

Diane emphasized the importance of “experience” within the theme of professional preparation. She had previously shared the story of hiring a fine arts teacher with a noteworthy resume of “experience and professional activities,” especially for a high school teacher, who grew their subject area program significantly. This tremendous
growth in student participation was attributed to the “experience and excellence” that was brought into the position by the teacher. There was agreement that candidates come with differing “levels of experience,” and that “experience of different types” is important. Experience includes the number of years as a teacher, the types and locations of schools where the candidate has served, as well as “life experiences” such as travel and “professional affiliations.”

Frank said, “I do really like the word disposition in the theme of student-centered disposition.” Disposition speaks to “inherent qualities” of a teacher that are seated in the “mind and character.” In his mind, this terminology highlighted the idea of being “student-centered” in a way that made it more consequential to the core of a teacher’s skills. Frank also stated, “I think you have captured the three areas that are most important, as far as fit goes,” when speaking about the emergent themes and their relationship to his school.

Ann assessed these themes as being “very accurate” and talked about the significant “importance of fit” as well. She related to the concern of theological fit by saying the following about prospective teacher candidates: “If they were too far afield in theology, they would be quickly dropped out of that, out of favor, in terms of the selection process.” Her experience has been that teacher candidates often have “preconceived” ideas about “Christian” schools, and those ideas frequently did not match what she was looking for in regards to fit. When asked to describe these ideas further, Ann said:
As a school, our theology was to be open, loving, accepting, and not to lay down exclusive boundaries. And, I felt sometimes I would get a candidate that was on the radical side of that—and I just didn’t feel it was a good fit, so they dropped from the list.

This “radical side,” in her experience, would come out in written responses to questions on the teacher application and in verbal discussions with the candidates. She explained:

We would often ask them to share about their own personal journey, and it was often just a harsher view of Christianity than I was trying to lead from. And, I know that the lines are all gray and messy, but I would drop them from the selection process because it felt too harsh!

These illustrative comments from Ann illuminated her focus, and provided verification for the themes that emerged in this category. She completed her comments about the results in this category by saying, “I would place heavy emphasis on the theological position and the student-centered disposition when determining fit.” For all of the participants, the theme of professional preparation was an assumed part of the concept of fit. If the professional preparation was not at or above the requirements, the candidate would automatically be excluded from the screening process. The next category presented to the participants for discussion was Mennonite culture.

**Mennonite Culture**

The category of Mennonite culture gave rise to the themes of Christ-centered living, community building, and peace-making. Christ-centered living was discussed in terms of the difference between being “bound by the law of the Old Testament” and
“following the life and teachings of Jesus Christ,” and being able to model this for students. Community building was composed of not only relationships within the school building, but also building relationship in the local community, the community of churches, the broadening ethnic/racial community, and the global community. Peace-making from a Mennonite perspective includes an everyday commitment to maintaining peace with everyone in all situations. In the Mennonite culture of the schools, this can be seen in areas such as “restorative or redemptive discipline,” “social justice” concerns, “service as a way of life,” and a commitment to “treat others as you want to be treated.”

During the overall discussion of these themes, several of the respondents commented on the order in which I presented the themes. My intention was not to rank them, but simply to present the themes. They were presented to the participants in the order of community building, peace-making, and Christ-centered living instead of the aforementioned order with Christ-centered living as the first theme. The participants agreed that they would put Christ-centered living at the top of the list, indicating that it would be the most important piece of the Mennonite school culture from their points of view. I found this to be significant because the participants did not discuss the idea of the order in which the themes were presented in the other two categories. It was verified that all the themes were relevant and important within each category, although individuals occasionally made comments that would indicate personal preferences on which themes were the most important to them in a specific category. But, as a group, the participants felt strongly enough about the theme of Christ-centered living to make mention of the fact that it is the most significant theme for them in the category of Mennonite culture.
Frank summarized by saying, “If you are going to order them, I would put Christ-centered living first, to bring focus to the other two.”

Each of the participants reflected on their views of Mennonite Culture within the setting of their school. Ann affirmed the three themes that were presented, and reflected again on her need to spend extra time “explaining the school culture” to teacher candidates who were not familiar with the “school community” and those who were not from a “Mennonite background.” She further explained, “I tried to ask questions, in regards to community building—how would they relate, would they attend events—I was looking for them to respond about how they would fit in community, into the Mennonite culture.” Thinking about the increasing denominational and faith diversity in his school, Bill questioned the extent to which the themes reflect a Mennonite culture as opposed to an organizational culture. The participants agreed that the themes are particularly distinctive to a Mennonite school culture, but recognized that other school cultures, especially in faith-based schools, may celebrate aspects of these themes as well. Bill also emphasized the concept of “service to others,” within the peace-making theme, as being particularly significant in his school.

Ann reflected on the increasing number of “non-Mennonite” teachers that she hired at her school. For Ann, and for the other participants, hiring teachers who are not from an Anabaptist background involves discerning their level of support for the principle of peace-making. In talking about the focus on peace-making in her school culture and the increasing diversity of faith backgrounds in the teacher pool, she said:
As I hired people who were non-Mennonite, I would ask them if they could accept our position, even if they didn’t feel that way. Those were sometimes tough pieces—and they were willing to support our position, even if they came out of a military background themselves. We seemed to find common ground in the fact that no one really wants to go to war—we want to work proactively towards other alternatives.

She acknowledged that the nature of her small community made it increasingly difficult to hire all Mennonite teachers, whereas the other participants normally had a wider pool of Mennonite candidates from which to select. However, there was unanimity in the idea that the “bottom line” was the candidate’s willingness to support the concepts of Christ-centered living, community building, and peace-making.

Diane restated her strong feelings that community building needs to be “inclusive.” She stated:

One of the big things that I look for is a teacher who can help build an inclusive community that is anti-racist, and that works really well with diversity of all kinds—if I feel a teacher can’t handle diversity, I hardly see why we would hire them.

The belief in “anti-racism” and “acceptance of diversity” as an integral part of community building was echoed by the other participants. This was also heard in repeated conversations about the “positive” cultural influences that have been added to the school cultures with the “increased ethnic/racial diversity” and with the “increasing
number of international students” on campus. From a broader organizational perspective, the stated goals of the Mennonite Education Agency also include anti-racism initiatives.

The member checking discussion in the category of Mennonite culture, and the emergent themes, resulted in discussion about a fascinating finding that was made by one of the school administrators. Her school is composed of a large student body, and is located in a large Mennonite community with other Christian school alternatives. The school conducted a marketing study in their local community, which targeted public school parents, many of whom were not from a Mennonite background. This administrator shared that the Mennonite school view and definition of “community” does not represent the view held by many in her local community. She summarized the findings by stating the following in regards to the viewpoint of many in the local non-Mennonite community:

Community, to them, is a very Mennonite and negative word because it indicates narrowness, it indicates conformity, it indicates barriers to keep people out. We see community as being a very positive word. To them, community would be a cultural word that indicates if you don’t believe in certain ways, dress in certain ways, you are not part of it.

Further thought indicated that this feeling arises out of an “outdated stereotype” of “closed” Mennonite communities, which was important to understand within this particular school’s local community. In summarizing the results of the study with parents, the administrator said, “they would be interested in a Christian environment, but not a Christian community. To them, community was clearly cultural and not
theological.” This illustrates the importance of not only understanding the school culture from an internal perspective, but also of understanding the perception of the school culture from an external perspective. Frank added that he believes that some components of Mennonite culture are “regional in nature,” but everyone agreed that the emergent themes that were presented are central to the concept of Mennonite culture in all of the Mennonite schools.

The relevance and verity of the emergent themes in the category of Mennonite culture were strongly confirmed. Once the coding process was completed and I had coded the themes of Christ-centered living, community building, and peace-making, I had an “a-ha” moment. I realized that these names were in direct correlation with the model of Anabaptist theology that had been cited by Gale in the interview stage of the research. This correlation was not intentional on my part, but strongly emerged throughout the coding process. I remembered that Gale had cited the work by Palmer Becker (2008), where he explored the question, “What is an Anabaptist Christian?” Becker listed and explained his understanding of the core values of Anabaptist Christians. These core values are: (a) Jesus is the center of our faith, (b) Community is the center of our lives, and (c) Reconciliation is the center of our work. Gale’s view of these themes as central to Mennonite culture and theology, and what emerged through data analysis, were identical. This correlation was significant in verification of the data analysis in this category. The final category that was discussed with research participants was spiritual formation, which is presented in the next section.
**Spiritual Formation**

Within the category of spiritual formation, the themes of relationship, listening/dialogue, and faith journey were identified and discussed with the study participants. Relationship was a pervasive theme throughout the interviews. The relationship between teachers and students was seen as “central” to not only spiritual formation, but also to “academic and behavioral progress.” A major component of good relationships is being able to listen and dialogue with students—accepting “whatever topic and perspective” that is presented by the student, and “truly listening” out of concern and a desire to help the student “think critically” on their own. Teachers who are able to discuss and model a “relevant” and “living” faith journey were also seen as critical in the process of student spiritual formation.

The participant input, regarding the emergent themes in the category of spiritual formation, was very positive in verifying these themes. One administrator quickly made the comment, “I think each of those three areas succinctly identifies our core values, and the things that we look for in spiritual formation.” The other administrators corroborated this statement. Following his agreement with the themes, Gale said, “For me they are all very important and significant and distinctive in our setting, and they are what we are looking for in faculty.” In another very affirming statement, Ann added, “I really like this category best of all because it gets down to the detail of what you need, as opposed to the category of fit where you have the broader themes.” Her statement also corroborates the previous discussion about fit as more of a “screening” at the beginning of the “identification” process when hiring new teachers. She views these themes as “key
characteristics that you hope you are going to hear and feel as you go through the interview.” And finally, speaking about spiritual formation, Ann said, “you have to have these pieces to impact the students.”

As a central focus of the study, the discussion of emergent themes in the category of spiritual formation was likely to have been the most involved discussion. In reality, this category elicited an even stronger consensus from the participants and, as such, the discussion was shorter, and less focused on recounting specifics from the interviews and follow-up phone calls. Gale summed it up best by saying:

Spiritual formation is primarily relationship. When Seniors talk about their spiritual journey in their Senior Speech, it almost always goes to a particular teacher and the way that teacher allowed him/her to feel, to be open, to explore, to discuss, and to not feel judged. This sentiment is expressed even more so when students come back as alumni.

The affirmation for these themes was strong and the participants did not expand further or offer any differing views on these themes that were relevant to their local school setting. The final section summarizes the participants’ views on participation in this research study.

**Concluding Remarks**

In conclusion, the participants were given the opportunity to make final comments and reflect on the experience of participating in the research. Each of the participants agreed that serving as a participant in the study was a positive and worthwhile experience. I believe that the concluding comments address several different aspects of
how participation in the study was relevant, and can best be stated in the participants’ own words. Gale said:

I always find it helpful to articulate why I do what I do—and how I make hiring decisions and the criteria I use is a very important part of the work I do here—and so that has been helpful. For me to step back again and to think through—very systematically—your questions, has led me to do that.

Along the same line, Diane added, “It is helpful to occasionally have something that forces you to stop and think about these kinds of things—what you are doing, how you are doing it, and why.” In relation to the potential benefits of this study, Frank said, “I think your work is going to enhance the work of the Mennonite Schools Council and affiliated schools, and principals in other religious schools.” In conclusion, Bill made the following comments about the study, and his thoughts about Mennonite education, which were illustrative of the impression that was given by each of the administrators throughout the interviews and follow-up discussions:

As I read your emergent themes, I think—man—you know that is what really makes our schools pretty unique and special. And, for me, such a joy to work at!

For me, it confirms the gift of Mennonite schools in our communities!

This open dialogue with the participants in the study proved to be a very positive and enlightening concluding activity. The professional input in relation to identifying and selecting teacher candidates who will be excellent spiritual guides for the students in their schools was rich in detail and wisdom, and was very much appreciated. The member
checking activity provided verification for the findings of this study, with additional dialogue that was helpful in presenting conclusions in the fifth chapter.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

This chapter was written for the purpose of presenting concluding remarks which focus on a summary of the results of the study, a discussion of those results, and recommendations for future research that have been derived from the study. Beginning with the first interview and its transcription, and throughout the rest of the interviews and document review, initial analysis through open coding took place. Successive coding stages, axial and selective coding, led to the emergence of central themes and then a central phenomenon. The summary of results section in this chapter presents these findings. The conceptual bases of the study are also addressed in coordination with the findings from the study. And finally, a section on recommendations for future research addresses how this study has added to the body of scholarly research, and future research directions that would enlarge the scope of this study.

Summary of the Results

Research data were obtained through semi-structured interviews, allowing for the emergence of participant identified themes, and documents related to teacher identification and hiring. Subsequent data analysis was conducted using grounded theory methodology (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Coding of the data was conducted as previously described in Chapter 3 of this dissertation. Words, phrases, and sections of the transcripts were analyzed in order to associate them with three pre-determined main categories of the conceptual base, which arose from the original research questions. The three categories that focused the coding process were: fit, Mennonite culture, and spiritual
formation. It goes without saying that these categories aptly correspond to a study of the identification and selection of teachers equipped to guide students in spiritual formation in Mennonite schools. Categorical data were reconstructed as themes of interrelated information from within the categories and between the categories, resulting in a core category and central phenomenon.

The themes that emerged from the category of fit were: theological position, professional preparation, and student-centered disposition. Themes that were related to the category of Mennonite culture were: Christ-centered living, community building, and peace-making. Finally, the category of spiritual formation gave rise to the themes of: relationship, listening/dialogue, and faith journey. Although these themes were assigned a categorical relationship for the purpose of organization and analysis, each of the themes were interrelated across all three categories as discussed in a later section of this chapter. The central phenomenon that emerged through the data analysis was “relationship,” an often repeated and described concept within the core category of spiritual formation, and more broadly as a main quality that functioned within the other two categories as well.

**Fit and Mennonite Culture**

As categorical constructs, fit and Mennonite culture led to the emergence of themes that were significantly interrelated. These two categories and their interrelationships are discussed in this section. As administrators described the characteristics that lead to a good fit between employees and their school, they were actually describing many of the characteristics that also were necessary for maintaining the Mennonite cultural aspects within the school. Two of the emergent themes within the
category of fit, professional preparation and student-centered disposition, were broader in the aspect of general teacher competencies and are sought in other school settings as well. The third theme, theological position, would be important in most faith-based schools with a specific type of theology being appropriate for a good fit with the particular school theology.

**Fit**

Throughout the stages of data analysis it became evident that the category of fit was experienced as a broader concept within the process of identifying and selecting teachers. Fit developed into a category that included the themes that were most closely related to the “screening” process. Both the prospective teacher candidate and the school personnel who were conducting the screening utilized this process. Participants in the study talked about the fact that candidates become familiar with the school through the teacher application, the school website, and the extent to which they had previous contact with the school or school families. Through these avenues, the screening process was used to assess fit as it related to theological position, professional preparation, and student-centered disposition. These themes, related to fit, emerged as the most important among a broader collection of factors that combined to indicate a basic teacher profile that would correspond to the needs of the school. The administrators hoped that a prospective candidate would eliminate himself or herself from the process, prior to applying, if the fit was not a good one. In faith-based schools, the theological fit between the school and the employee is central to the broader concept of fit. A prospective employee who proceeded through the application process, regardless of a “mismatch”
between his or her theological position and that of the school, indicates one or more problems. Either the school did not describe their theological position adequately in the application and other documents, or the applicant did not perceive the central importance of the theological/spiritual mission of the school, or the applicant lacked an appropriate understanding of his or her theological position versus that of the school. If the applicant did not identify a mismatch in this or other areas, this screening function became the responsibility of the administrator or someone on the “interview team.”

Professional preparation revealed itself in several areas, the most obvious being a bachelor’s degree that was subject or grade level specific, and a state teaching license. A deficiency in this area of professional preparation should indicate that the applicant need not apply. However, some states set different standards for private school teacher licensure. Applicants may apply even if their degrees or licensure do not match all of the areas in which they will be teaching. A small school is more likely to ask teachers to teach multiple subjects in order to offer them a full-time professional position. Other aspects of professional preparation that the administrators in this study were looking for included past teaching experience, other teaching-related work experiences, and advanced degrees. If each of the applicants for a particular teaching position possessed the appropriate teaching degree and licensure, these “extra” preparation pieces became relevant.

Theological position was also a central focus for determining fit. It was assumed by the administrators that a person with no personal faith experience or interest would not bother to complete an application. Further, the online and within-application access to
the Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective served as screening tools for potential applicants who were Christians but not Mennonite or Anabaptist. If they could not support the theology in that document, it would be assumed that they would not be a good fit for the school. Church membership, church involvement, and a relevant faith testimony were also significant indicators of fit. These areas may or may not have been evident to applicants, as criterion for fit, depending on the nature and depth of the faith related questions on the teacher application. Some schools asked for more written details in the application prior to an interview and others explored the faith commitment of an applicant in more detail during the interview. However, several of the administrators recounted experiences, within teacher interviews, where it became apparent that the theological positions of the school and the applicant did not match.

Student-centered disposition, as a theme within fit, was more difficult for an applicant to assess in a process of self-screening. While some of the applications included general questions that the administrators used to “get a sense” for the degree to which an applicant was student-centered, the questions were not always worded in a way that made this apparent to the person who was answering the question. For instance, one school asked applicants to describe their hobbies and interests and then derived information from their answers to indicate how well they may relate to students. Understanding the developmental levels of students, the ability to communicate effectively at those levels, and showing compassion and love to students are all areas that were highly valued but less easily assessed through written responses. The administrators analyzed the applicants’ responses to personal interview questions for the
purpose of determining how student-centered the teacher may be in all aspects of their teaching. A match in each of these areas of fit allowed for a more specific look at the potential for fit within a Mennonite school culture.

**Mennonite Culture**

The second category within the conceptual base of the study, Mennonite culture, was also one that gave rise to strong themes and was interrelated to both fit and spiritual formation. The first theme, identified by participants as the most important one within this category, was that of Christ-centered living. Without exception, the participants emphasized the major aspects of their school culture as being centered on the life, teachings, and mission of Jesus Christ. One school encapsulated this in their graduate profile as preparing students to be “radical followers of Christ.” The spiritual disciplines that are practiced within the schools help both employees and students to continue in their development of a Christ-centered life. As discussed previously, the member-checking activity helped validate the centrality and importance of this aspect of Mennonite culture. The emergent themes in this category were not originally presented to the participants in “order of importance,” leading them to emphasize that this is the most important theme within the category of Mennonite culture. For a teacher, leading a Christ-centered life establishes a basis for guiding students in spiritual formation. Being centered on Christ does not mean a perfect life, and areas of “struggle” and “growth” add to the depth of spiritual formation that is modeled by the teacher.

The second theme that was central to Mennonite culture was community building. One administrator, with the agreement of others, especially emphasized the fact that a
significant aspect of community building is making decisions “in community.” He also focused his understanding of Mennonite culture, as informed by theology, in the context of “community as the center of life” at his school. Community building is multi-tiered within a Mennonite school culture. The school community, often referred to as the “school family,” is found within the local community, which is subsumed in the global community. Several administrators spoke about their “celebration” of the growing diversity in their schools, both from an ethnic/racial standpoint and an international standpoint. The “communities” were also “widening” as a growing number of students, families, and faculty joined the schools from differing denominations and religions. Increasingly, the schools enrolled students and families with no faith background at all. This change brought challenges that helped the school community “grow and stretch.” One of the main challenges that came with this type of growth was maintaining the Anabaptist Mennonite distinctives while celebrating the diversity and accompanying strengths that were introduced into the culture. Challenges within the community are identified, discussed, and solved “by the community.” Working from a “community mindset” leads directly to increased successes in the final identified theme, which is peace-making.

The final major theme within the category of Mennonite culture was peace-making. Traditionally, Anabaptist churches have been known for their theological “peace position.” This position engenders the label of “pacifists,” given to those who will not participate in military service because of their religious conviction against fighting and killing other people. Within the Mennonite culture of the schools, this
position is discussed, debated, respected, and accepted as a theological position of Anabaptists. However, as the schools experienced increased diversity, many of the students and their families did not agree with or practice this particular facet of pacifism. On a day-to-day basis, however, within the Mennonite school culture, there are several manifestations of this theme. “Restorative discipline” is practiced in all of the schools in this study. The main point of discipline is not to make the student “suffer,” although that may be a consequence of misbehavior, but it is to restore them to a “right relationship” within the community. There is also a strong focus within the schools on “social justice” and “service to others.” During the member-checking activity, one administrator questioned why “service to others” did not show up as a theme within Mennonite culture. He was relieved to find out that it was being presented as a thematic component of peace-making. The schools viewed peace-making, at a very basic level, through the “golden rule,” treating others as you would like to be treated. Having summarized the themes within the categories of fit and Mennonite culture, the next portion of this chapter briefly explores the interrelationships between these categories and themes.

**Synthesis of Fit and Mennonite Culture**

As discussed previously, the themes within the category of fit emerged from the data analysis because of their overarching commonality as methods of screening for fit by both the applicant and the school. The themes within the category of Mennonite culture are directly related to an Anabaptist understanding of the basic question of “What is an Anabaptist?” Each of the themes within Mennonite culture—Christ-centered living, community building, and peace-making—are directly addressed through individual
articles in the Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective. Circling back to the theme of theological position in the category of fit, the Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective is the central document used to assess theological position. Thus, the theme of theological position is directed linked to the three themes that characterize Mennonite culture.

Similarly, professional preparation as a determinant of fit includes a desire for teachers to have “globally and ethnically diverse experiences” in their resume. The main reason that these experiences are valued is because of the implications they bring to the themes of community building and peace-making as keystones of Mennonite culture. We now live in a “global society” where our students are traveling and relocating to locations all around the world. In addition, students from around the world and in surrounding neighborhoods are enrolling in the schools in increasing numbers. Learning to embrace and celebrate all of “God’s people” is a major focus within the Mennonite school cultures. Another aspect of professional preparation is excellence in academics and related experiences, which correlates with the theme of Christ-centered living. Christ, as the model for Christians, achieved perfection in all that He accomplished. Several of the administrators discussed the need for “experts” in the teaching fields, and they related the need for “teaching with excellence” to the biblical admonition to do everything “as to the Lord.” In other words, Christians are exhorted to do everything, regardless of the level of difficulty or importance, with excellence.

Student-centered disposition, included in the category of fit, is also directly linked with the themes that emerged in Mennonite culture. Christ-centered living, community
building, and peace-making, were viewed by the participants as following the biblical example of “how our lives should be lived.” Several of the administrators stated that selecting teachers is the “most important thing that the head administrator does.” They further explained that the modeling that is done by teachers is the most important “influence” in the students’ lives at school. Consequently, the teachers with the best student-centered dispositions are the ones who will best live out the conditions and themes that were identified within Mennonite culture. The core category of spiritual formation, which gave rise to the central phenomenon of relationship, is discussed in the next section.

**Spiritual Formation**

The emergent themes within the category of spiritual formation were found to be dominant in the data analysis, with respect to the frequency of words and phrases being coded within these themes and within this category. This study centered on identifying the proficiency of teacher candidates in the domain of guiding spiritual formation in students. This positions the discussion of spiritual formation as the core category, which contained the dominant themes that were discovered through data analysis. The idea of interrelated themes, as discussed in the previous section, repeats itself in the category of spiritual formation. The three themes centered in spiritual formation are relationship, listening/dialogue, and faith journey. Each are summarized separately with a group summary at the end of this section.

Relationship emerged as the central phenomenon within the study. Mennonite school administrators in this study repeatedly spoke of and illustrated the importance of
identifying and selecting teachers who are able to develop “relevant” and “meaningful” relationships with the students. Whereas the theme of relationship focused most often on the topic of spiritual formation, it also crossed categorical boundaries. The administrators passionately shared their view that without relationship, teachers will be ineffective in guiding students in spiritual formation. They also agreed that a teacher without positive teacher-student relationships will also be ineffective in the areas of student-centered disposition, teaching subjects, community building, peace-making, and modeling Christ-centered living. Relationship is directly correlated to the other two major themes, within spiritual formation, of listening/dialogue and faith journey. If a positive relationship does not exist between the teacher and the students, listening/dialogue cannot effectively be taking place and the faith journey of the teacher will be irrelevant to the student. These two themes are discussed separately following the summary of relationship.

One of the administrators talked about the “amazing” relationships that exist between the teachers and students at his school. His school chooses to allow students to address teachers by their first names, not a practice in the other schools in the study, to promote the feeling of respect for students by their teachers. Each administrator, in different ways, illustrated the need for teachers to be “warm, caring, loving, and respectful” in their relationship with the students. And they each spoke of a “mutual respect” that cannot be “demanded” of students or “forced” on the students by the teachers. A major indication of the positive relationships that developed, between teachers and students in their schools, was illustrated as some administrators described the culminating high school activity for Seniors before commencement. During “Senior
Speeches” and through alumni feedback, relationships with teachers are most frequently cited as the “highlight” of the student’s career. For the administrators, eventual selection of these teachers from a pool of candidates most often comes down to “intuition” gained over years of experience. However, a teacher’s potential proficiency in building relationships is also assessed through contacts with references, written answers to student-related questions, and personal interaction with the interviewers.

The second and third themes, in the spiritual formation category, of listening/dialogue and faith journey are directly related to relationship. Participants in the study repeatedly and consistently spoke of the positive correlation between developing a good relationship with students and being able to listen, dialogue, and share a faith journey with those students. When a relationship of mutual respect has not been established, the students will not confide in their teachers, nor will they be open to guidance from those teachers. The ideas of listening and dialogue, as facilitators for student spiritual formation, were repeated frequently throughout the interviews. There was a clear agreement among the administrators that they did not want a teacher who “had all the answers.” One participant explained that he wanted to make sure that the teacher facilitated “critical thinking,” especially in the area of spiritual formation. Another one shared that she didn’t want a teacher to “shove Christianity down their throats.” There was widespread agreement that spiritual formation cannot be effectively accomplished in a “dogmatic” way where the teacher “spoon feeds” the students and they are asked to “passively take their medicine.” These statements were made as a way of illustrating the desired quality of being “quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to
become angry” as found in James 1:19 (New International Version). A strong focus on the importance of dialogue came through as administrators, again with passion, expressed the desire for their teachers to be open to students “sharing and asking about anything.”

There was clearly a strong emphasis on listening before reacting, and responding in a way that placed “importance” in what the student had to say, especially in discussions about faith and spirituality. These qualities led to the student “being willing” to dialogue, and “appreciating” the ability to talk about anything that was “of concern to them.” The main element of excellent relationships was having teachers who were willing to listen and talk with them about things that were relevant and meaningful. In a Mennonite school culture, the spiritual formation of the student often encompasses the most relevant and meaningful issues in the students’ lives. At times, the student identifies these issues as a part of their personal spiritual formation and at other times they may not realize the spiritual ramifications until later. A Mennonite school teacher is expected to recognize the spiritual issues in a student’s life and guide him or her in processing and growing through the highs and the lows in his or her life. This guidance comes largely through the experiences that a teacher draws from in his or her own faith journey.

Finally, the theme of faith journey completed the identified themes within the category of spiritual formation. In order for students to understand the idea of a faith journey as a “continual process” and “growth in likeness to Christ,” the teacher must have a “relevant and active” faith journey to model for the students. Sometimes this modeling of a faith journey is quiet, through actions and behaviors, and sometimes it is vocal through teaching and personal dialogue. Several of the participants repeated the
idea that more is “caught than taught” within the confines of the classroom and beyond the walls of the classroom and the school, indicating the importance of modeling in spiritual formation.

The administrators were also seeking to identify teachers whose faith journey was not a “perfectly smooth and straight” path through life. Learning comes from “making it through” difficult situations and “learning from our mistakes,” and the lessons that teachers learn through adversity can provide the greatest opportunity for guiding the spiritual development of students. Being able to share the “ups and downs” of their lives gives teachers a meaningful “relevance” that resonates with the students. The teachers are expected to share their struggles, in an “age appropriate” way, when doing so will assist students in working through difficult issues that arise in their lives. On the other hand, when a teacher has not personally experienced what the student is sharing, guiding formation comes through an ability to listen, to care, and to help the student evaluate his or her own faith journey.

The themes of listening/dialogue, faith journey, and relationship are inseparably linked as conditions for the growth of students in spiritual formation. The listening must be active and focused, the dialogue must be understanding, the faith journey must be active and relevant, and the relationship must be mutual. Relationship also involves the community and more specifically the families and churches that partner with the school in guiding the spiritual formation of the students. These partnerships strengthen the support network of each student. The schools recognize that they do not take the place of the family or the church—they complement them. Several of the administrators
explained that the school is not a church and that the parents have the primary role in raising the student.

In summary, Mennonite school administrators seek to identify and select teachers who have the ability to listen and dialogue with students about their faith journey, as part of a meaningful and mutually respectful relationship. These teachers are the ones who most successfully guide students in spiritual formation according to the lived experience of the administrators who participated in this study. The emergent themes that have been discussed were strongly articulated by the participants in this study. The following section reviews how the theories presented in Chapters 1 and 2 support this study’s findings.

**Teacher Selection**

Arthur (2012) explored the components of processing new employees in an organization, which included advertising, recruiting, interviewing, and selection processes of different kinds. These processes were exhibited by the schools in this study in a manner similar to public and other private schools. Advertising for open positions in the Mennonite schools has shifted from a wider audience to a more focused group of people within the school and local community and those who view the school websites. The basic structural procedures for identification and selection of teachers are common and have been the topic of much study, including the identification of the interview as the predominant vehicle for employee selection for the last century (Moscoso, 2000). Metzger and Wu (2008) paid particular attention to commercial teacher selection instruments, or structured interviews in their research. However, structured interview
protocols have not been developed for the purpose of assessing the spiritual domain of teacher proficiencies. In addition, none of the Mennonite schools chose to use commercial teacher selection instruments in their selection process. Research related to assessing a teacher’s ability to guide students in spiritual formation does not exist. These realities were a major impetus for conducting the current study.

Fit

Although the themes within the categories of fit and Mennonite culture interrelate with the categorical themes in spiritual formation, they did not rise to the same prominence in identifying and selecting a teacher. Granted, consideration of these themes was important in the process. But, discussion and assessment of the importance of these areas of fit and cultural characteristics were more basic and more easily assessed than the prominent themes found in spiritual formation. A brief discussion of these themes is warranted, however, because of the major interaction among and between these categorical themes.

Wilkins and Ouchi (1983) established a positive correlation between certain types of people and certain types of organizations, leading to the necessity for fit between the two in order to create a productive work relationship. When the purpose and culture of an organization do not match with the interests and motivations of the employee, neither party is well served. Bowen et al. (1991) discussed their findings that candidates with the best fit for personality and social skills are not necessarily the ones with the best technical or job-related skills. For the cases where this is true, the administrator in the current study who downplayed the academic preparation of a candidate in favor of their
relationship skills may be partially vindicated. He believed that you can increase a teacher’s knowledge base but you cannot increase his or her relationship capacity. However, most of the administrators were unwilling to settle for one of these traits over the other. The goal is to select a teacher who has excellent academic training and knowledge along with excellent people skills.

Various other studies have illustrated the importance of selecting personnel who are compatible with the organizational culture, labeled as goodness of fit (Burk & Birk, 2001; Schein, 1990). Organizational values have also been cited as being significant in determining person-organization fit (Bourne & Jenkins, 2013; M. Smith, 1994). Each of the administrators recognized and valued the need for a good fit between the school and the employees. The theological position, professional preparation, and student-centered disposition of the teacher candidate helped delineate candidates who were a good fit for a school from those who were not. These areas of fit were significantly interrelated with the prominent themes that emerged in the Mennonite culture discussion.

**Mennonite Culture**

The category of Mennonite culture within the current study arose out of scholarly work in the broader area of organizational culture (O’Reilly, 1989; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Organizational culture is a product of shared basic assumptions that emanate from problem solving in the areas of external adaptation and internal integration (Schein, 1992). The basic assumptions of Mennonite school culture are well articulated, integrated, and shared among the school community. The ability of an administrator to
identify how strongly a teacher candidate identifies with these assumptions leads to maintaining and perpetuating the Mennonite culture within the school.

Furthermore, MacNeil et al. (2009) established organizational culture as the most important aspect for a leader to consider with regards to the teacher selection process. Sergiovanni (1994) called for changing the metaphor in education from schools as organizations to schools as communities. His theory indicates leadership of an organization depends on compliance and control through rules, regulations, and monitoring. In communities, connections between people are not based on contractual obligations, but on commitments to other people. And, communities connote a sense of working together for a common purpose, whereas organizations impose a system of rules and regulations from a hierarchical structure. These descriptions of community correlate with the findings in this study regarding “decision-making in community” and “peace-making in Mennonite culture.” The leadership structures of the schools in this study were not hierarchical in nature and the focus within the culture of the schools was not on rules and regulations. The main focus, in these educational settings, revolved around valuing all people and maintaining loving relationships within the community.

Mills (2003) found that service to others and a Christ-centered vision are tenets of a truly Christian community. These findings also corroborate the findings of the current study regarding the importance of the Christ-centered living and the community building foci within the Mennonite school culture. It was evident that each of the school administrators used Christ as the model for Christian living and expected Him to be the model for the employees as well. Furthermore, Palmer (1997) believed that community
is necessary for teaching and learning; and Kofman and Senge (1993) found that spiritual formation in students needs a process, in the context of community, with time to experiment and discover. The strong focus on community in the schools was evident in the interviews. The administrators used the same language and metaphors as the cited authors in linking community with teaching, learning, and spiritual formation.

**Spiritual Formation**

Numerous authors have studied and written about the topic of spiritual disciplines (R. J. Foster, 2002; Macfarlane, 2009; Willard, 2000). These same spiritual disciplines were spoken of by administrators in the current study, and include: prayer, worship, study, fellowship, meditation, service, and celebration. Through the practice of these disciplines, both individually and corporately, teachers and students interact and grow together in spiritual formation. Turner (2013) discussed the dual purpose of developing both individual and community spiritual formation. He said that members of a community encourage and demonstrate spiritual growth to each other, as well as provide a means of accountability for each other. The relevance of community building in this study once again aligns with the literature on the topic of spiritual formation. The ideas of modeling spiritual growth and accountability through relationships also resonate with the themes of Mennonite culture and spiritual formation.

**Models of spiritual formation.** Willet (2010) developed a biblical model of the stages of spiritual development, which recognized the progressive nature of spiritual development, which may commence at any age. His model was also built in light of human development theory, and was broken down into stages, milestones, and core
issues. Fortosis (1992) took issue with this type of theory and cited concerns about formulating stages in the narrow channel of Christian spiritual formation, which included the facts that: (a) people may begin to follow Christ at any age, (b) there are vastly different levels of exposure to Christian thought prior to salvation, (c) inner motives and attitudes are difficult to assess or categorize, and (d) there is a temptation to assess spiritual maturity solely on actions or behavior. This model of spiritual formation developed by Fortosis contains three stages. The first stage is formative integration and is characterized by fluidity and evolution of ideas, egocentric reasoning, theological dogmatism, and less biblical knowledge and discernment. The second stage is responsible consistency and is characterized by solid convictions, other-centered reasoning, less theological dogmatism, and greater biblical knowledge and discernment. The third stage is self-transcendent wholeness and is characterized by secure theology fostering flexibility, self-transcendence for the sake of others, thorough biblical knowledge and wisdom, unwavering faith and being a confronter of public/private injustice. This model more closely aligns with the spiritual formation that is experienced in Mennonite schools. Across the range of students from Kindergarten through 12th grade and their adult teachers, each of these three stages can easily be identified in a school setting. Fortosis explained that teachers must be careful to encourage whatever level of maturity a student is experiencing at any given point in time. The participants in this study were very clear on the need for their teachers to be able to identify the differing levels of maturity and development in their students. This ability to “understand” the student leads to appropriate teaching and mentoring of the student.
This view of spiritual formation can be compared to academic differentiation within a classroom as well. The teacher must have a clear focus on the range of needs within the classroom, both educationally and spiritually. This is a challenging task, which makes the teacher identification and selection process even more daunting. A spiritually mature person is needed in order to assess and facilitate the spiritual growth of a classroom full of students. Teachers should be in the third stage of spiritual formation in order to guide students. Self-transcendence is understood to be the ability to overcome individual limits and desires associated with spiritual contemplation and realization. In other words, the teacher must be Christ-centered and not self-centered. The idea of a secure theology that fosters flexibility is indispensable in working with students who vacillate between spiritual maturity and immaturity. Flexibility speaks to the need for students to be heard and responded to with the patient and loving guidance of teachers who are not threatened by unpredictability. Teachers also need a thorough knowledge of the Bible and the wisdom that grows from that knowledge. The qualities that administrators were seeking when selecting a teacher, line up closely with this third stage of spiritual formation.

**Modeling spiritual formation.** A study by Fleming and Cannister (2010) found that admiration of another person’s faith was the most significant factor in the spiritual formation of high school students’ own spiritual formation. This gives credence to the strong focus which participants in the current study place on the faith journey of prospective teacher candidates. Living out this faith journey and the ability to dialogue with students provides the modeling for a student that is so critically needed to assist in
the progression of spiritual formation. But, as previously stated, there must be a mutually respectful relationship between the student and the teacher in order for the student to truly admire and emulate the teacher’s faith.

Forrest and Lamport (2013) believed that Christian education is more than just content; it is spiritual transformation. The mission statements of each of the schools in this study illustrate that this is a central understanding in Mennonite education. If spiritual formation was not central to the mission of these schools, they would simply be private schools that are centered on academics and extracurricular activities; and the administrators would not have been able to articulate what they are looking for in teachers as they guide students in spiritual formation.

C. R. Foster (2007) found, through his research with students, that they learn spiritual formation from teachers who reach beyond the curriculum and the lectures, and share from their heart as a way of modeling. The core phenomenon related to spiritual formation in the current study was building a relationship through listening and dialogue. Because of this valued relationship, a teacher’s faith journey can be modeled. Through this modeling, teachers are able to encourage students to ask faith questions and move beyond the obstacles of disinterest and fear of the unknown (Macfarlane, 2009; Steibel, 2010). Caution was given that students must not be presented with the idea that a Christian can live a perfect life, but that spiritual formation results in becoming increasingly Christ-like in all aspects of their life over time. These findings align with the results of the current study as evidenced by the senior students and alumni at the Mennonite schools who fondly remembered the caring teachers who listened and guided
them along the way. Students felt safe in asking questions and sharing problems with their teachers. Strong relationships alleviated the fear in asking questions that were “off limits.” Students also spoke about having teachers who were willing to talk about the mistakes that they had made in their own life. These mistakes were life lessons that led to an increased awareness of Christ-like living and the joy that comes from leading a life that is guided by God’s precepts.

Dunn (2001) contrasted the idea of “telling students” as a method of spiritual guidance by teachers, with “pacing students” towards a life that is Christ-centered. The main focus of telling is to get your point across, whereas pacing requires an investment in terms of time and expertise as the teacher “listens” to the student, seeks insight regarding the student’s “stage of development,” discerns how to “relate” to the student, and paces with the student in their own particular “journey of spiritual formation.” Administrators in the current study were not looking for teachers who preferred “telling students” to “listening to and dialoguing with students.” They did not use the term pacing, but spoke about teachers who took the time to get to know students beyond the classroom walls. These teachers developed relationships with the student’s family, and church when possible, and took time to attend special events that were important to their students. Through time and proximity, the teachers developed a more accurate view of where the student was in his or her personal spiritual development and in turn were better able to relate to each student and assist him or her in spiritual formation. The time spent on relationship development parallels the idea of pacing.
G. Smith (2003) added that there is nothing as fundamental to the “Christian journey” as knowing and feeling that “we are loved.” The participants in the current study repeatedly spoke about the need for students to feel loved by their teachers and to have teachers who model their “faith journey.” Junkin (2009) said that transformation begins with encountering God in a personal way and proceeds through experiencing the living God in the “community of faith.” Identifying and selecting teachers who understand the culture, fit within the community of faith, and will then build meaningful relationships with students, for the purpose of guiding spiritual formation, became clear as the central goal of the Mennonite school administrators. There was agreement that this was the most important role that they filled because of the long-term and lasting effects that each teacher has on his or her students. Fulfillment of the missions of the schools rests squarely on the shoulders of the adults who are selected to teach the students. The results of the studies included in the theoretical review, and the findings in the current study, are in close alignment. The themes of relationship building, listening, and modeling a faith journey within a Christian community, are all central in the process of spiritual formation.

Relationship. The theoretical review for this study was not used as a reference point for data analysis or coding during the actual research process. No specific research studies or related theories were used as a guide, which would have biased the results of this study. As part of this discussion section, however, the theoretical review was explained in order to determine potential resonance between the findings in the current study with those of past studies. Corroboration between the findings in this study and
theory on the topic of teacher-student relationships, which became the main theme that emerged through data analysis, was clear. Positive relationships between teachers and students were cited as being significantly aligned with effective teacher instruction by Marzano (2011). He went on to say that a student’s perception of his or her relationship with a teacher is based on how teachers act toward the student, not on how the teacher perceives the relationship. Marzano also discussed four teacher actions that create positive relations with students: (a) showing interest in the students’ lives, (b) advocating for students, (c) never giving up on students, and (d) acting friendly. Furthermore, positive relationships with students assist in achieving success with all other teacher related strategies. Each of these four teacher actions was expected from teachers who were selected to serve in the Mennonite schools of this study.

All of these actions were cited in interviews with the Mennonite school administrators. The specific wording varied, but the meaning did not. There was a pervasive concern that teachers would be approachable, understanding, respectful, and viewed by students as someone who cared for them in a holistic way. Additional words used by the administrators to describe effective teachers also match those of Stronge and Hindman (2003)—caring, competent, humorous, knowledgeable, demanding, and fair. The main focus of the selection process for Mennonite school administrators was to intentionally identify these characteristics in teacher candidates, and to identify the extent to which they will be a natural part of the teacher’s relationship with students.

In summary, the relationship of the teacher to the student is central to facilitating all of the other processes that a teacher is charged with doing. The central theme of
relationship sets the stage for listening and dialogue to occur as the teacher lives out his
or her faith journey as a model and guide for spiritual transformation, which is a central
focus in Mennonite schools.

Reflections

This study was born in the context of a lifelong career as an educator and
administrator in four different Mennonite Schools Council member schools and a deep
commitment to the continuing success of these schools for the good of the students they
serve. The need to guard against bias, to the degree possible, goes without saying.

During all aspects of the study, I attempted to guide my thinking, the questions I asked,
and the data analysis from the point of view of a person who did not have an in-depth
knowledge of Mennonite education. In addition, I worked with a peer de-briefer who
reviewed the transcripts and emergent coding categories. These discussions helped
confirm that my process and coding were reasonable and thorough. Each of the
participants was also given the chance to respond to the emergent themes and analysis
through reading and responding to the results. After the first few interviews I sensed that
the participants might be leaving out certain details in their answers with the assumption
that I already knew the background information. While this was likely true, I did not
want their answers to be different because of who was conducting the interview. From
that point, at the beginning of each interview, I asked the participants to assume that I did
not know anything about Anabaptist Mennonite education when giving their answers.

On the positive side, my familiarity with Mennonite education and the participants in the
study made my entrance into the field of study very easy. The process of developing a comfortable relationship with the participants did not hinder the interviews.

Because of the high level of collegiality among the Mennonite Schools Council administrators, I believe that the results of this study may have been more closely aligned across the administrators than may be the case if the study were replicated in denominationally affiliated schools without close organizational ties. The administrators in this study meet three times a year for extended professional and spiritual development. They frequently experience professional development with the same speakers and discuss professional and spiritual topics together in deep and personal ways. Subsequently, best practices and resources are freely shared across the schools, leading to a commonality in thought and process. That being said, the schools and their communities do have distinct personalities and characteristics that lead to local differences in educational and spiritual thought and practice.

In Chapter 1, I revealed assumptions that I had going into this study. I heard many things in the interviews that didn’t surprise me because of my participation in the Mennonite Schools Council throughout the years, my relationship with each of the participants, and the fact that I have visited most of the schools in the study. Although I expected common themes in the interviews, I did not anticipate how very closely those themes would align. The identification of relationship, and the interaction of listening and dialogue within relationship, seemed to be a mirror image in each of the schools. The administrators had slightly different language in describing these themes, but the meaning was clear and seamless as discussed previously. And, the strength of conviction
that surrounded these themes was striking. The testimony of the Senior students and alumni to the powerful impact of the teachers provided unmistakable credence to the teacher characteristics that the administrators looked for, and the effectiveness of these teachers.

I was not surprised to find the high degree of emphasis that is placed on academic excellence in the schools. The strong emphasis on spiritual formation in the schools was anticipated, but it was discussed somewhat differently than I imagined. I expected to hear more talk about the “programmed” efforts towards spiritual formation, such as Bible classes, chapels, and service projects. These were unmistakably important and present in the schools, but they seemed to be more of an offshoot in leading a Christ-centered life rather than the focus. This was encouraging as it exhibited the student-centered disposition of the school rather than a program-centered approach.

The Christ-centered, community building, and peace-making themes were expected as they are a reflection of the larger Anabaptist Mennonite understanding of how to live a Christian life. Because I had not prioritized the categorical themes during the analysis, with the exception of the spiritual formation themes, I was not expecting the member checking activity to bring a focus to the higher priority being given to being Christ-centered in the Mennonite culture. This made sense once it was raised, given that community building and peace-making are understood as a natural part of living a Christ-centered life.

If I were to recreate this study, I would be tempted to explore the idea of intuition, as a component of teacher selection, earlier in the interviews, although, I would also not
want to “guide” or “lead” the participants into a train of thought that was created by me as the researcher. Intuition seemed to be a common concept, although very illusive in definition. Intuition appeared to develop with length of service and may be parallel with the idea of professional practice leading to more informed decision making. The biblical concept of wisdom being developed and enhanced through a relationship with God would also likely resonate with the participants of this study.

The results of this study provide evidence that strong teacher-student relationships are central to the effective functioning of teachers across the domains of teaching practice. Specifically within the Mennonite school context, there is a clear focus on the teacher modeling their faith journey and being able to encourage important dialogue with their students. The listening aspect rises to the top as a proficiency that facilitates positive relationships. Beginning administrators and teachers in Mennonite schools would benefit from discussion and thought around these important themes in the realm of student spiritual formation in Mennonite schools.

**Implications for Mennonite School Leaders**

The results of this study carry both immediate and long-term implications for administrators in Mennonite schools. In 2009, the Mennonite Schools Council produced a resource titled *Handbook to Establish a Mennonite School* (Eby, 2009). The handbook includes topics such as an overview of the Mennonite Schools Council, making the case for Mennonite schools, a philosophy of Mennonite education, curriculum, pedagogy, setting up a new school, school finance, and the role of a school board. The topic of how to identify teacher candidates who will be proficient in guiding students in spiritual
formation would be a perfect fit for a publication of this type. Findings from this research would add to knowledge base being offered to boards and administrators who are establishing a new Mennonite school in the future. The handbook is also helpful to established Mennonite schools and administrators who are seeking to identify best practices in Mennonite education.

The findings from this study also gave rise to recommendations for Mennonite school administrators and board members:

1. Clearly identify the theological underpinnings and church relationships that are pervasive and valued in the school culture prior to teacher selection.
2. Develop a teacher selection plan that supports and perpetuates the cultural and theological ideals of the school and its constituency.
3. Ensure that the Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective (CFMP; General Conference Mennonite Church, 1995) is thoroughly presented and explained to candidates, highlighting the portions that lead to goodness of fit in the local setting, if this is a foundational document for the institution.
4. Identify the CFMP articles that are most important to the local school community and develop questions, both written and oral, that assess the teacher candidate’s alignment with these beliefs.
5. Thoroughly assess the ideas of relationship, listening/dialogue, and faith journey, in the context of guiding spiritual formation of students, in order to develop a teacher selection process that identifies teacher strengths in these areas.
6. Strongly consider the inclusion of an onsite teaching demonstration, with students, where teacher candidates are observed relating to students in a classroom setting.

7. As an administrative team and board, reach clear agreement on the specific aspects of teacher/student relationships that are valued and supported in the local school community.

This research identifies strong congruence in values related to Spiritual Formation in the Mennonite Schools Council member schools. Each school should be very deliberate in assessing these values in the context of their own culture and goodness of fit criteria.

Based on the findings of this study, questions designed to evaluate a teacher candidate’s strengths in guiding student spiritual formation can be developed. The following questions are examples of those that may be helpful to this process:

1. What is your understanding of an appropriate teacher/student relationship, given the teacher’s role as a spiritual guide for students in a school setting?

2. Do you see a difference between guiding students and instructing students? If so, elaborate on the differences.

3. What is the balance between listening to students describe their spiritual/life journey and your personal input towards guiding them in their journey?

4. Discuss your personal faith journey. How will your faith journey be used in the process of guiding the spiritual formation of students?

5. Describe your understanding of respect in teacher/student relationships.
6. How do you develop appropriate relationships with students and define the boundaries of those relationships in the context of a holistic view of the student?

Research findings, as a continuing process of learning, naturally lead to recommendations for future research as discussed in the next section.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The current research was conducted in order to study the identification and selection of teachers equipped to guide students in spiritual formation in Mennonite schools. Future research of this nature could be helpful in expanding the understanding of teacher identification and selection in faith-based schools and the organizational contexts in which they operate. In addition, extended research could lead to data-based structured interviews for the purpose of identifying and selecting teachers who excel in proficiencies within a spiritual domain in faith-based schools:

1. The current study focused on schools within the Mennonite Schools Council, and only schools within the United States. An interesting comparison, through a similar study, could be made with Mennonite schools in other countries or Mennonite schools that relate strictly to the Conservative Mennonite Conference. What are the differences and similarities in how other Mennonite related schools identify and select teachers who are equipped to guide their students in spiritual formation?

2. The initial idea for the current research study emanated from the use of structured interviews for hiring teachers in public schools. The question of
what a structured interview would look like, when assessing skills in the
domain of spiritual formation in students, was considered. The volume of
research necessary to create a data-based structured interview far surpasses the
scope of this doctoral dissertation study. Future research and development of
structured interview questions for faith-based schools could be beneficial to
the administrators of the schools.

3. The realm of selecting teachers based on intuition or instinct was briefly
explored. The procedural steps in identifying and selecting teachers in
schools have been well-researched. These studies have centered most
specifically on public schools and within the context of the “science” of
teacher selection. Research centered on the role that intuition or instinct, as an
“art,” play in identifying and selecting teachers could expand scholarly
literature for the benefit of both public and faith-based schools.

4. Research into the perceived degree of success in selecting teachers who are
equipped to guide students in spiritual formation, in Mennonite and other
faith-based schools would extend and add depth to the knowledge base that
has been achieved through this study. Administrators were able to articulate
what spiritual formation related qualities they sought in teacher candidates,
and to a certain extent, how they made a final selection of a teacher. A logical
next step would be to study their perceptions of success in choosing the right
candidates over time.
5. A replication of this study in other faith-based schools, which are rooted in
different denominations or in other religions, would shed light on the
similarities and differences in what these schools are looking for within the
spiritual domain of teacher proficiencies. For example, how do administrators
in Baptist schools identify and select teachers who are equipped to guide
students in spiritual formation? Or, how do administrators in Islamic schools
identify and select teachers who are equipped to guide students in spiritual
formation?

6. Spiritual formation is a domain that is of particular interest to faith-based
schools. There may be teacher domains in other private schools for which a
similar study would be informative. Presumably, a school for the arts would
seek to expand the appreciation of students for all of the fine arts, and would
want to hire teachers who are equipped to guide students in developing this
appreciation. How would they identify and select teachers, especially those
teaching academic subjects, who would further the artistic mission of the
school most successfully? A qualitative study of this type could focus on
domains other than the spiritual domain.

**Conclusion**

For the administrators in this study, the identification and selection of teachers
who are equipped to guide their students in spiritual formation center on the teacher’s
ability to form meaningful relationships with those students. These relationships then
allow the teacher to listen to and dialogue with the students about their faith journey, that
of the student and their own, for the purpose of guiding spiritual formation in the students. Establishing a fit, between the teacher and the school, through the initial assessment of theological position, professional preparation, and a student-centered disposition are important parts of the screening process for teacher candidates.

In addition, a thorough understanding of the Mennonite school culture and its interaction with fit and spiritual formation is integral to the teacher identification and selection processes. The Mennonite culture of the schools in this study can be described in terms of Christ-centered living, community building, and peace-making. The high level of agreement among these Mennonite school administrators, as discovered through qualitative data analysis, illustrates the commonality of mission and the unity in purpose across the schools. The strength of collegial relations through the work of the Mennonite Schools Council was evident throughout this study. The work of the council on projects such as: Anabaptist Learning Institute, Mennonite Educators Certificate, Mennonite Education Agency accreditation, Mennonite School Distinctives, and commissioning a book project on the benefits of Mennonite education is a model for other faith-based school groups. The unity in purpose and themes surrounding the identification and selection of teachers within these schools is striking, and also serves as a model for Mennonite schools that may be established in the future.
APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

CONFESSION OF FAITH IN A MENNONITE PERSPECTIVE
Appendix A

Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective

Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective—Summary Statement

1. We believe that God exists and is pleased with all who draw near by faith. We worship the one holy and loving God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit eternally. God has created all things visible and invisible, has brought salvation and new life to humanity through Jesus Christ, and continues to sustain the church and all things until the end of the age.

2. We believe in Jesus Christ, the Word of God become flesh. He is the Savior of the world, who has delivered us from the dominion of sin and reconciled us to God by his death on a cross. He was declared to be Son of God by his resurrection from the dead. He is the head of the church, the exalted Lord, the Lamb who was slain, coming again to reign with God in glory.

3. We believe in the Holy Spirit, the eternal Spirit of God, who dwelled in Jesus Christ, who empowers the church, who is the source of our life in Christ, and who is poured out on those who believe as the guarantee of redemption.

4. We believe that all Scripture is inspired by God through the Holy Spirit for instruction in salvation and training in righteousness. We accept the Scriptures as the Word of God and as the fully reliable and trustworthy standard for Christian faith and life. Led by the Holy Spirit in the church, we interpret Scripture in harmony with Jesus Christ.
5. We believe that God has **created the heavens and the earth** and all that is in them, and that God preserves and renews what has been made. All creation has its source outside itself and belongs to the Creator. The world has been created good because God is good and provides all that is needed for life.

6. We believe that God has **created human beings** in the divine image. God formed them from the dust of the earth and gave them a special dignity among all the works of creation. Human beings have been made for relationship with God, to live in peace with each other, and to take care of the rest of creation.

7. We confess that, beginning with Adam and Eve, humanity has disobeyed God, given way to the tempter, and chosen to **sin**. All have fallen short of the Creator’s intent, marred the image of God in which they were created, disrupted order in the world, and limited their love for others. Because of sin, humanity has been given over to the enslaving powers of evil and death.

8. We believe that, through Jesus Christ, God offers **salvation** from sin and a new way of life. We receive God’s salvation when we repent and accept Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. In Christ, we are reconciled with God and brought into the reconciling community. We place our faith in God that, by the same power that raised Christ from the dead, we may be saved from sin to follow Christ and to know the fullness of salvation.

9. We believe that the **church** is the assembly of those who have accepted God’s offer of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. It is the new community of disciples sent
into the world to proclaim the reign of God and to provide a foretaste of the church’s glorious hope. It is the new society established and sustained by the Holy Spirit.

10. We believe that the **mission** of the church is to proclaim and to be a sign of the kingdom of God. Christ has commissioned the church to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them, and teaching them to observe all things he has commanded.

11. We believe that the **baptism** of believers with water is a sign of their cleansing from sin. Baptism is also a pledge before the church of their covenant with God to walk in the way of Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. Believers are baptized into Christ and his body by the Spirit, water, and blood.

12. We believe that the **Lord’s Supper** is a sign by which the church thankfully remembers the new covenant which Jesus established by his death. In this communion meal, the church renews its covenant with God and with each other and participates in the life and death of Jesus Christ, until he comes.

13. We believe that in **washing the feet** of his disciples, Jesus calls us to serve one another in love as he did. Thus we acknowledge our frequent need of cleansing, renew our willingness to let go of pride and worldly power, and offer our lives in humble service and sacrificial love.

14. We practice **discipline** in the church as a sign of God’s offer of transforming grace. Discipline is intended to liberate erring brothers and sisters from sin, and to restore them to a right relationship with God and to fellowship in the church. The practice of discipline gives integrity to the church’s witness in the world.
15. We believe that ministry is a continuation of the work of Christ, who gives gifts through the Holy Spirit to all believers and empowers them for service in the church and in the world. We also believe that God calls particular persons in the church to specific leadership ministries and offices. All who minister are accountable to God and to the community of faith.

16. We believe that the church of Jesus Christ is one body with many members, ordered in such a way that, through the one Spirit, believers may be built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.

17. We believe that Jesus Christ calls us to discipleship, to take up our cross and follow him. Through the gift of God’s saving grace, we are empowered to be disciples of Jesus, filled with his Spirit, following his teachings and his path through suffering to new life. As we are faithful to his way, we become conformed to Christ and separated from the evil in the world.

18. We believe that to be a disciple of Jesus is to know life in the Spirit. As the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ takes shape in us, we grow in the image of Christ and in our relationship with God. The Holy Spirit is active in individual and in communal worship, leading us deeper into the experience of God.

19. We believe that God intends human life to begin in families and to be blessed through families. Even more, God desires all people to become part of the church, God’s family. As single and married members of the church family give and receive nurture and healing, families can grow toward the wholeness that God intends. We are called to chastity and to loving faithfulness in marriage.
20. We commit ourselves to tell the truth, to give a simple yes or no, and to avoid the swearing of oaths.

21. We believe that everything belongs to God, who calls the church to live in faithful stewardship of all that God has entrusted to us, and to participate now in the rest and justice which God has promised.

22. We believe that peace is the will of God. God created the world in peace, and God’s peace is most fully revealed in Jesus Christ, who is our peace and the peace of the whole world. Led by the Holy Spirit, we follow Christ in the way of peace, doing justice, bringing reconciliation, and practicing nonresistance, even in the face of violence and warfare.

23. We believe that the church is God’s holy nation, called to give full allegiance to Christ its head and to witness to every nation, government, and society about God’s saving love.

24. We place our hope in the reign of God and its fulfillment in the day when Christ will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead. He will gather his church, which is already living under the reign of God. We await God’s final victory, the end of this present age of struggle, the resurrection of the dead, and a new heaven and a new earth. There the people of God will reign with Christ in justice, righteousness, and peace for ever and ever.

Source: https://www.mennolink.org/doc/cof/summary.html
APPENDIX B

MENNONITE SCHOOL TEACHER APPLICATIONS
Appendix B

Mennonite School Teacher Applications

Example 1

Application for a Professional Position

PERSONAL PROFILE

LAST NAME \hspace{1cm} FIRST \hspace{1cm} MIDDLE

Present Address \hspace{2cm} Telephone (\hspace{1cm}) \hspace{1cm} -

CITY \hspace{1cm} STATE \hspace{1cm} ZIP CODE

Permanent Address \hspace{2cm} Telephone (\hspace{1cm}) \hspace{1cm} -

CITY \hspace{1cm} STATE \hspace{1cm} ZIP CODE

Marital Status: Are you separated from your spouse, divorced, remarried, or married to a divorced person? Yes □ No □ If "yes," please explain _________________

Denomination \hspace{1cm} Congregation

What grades do you prefer (circle one or more)? Pre-K \hspace{1cm} 1 \hspace{1cm} 2 \hspace{1cm} 3 \hspace{1cm} 4 \hspace{1cm} 5 \hspace{1cm} Middle School \hspace{1cm} High School

List in order the three subjects you feel best qualified to teach. _________________

What extracurricular activities do you feel capable of directing? _________________

What are your career goals? _________________

Why are you applying for a position with this school? _________________
EDUCATIONAL AND EMPLOYMENT BACKGROUND

High School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Undergraduate Colleges and Universities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Institution</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Degree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major</th>
<th>No. of Sem. Hrs</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>No. of Sem. Hrs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of semester hours in professional education courses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Supervised Student Teaching</th>
<th>Name of School</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Grade/Subject</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Graduate Colleges & Universities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Institution</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Degree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Regular Teaching Experience

List all experience chronologically. Indicate part-time teaching by an asterisk. Do not include substitute teaching unless it was a full-time position.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inclusive Dates</th>
<th>Name of School</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Public/Private</th>
<th>Grade/Subject</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other Employment

List chronologically all non-teaching work experience.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inclusive Dates</th>
<th>Kind of Work</th>
<th>Employer and Address</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(If necessary, enclose sheet with additional listings of any above items.)
REFERENCES

List the names of three people who have written you letters of recommendation or of your qualifications for teaching.

Name | Position | Phone Number


Teaching Certificate Held: State or Agency | Type | Expiration Date

Please ask your college to have your confidential placement credentials sent to this school.

When and why did you leave your last position?

Have you ever been dismissed or asked to resign from a teaching position? Yes ☐ No ☐

(If "yes," give details on a separate sheet.)

Have you ever been convicted of, or are you currently charged with, any offense involving dishonesty, breach of trust, moral turpitude, or any other type of misconduct or felony? Yes ☐ No ☐

(If "yes," give details on a separate sheet.)

When can you begin a position, if appointed?

Are you under contract at the time of making this application? ☐ Yes ☐ No

for the ensuing year?

What is the latest date by which you may resign without violating your contract?

May your present employer be contacted Yes ☐ No ☐

(If "yes," explain)

Present Salary Minimum Acceptable Salary

CERTIFICATION

I give the school and its designated representatives permission to contact the schools, employers, and references named in this application and to investigate the information I have provided and to seek and obtain any other information the school considers relevant. I release the school and its representatives and the persons and organizations who provide this information from any liability for doing so.

I further waive the right ever to personally view any references given to the school.

In addition, I declare all my statements and answers which are part of this application to be complete and correct to the best of my knowledge.

Signature Date
STATEMENTS OF CHRISTIAN FAITH AND COMMITMENTS

(Please attach responses to questions 1, 2, and 3 on separate sheets of paper)

1. Write a spiritual autobiography. Include your personal relationship to Christ, your personal relationship to the church, and your philosophy of Christian life and commitment.

2. Describe how Christian faith shapes your teaching and relationships.

3. Are you willing to be guided by the sponsoring board of trustees, the cooperating church conference, supporting congregations, and the administration of the school?

4. I have read and am in agreement with the Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective and the school's mission statement and philosophy of education. If any exceptions, please explain.

Date: ___________________ Signed: ___________________

School does not discriminate on the basis of sex, race, handicap, or national or ethnic origin.
Example 2

EMPLOYEE APPLICATION

Answer all applicable questions according to position desired

I. PERSONAL DATA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position desired:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Name ________________________________________________
  Last          First          Middle

Address (present): __________________________________________ Phone: ______

Address (permanent): _________________________________________

E-mail Address: ____________________________________________

Married: No, Yes  Spouse's Name: ____________________________

Children: ___________________________________________
  Age ______  Age ______
  Age ______  Age ______

Present Church Affiliation

Congregation: ____________________ Address: __________________

Pastor's Name: ____________________ E-mail address: ____________

II. TRAINING AND CERTIFICATION (Attach separate document to answer questions as needed.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th># Years Attended</th>
<th>Graduated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Graduate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Majors: ____________________ Minors: ____________________

Degree/Diploma: ____________

Majors: ____________________ Minors: ____________________

Degree/Diploma: ____________
III. TEACHING EXPERIENCE (Attach separate document to answer questions as needed.)

Name of School and Location (Subjects Taught, Grade Level, Date, No. of Years)


Teaching position preferred

Subjects and grades in order of preference

Present/estimated teaching salary $________ Minimum salary expected $________

Are you presently under contract? No______ Yes______ Distant________

Please circle the computer software programs you are proficient in.

Word Excel InDesign PowerPoint Photoshop Use of Internet Other________

IV. WORK EXPERIENCE (Attach separate document to answer questions as needed.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employer</th>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Supervisor/Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Salary/wage expectations________

Comments

Please circle the computer software programs you are proficient in.

Word Excel InDesign PowerPoint Photoshop Use of Internet Other________
V. RELATED ACTIVITIES AND INTERESTS

What co-curricular activities have you ever participated in?

What co-curricular activities have you directed? Coaching sports, drama, music

List the titles of the last 2 books you have read.

What are your personal hobbies, special interests, and abilities?

VI. SPECIAL INFORMATION (Attach separate document.)

Write a one-page autobiography answering the following questions:

- Define the characteristics of your parents you most appreciated.
- What activity or activities do you find most helpful in maintaining a personal relationship with Jesus?
- Tell me about the person that had the most influence in your life and why.
- What is the one thing you can do better than almost anyone?
- List the church you presently attend and explain why you chose to attend there.

Reflecting on discipline, what is most important - truth or relationship and why?

If you were hiring a new employee, what are the 3 most important attributes of the person?
VII. REFERENCES (Include name, address, phone and e-mail)

Former employer, superintendent or principal ____________________________

Former colleague, associate teacher _________________________________

Former colleague, associate teacher _________________________________

Former colleague, associate teacher _________________________________

College professor, dean or counselor (if recent graduate) ________________

Personal _________________________________________________________

You are required by the state of ___________ to have a background check completed.

Was there be any surprise information disclosed in the background check? If yes, please list this information. ________________________________

_______________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________

Signature _______________________________________________________

Date Application is submitted _________________________________________

Information submitted on this application will be kept confidential and used only to evaluate the applicant for a position at _______________________________

School does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, or ethnic origin in the hiring of its certified or non-certified personnel.
Mennonite Church Doctrinal Statements

1. God - We believe that God exists and is pleased with all who draw near to him. We worship the one holy and everlasting God, who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We believe that God has created all things visible and invisible, and has brought salvation and new life to humanity through Jesus Christ, and continues to sustain the church and all things until the end of the age.

2. Jesus Christ - We believe in Jesus Christ, the Lord of the universe, who has given us his life and honor. We believe in the resurrection of the dead, and in the coming of Jesus Christ to judge the living and the dead. We believe in the Holy Spirit, the one true God, who has given us his Spirit, who empowers the church, who is the source of our life in Christ, and who is poured out on those who believe as the guarantee of our redemption and of the final destruction of sin.

3. Holy Spirit - We believe in the Holy Spirit, who is the eternal God, who dwells in Jesus Christ, who empowers the church, who is the source of our life in Christ, and who is poured out on those who believe as the guarantee of our redemption and of the final destruction of sin.

4. Scripture - We believe that Scripture is inspired by God through the Holy Spirit for instruction in salvation and training in righteousness. We accept the Scriptures as the Word of God and as the fully reliable and trustworthy standard for Christian faith and life. We seek to understand and interpret God's word in harmony with Jesus Christ as we are led by the Holy Spirit in the church.

5. Creation and the New Creation - We believe that God created the heavens and the earth and all that is in them. We believe that God has created and is still creating the world, and that God has restored the world for us through Jesus Christ and his church, which is the new creation. We believe that God has restored the world for us through Jesus Christ and his church, which is the new creation.

6. The Creation and the New Creation - We believe that God has created human beings in the divine image. God formed them from the dust of the earth and gave them a special dignity among all the works of creation. Human beings have been made for relationship with God, to live in peace with each other, and to take care of the rest of creation.

7. Sin - We confess that, beginning with Adam and Eve, humanity has sinned, given way to the tempter, and chosen to sin. Because of sin, all have fallen short of the Creator's intent, marred the image of God in which they were created, damaged order in the world, and left only death for others. Because of sin, humanity has been given over to the endless powers of evil and death.

8. Salvation - We believe that, through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God offers salvation for all and a new way of life to all people. We receive God's salvation when we repent of sin and accept Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. In Christ, we are reconciled with God and brought into the reconciling community of God's people. We embrace faith in God that, by the same power that raised Christ from the dead, we may be raised from death to life and know the fullness of salvation in the age to come.

9. The Church of Jesus Christ - We believe that the church is the assembly of those who have come to God's people through faith in Jesus Christ. The church is the now-fledged body of believers, and in the world to proclaim the reign of God and to provide a witness of the church's presence among the nations. The church is the new territory established and sustained by the Holy Spirit. The church of Jesus Christ is called to become ever more like Jesus Christ, his Lord, in its worship, mission, witness, mutual love and care, and the witness of common life.

10. The Church of Jesus Christ - We believe that the mission of the church is to present and to be a sign of the kingdom of God. Christ has commissioned the church to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them, and teaching them to observe all that he has commanded.

11. Baptism - We believe that the baptism of believers in water is a sign of their new life in Christ. Baptism is the sign of new life in the church, of new life with Christ to walk in the way of Jesus Christ. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, believers are baptized into Christ and his body by the Spirit, water, and blood.

12. The Lord's Supper - We believe that the Lord's Supper is a sign of the new covenant in Christ established by the church. In this covenant meal, the members of the church renew the covenant with God and with each other. As one body, we participate in the life of Jesus Christ given for the redemption of humankind. Thus we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.
13. Food Sharing - We believe that in sharing the last of his disciples Jesus Christ called us to serve one another in love as he did. We are called to follow the example of our Lord, who chose to serve in the washing of his disciple feet. Thus we acknowledge our membership in his body, renew our willingness to serve one another in love, and confess our lives in the service and sacrifice of God.

14. Discipline in the Church - We believe that the practice of discipline in the church is a sign of God's offer of forgiveness and transforming grace to believers who are mingling away from sinful disobedience or who have been overtaken by sin. Discipline is intended to release the church from sin, enable them to return to a right relationship with God, and to restore them to fellowship in the church. It is given in grace to the church's witness and contributes to the eschatological role of the gospel message in the world.

15. Ministry and Leadership - We believe that ministry continues the work of Christ, who gave gifts through the Holy Spirit to all believers and empowered them for service in the church and in the world. We believe that those who call particular persons in the church to specific leadership functions and offices are those ministers accountable to God and to the community of faith as they serve the church.

16. Church Order and Unity - We believe that the church of Jesus Christ is one body with many members, ordinate in such a way that, through the one Spirit, believers may be built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.

17. Discipleship and the Christian Life - We believe that Jesus Christ calls us to discipleship, to take up our cross and follow him. Through the gift of the Holy Spirit, we are empowered to be disciples of Jesus, to follow his teachings and live a life of love and service. By faith we walk in Christ's way, we are being transformed into his likeness, and we come to God in the spirit of service.

18. Christian Spirituality - We believe that to be a disciple of Jesus is to know him in the Spirit. As we experience the presence of God, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we are transformed into his likeness, and we grow in the image of Christ.

19. Family, Singleness, and Marriage - We believe that God intends human relationships to be a reflection of his own. As a single or married member of the church, we are to be stewards of our time and talents, and to foster relationships that are rooted in Christ. We are called to cherish the gifts God has given us in marriage.

20. Truth and the Authority of God - We commit ourselves to the truth, to give a simple yet clear, and to live a meaning of that truth.

21. Christian Stewardship - We believe that everything belongs to God, who calls us to do as faithful stewards of all that God has entrusted to us, and to proclaim as the word of God's promise.

22. Peace, Justice, and Nonviolence - We believe that peace is the will of God. God created the world in peace, and God's peace is most fully revealed in Jesus Christ, who is our peace and the peace of the world. Led by the Holy Spirit, we follow Christ in the way of peace, seeking justice, bringing reconciliation, and practicing nonviolence even in the face of opposition and harm.

23. The Church as a Part of Government and Society - We believe that the church is a part of God's 'kingdom', called to give full allegiance to Christ as head and to witness to every nation, government, and society what God's saving love is.

24. The Role of God - We place our hope in the reign of God and in its fulfillment in the city when Christ returned. God will restore order and justice in the world through Christ. God will restore order in the Gentile world, restoring theDispensary for a new heaven and a new earth. The people of God will reign with Christ in justice, righteousness, and peace.

If employed by . . . , School, I certify to give this work priority, to labor faithfully, in exemplary, and to observe the principles and standards held by this institution.

Signature

Date
REFERENCES
REFERENCES


Miles, M. (1971) Planned change and organizational health: Figure and ground. 
Administering Human Resources (Francis M. Trusty, ed.). Berkley, CA: 
McCutchan.

Christian Belief, 7*(2), 129-142.

and applicant reactions. *International Journal of Selection and Assessment, 8*(4), 
237-247.

of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care, 6*(1), 11-17.

Ng, Y (2012). Spiritual development in the classroom: Pupils’ and educators’ learning 


culture: A profile comparison approach to assessing person-organization fit. 

Quarterly, 25*(1), 129-141.

Sociology, 11*, 457-483.


Rickabaugh, B. L. (2013). Eternal life as knowledge of God: An epistemology of knowledge by acquaintance and spiritual formation. *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care, 6*(2), 204-228.


Stern, P. N. (2012). On solid ground: Essential properties for growing grounded theory.


Vanhoozer, K. J. (2009). *Is there a meaning in this text?: The Bible, the reader, and the morality of literary knowledge.* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.


