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Exemplary Leadership: A Mixed-Methods Case Study Discovering How
Special Education Leaders Create Meaning

A Dissertation by

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Irvine, California

School of Education

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

August 2019

Committee in charge:


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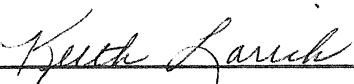
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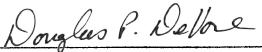
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This dissertation is dedicated to my children, Edin Quinn VanderVennet and Asher Timothy VanderVennet. May you always find meaning in what you do in your lives. You both unknowingly sacrificed endless hours for me to complete this journey and my greatest hope is that sacrifice will add knowledge that creates a more meaningful world for you to live in. I love you both deeper than is possible to capture. You both are my “why”.

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Thank you to the three special education leaders and the 35 teachers who took time out of their summer vacations and busy schedules to selflessly support my research. I have the utmost respect and gratitude for all of you. I hope your time was not in vain and that some movement toward a more meaningful and functional system is in our future.

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ABSTRACT

Exemplary Leadership: A Mixed-Methods Case Study Discovering How Special Education

Administrators Create Meaning

by Julia Schnack VanderVennet

Purpose: The purpose of this mixed-methods case study was to identify and describe the behaviors that exemplary Special Education administrators use to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers through character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration. In addition, it is the purpose of this study to determine the degree of importance to which special education teachers perceive the behaviors related to character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration help to create personal and organizational meaning.

Methodology: The current mixed-methods study obtained in depth qualitative data through interviews from 3 exemplary special education administrators. Following the qualitative interview process, quantitative online surveys were sent to twelve of their special education followers. The results of the qualitative interviews and the quantitative survey data were compared for triangulation.

Findings: Qualitative data from this study indicate that exemplary special education administrators use behavior from the three domains of character, relationships and vision. Similar to the qualitative data, the survey data yielded results of findings spread across three of the five leadership domains—character, relationships, and wisdom. As such, both qualitative and quantitative data showed findings in character and relationships. However, qualitative data supports vision and quantitative data supports wisdom.

Conclusions: Special education administrators must use an interplay of behaviors from the five meaning-maker domains (character, relationships, vision, and wisdom) in order to create meaning for themselves and their followers. Furthermore, special education administrators create meaning through authenticity, transparency, concern for well-being, shared student-centered vision planning, and use their moral compass to create a culture of “doing what is right”.

Recommendations: It is recommended that this study be further explored through a mixed-methods approach to both leaders and followers in addition to expanding to other populations and geographical areas. Additionally, a pure qualitative study with special education administrators to better understand the special education drivers that affect meaning could be powerful information for the field. Furthermore, a case study examining special education teacher who leave the field could contribute information on the high attrition rates in special education.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION	1
Background.....	2
History of Special Education Law	2
Special Education Administrators	4
Special Education Teachers.....	6
Meaning/Creating Meaning.....	9
Theoretical Framework.....	11
Problem Statement.....	12
Purpose Statement	13
Research Questions.....	14
Significance of the Problem	14
Definitions	16
Exemplary.....	16
Theoretical definition	16
Operational definition.....	16
Meaning	16
Theoretical definition	16
Operational definition.....	16
Character.....	17
Theoretical definition.	17
Operational definition.....	17
Vision.....	17
Theoretical definition.	17
Operational definition.....	17
Relationships	17
Theoretical definition.	17
Operational definition.....	18
Wisdom.....	18
Theoretical definition.	18
Operational definition.....	18
Inspiration.....	18

Theoretical definition	18
Operational definition.....	18
Followership	18
Theoretical definition	18
Operational definition.....	19
Delimitations	19
Organization of the Study.....	19
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	21
Special Education	21
Legal Implications on Special Education	22
Impact of Special Education Underfunding	24
Special Education Administrator Impact.....	25
Special Education Teacher Impact	26
School/Family Disagreement	27
Labor Unions	29
Theoretical Foundation on Meaning.....	30
Followership	34
Meaning-Maker Construct.....	36
Meaning-Maker Domains.....	38
Character.....	38
Vision.....	39
Relationships	40
Wisdom.....	41
Inspiration.....	42
Integration of Leadership Domains	43
Research Gap.....	43
Summary.....	44
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY	46
Overview	46
Purpose Statement	46
Research Questions.....	47
Research Design	47

Mixed-Method Rationale.....	48
Qualitative Research Design	49
Quantitative Research Design	49
Population.....	50
Target Population	51
Qualitative Sample	52
Quantitative Sample	55
Instrumentation.....	58
Qualitative Instrumentation	58
Quantitative Instrumentation	59
Reliability and Validity	59
Field Testing Interviews	61
Field Testing Surveys	61
Intercoder Reliability.....	62
Triangulation	62
Data Collection.....	63
Data Analysis.....	64
Limitations.....	66
Time.....	66
Distance	67
Researcher as an Instrument of Study	67
Sample Size	67
Summary.....	67
CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS	69
Purpose Statement	69
Research Questions.....	69
Research Methods and Data-Collection Procedures	70
Population.....	70
Sample	70
Qualitative Sample	70
Quantitative Sample	72
Demographic Data.....	72

Presentation and Analysis of Data.....	74
Intercoder Reliability.....	75
Data Analysis for Research Question 1.....	75
Data Analysis for Meaning-Maker Domains.....	75
Participant A.....	76
Participant B.....	76
Participant C.....	77
Summary of Data Collected for Individual Meaning-Maker Domains.....	79
Character.....	81
Vision.....	84
Relationships.....	86
Wisdom.....	89
Inspiration.....	92
Summary of Qualitative Data.....	94
Meaning-Maker Domains in Concert: Unprompted Interview Data.....	96
Data Analysis for Research Question 2.....	97
Character.....	98
Vision.....	99
Relationships.....	101
Wisdom.....	103
Inspiration.....	107
Findings Related to the Five Meaning-Maker Domains.....	109
Research Question One Findings.....	109
Character (Qualitative).....	109
Vision (Qualitative).....	110
Relationships (Qualitative).....	110
Wisdom (Qualitative).....	111
Inspiration (Qualitative).....	111
Research Question Two Findings.....	112
Character (Quantitative).....	112
Relationships (Quantitative).....	112
Wisdom (Quantitative).....	113
Integration of Meaning-Maker Domains (Qualitative and Quantitative Comparison).....	113
Unexpected Findings.....	114
Summary.....	114
 CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	 116

Methodology Review	116
Key Findings.....	118
Research Question One Key Findings.....	118
Character (Qualitative).....	118
Vision (Qualitative).....	121
Relationships (Qualitative).....	121
Research Question Two Key Findings.....	124
Character (Quantitative).....	124
Relationships (Quantitative).....	125
Wisdom (Quantitative).....	125
Integration of Meaning-Maker Domains (Qualitative and Quantitative Comparison)	126
Unexpected Findings	127
Conclusions	128
Conclusion 1	128
Conclusion 2	130
Conclusion 3	131
Conclusion 4	131
Conclusion 5	132
Conclusion 6	133
Implications for Action.....	134
Implication for Action 1: Professional Development.....	134
Implication for Action 2: Preparation Programs	136
Implication for Action 3: Hiring Practices	137
Implication for Action 4: Professional Associations.....	137
Implication for Action 5: Special Education Teacher Mentorship.....	138
Implication for Action 6: Political Action.....	139
Education.....	140
Recommendations for Future Research.....	141
Concluding Remarks and Reflections	143
References	145
Appendices	158

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1	64
Table 2	73
Table 3	74
Table 4	78
Table 5	80
Table 6	81
Table 7	84
Table 8	87
Table 9	89
Table 10	92
Table 11	95
Table 12	96
Table 13	99
Table 14	101
Table 15	103
Table 16	106
Table 17	108

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.....	32
Figure 2.....	56
Figure 3.....	80
Figure 4.....	82
Figure 5.....	84
Figure 6.....	87
Figure 7.....	90
Figure 8.....	92

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Humans have long been on a pilgrimage to find meaning in their personal and professional lives (Koltko-Rivera, 2006; Phupheli, 2005), which is a critical factor for sustained happiness (Bartels, 2017). Centuries ago, Aristotle eloquently stated, “Pleasure in the job puts perfection in the work,” leading to the idea that meaningful work experiences create benefits for the person and the organization (Frankl, 2017). At least 35% of a person’s total waking hours over a 50-year working-life period is spent at work (assuming 8 hours of sleep a night), which accounts for at least 50% of one’s total waking hours during any given working day (Thompson, 2016). Although work is a necessary requirement for economic stability, in order to work, people are sacrificing their leisure time, physical/emotional health, and time with those they cherish most—their children, spouses, siblings, parents, and friends. Yet, current data suggest that people feel that work is not meaningful. Accenture reports that 31% of people quit their jobs because of dissatisfaction with company leadership and 43% leave because they feel undervalued through a lack of recognition (Hall, 2013). A growing body of research across all organizations suggests that leadership has a profound impact on job satisfaction. Transformational leadership strategies are helping to create personal and professional meaning in the workplace and mediating feelings of worthlessness (Bartels, 2017; Herrera, 2017; Hodge, 2017; Thompson, 2018; Villanueva, 2017). Specifically, five transformational leadership behaviors—character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration—facilitate feelings of personal and professional meaning. These leadership behaviors enhance personal meaning for employees in all organizations (Bartels, 2017; Herrera, 2017; Hodge, 2017; Thompson, 2018; Villanueva, 2017).

Public K-12 school districts have similar needs for these leadership behaviors that facilitate personal meaning. Public-school employee attrition rates are at an all-time high

(Bilingsley, 2002). K-12 education employees face more challenges than ever before due to fiscal and educational demands. Within K-12 education, one of the most challenging educational programs is special education.

Special education is thought to involve more challenges than most areas in K-12, due to the litigious culture that has developed and the high degree of federal and state regulation in this area. Consequently, excessive paperwork and high-conflict meetings that are required by these legal mandates contribute to work-related stress associated with high depersonalization rates and emotional exhaustion (Kucuksuleymanoglu, 2011; Saricam & Sakiz, 2014; Tyler & Brunner, 2014). Typically, special education teachers are managed by special education administrators, a district-level position. Accordingly, there is a dire need to examine the transformational leadership behaviors of special education administrators.

These dynamic factors have led to the belief that more than any other K-12 administrative position, special education administrators must have the highest level of transformational leadership skills to provide and maintain meaning for the special education teachers under their supervision. In spite of the leadership needs for the staff who educate 10-12% of all students, there is little research about how special education leaders create and maintain personal and professional meaning in this environment. Thus, additional research is needed to determine how special education administrators have impacts to those of other leaders in the meaning-makers body of research.

Background

History of Special Education Law

Prior to 1975, children with disabilities were not viewed as contributing members of society with equal access to public education. PL 94-142, otherwise known as the Education for

All Handicapped Children Act, was enacted in 1975 by Congress—a landmark law that guaranteed a free and appropriate public education to all children despite their disability (US Department of Education, 2010). This population of children was fated to institutionalization and had no hope for education or rehabilitation prior to the passage of the law. There was a firm line of segregation between those who were viewed as “able” versus “disabled” (US Department of Education, 2010; Lachman, 2017). Public Law 94-142 stood as the first step in an attempt to equalize access for all children—with or without disabilities. PL 94-142 was comprised of four main drivers: to ensure that children with disabilities were appropriately identified and educated, to determine if the educational efforts were successful, to give due-process rights to children and families, and to give public school districts financial ability to accomplish this mission (US Department of Education, 2010). These four drivers changed lives and gave new opportunity to many marginalized students who previously never had access or opportunity to succeed despite their disability. Furthermore, PL 94-142, amended in 1997, led to the development of the core law driving special education in modern day public education, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (US Department of Education, 2010).

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is the driving force behind special education. It provides the legal and ethical parameters for how children with disabilities are granted access to an equal education. The driving force behind IDEA is to ensure that children have access to a free and appropriate education (FAPE) at public expense despite their identified disability (US Department of Education, 2010). Public-school administrators and teachers are bound to the laws of IDEA as they adhere to the regulations driving public-school funding sources. While the intention of the law is to grant equity to all children, its implementation led to significant challenges of interpretation. The core of IDEA is determining

what an *appropriate* education is for children (US Department of Education, 2010). By definition, the word *appropriate* is riddled by subjectivity and leads to competing interpretations of what children require to have access comparable to that of typically developing peers in school. Furthermore, a core tenet of IDEA is that public-school districts are required to educate children with disabilities in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) possible to receive educational benefit (US Department of Education, 2010; Lachman, 2017). Public schools, families, special education attorneys, the Office of Administrative Hearings, and the Supreme Court have spent the past 23 years in deep, contentious discussions about what constitutes an *appropriate* education within the least restrictive environment. As such, special education has evolved into being one of the most litigious fields in public education.

Special Education Administrators

The district-level position of a special education administrator requires its officeholder to directly oversee the special education department in public schools. As such, much of an administrator's job is dictated by ensuring that public school districts and their employees are adhering to the aforementioned laws originating from IDEA (Nohr Schulz 2003). As mentioned above, special education teachers are managed by special education administrators, a district-level position. As such, it is worthwhile to look more closely at the leadership behaviors of those occupying this administrative position. Special education administrators are directly responsible for overseeing special education teachers and hold multifaceted and complex jobs. One of their primary responsibilities is to ensure that public school districts comply with state and federal legislation (Nohr, 2003). Furthermore, special education administrators, while serving only 10-12% of the general population, are held accountable for compliance with regulations at the district, state, and national levels while being charged with leading the special education teachers

who experience the aforementioned attrition rates. (McHatton, Glenn & Gordon, 2012; No Child Left Behind Act, 2002). Special education administrators have a seemingly insurmountable amount of work that severely limits their time to be in contact with teachers and other support staff at schools (Norh, 2003). Failure to adhere to state and federal mandates results in extraordinarily costly, stressful, and time-consuming litigation (Nohr, 2003). However, special education administrators are also responsible for leading their teams, an aspect of the job that is frequently compromised as they respond to federally mandated responsibilities and timelines (McHatton, Glenn & Gordon, 2012; Norh, 2003). Regardless of these contentious factors, it is ultimately up to special education administrators to create and maintain personal and professional meaning to attract and maintain quality teachers within this federal and state compliance environment.

Special education administrators serve only 10-12% of the public-school population but are the sole position ultimately held accountable to district, state and national compliance regulations while also managing the employees within the special education department (McHatton, Glenn & Gordon, 2012; No Child Left Behind Act, 2002; Nohr Schultz, 2003). Failure to adhere to these compliance standards driven by legislation results in high-cost litigation riddled with stress, negative press, and insurmountable investments of time (McHatton, Glenn & Gordon, 2012; Norh, 2003). To complicate things further, IDEA is referred to as the most underfunded law that has ever passed (Legislative Analyst Office, 2018). When IDEA was passed, a promise of 40% federal funding was promised; however, to date only 11-12% of this promised funding has been actualized. With an expensive mandate, districts are left with no other option but to use funds from the general operating budget of public schools (Legislative Analyst Office, 2018). Accordingly, there are unlimited requests with significant price tags from a finite

funding source. Special education administrators receive significant pressure from school boards and top-tier administration to limit the encroachment of special education costs to the general fund. Special education administrators must guide their team to appropriately serve students with disabilities in the public setting with only a fraction of the funding needed to back their mandates (Legislative Analyst Office, 2018). The cost of underserving is exorbitant financial consequences and mandated government oversight to districts. Furthermore, the pressure to save cost, serve students and maintain a reputable status in the community while leading teachers with the highest attrition rates may feel like an impossible charge, resulting in special education administration holding one of the most difficult positions in a public-school district. Yet adhering to the district, state, and federal legislation boundaries is not possible without the compliance and commitment of the special education teachers in the schools.

Special Education Teachers

While there are many types of service providers, special education teachers are the most prominent population of people serving students with disabilities in schools. Research shows that special education teachers enter the field to help children in the community who are marginalized. One special education teacher stated, “I teach to lift souls, to help my students find their wings, and to show them how to reach beyond their dreams” (Office of Special Education and Rehabilitations Services, 2016). Special education teachers enter the field to teach and mentor students in the world facing obstacles that many people in the population don’t face (Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services, 2016). However, once embarking on the special-education teacher journey, research is showing that teachers are leaving the field at astounding rates due to the significant negative legal climate, high demands of paperwork, and

legal mandates that impede the ability to teach and connect with students (Kucuksuleymanoglu, 2011; Saricam & Sakiz, 2014; Tyler & Brunner, 2014).

The high attrition rates are impacting a significant number of students and teachers in the state. In the state of California, there are 774,665 students in special education, resulting in a legal minimum of 27,667 special education teachers serving those students (California Department of Education, 2018). Special education teachers serve approximately 10-12% of the population and face the multifaceted challenge of balancing complex student needs with the federal and legal mandates of special-education law (Bilingsley, 2002). Federal and state law places many boundaries on teachers' professional decision-making. Much of the teacher's workday is dictated by compliance requirements and federal regulations (Tyler & Brunner, 2014). Consequently, the contentious nature, excessive paperwork, and legal mandates contribute to work-related stress associated with high depersonalization rates and emotional exhaustion (Kucuksuleymanoglu, 2011; Saricam & Sakiz, 2014; Tyler & Brunner, 2014). The individual freedoms available to most teachers are greatly constrained for special education teachers by federal and state regulations. The dynamic special-education governance forces contribute to higher levels of staff dissatisfaction and thus, staff turnover (Kucuksuleymanoglu, 2011; Saricam & Sakiz, 2014; Tyler & Brunner, 2014). In fact, special education teachers leave their positions at nearly double the rate of their general education counterparts (12.3% vs. 7.6%) and 49 of our states report that there is a shortage in special education staff (United States Department of Education, 2010).

Special education is a career where staff gain significant meaning when responding to their students' unique needs. Special education teachers help students learn who previously could not, yet the constant and ever-increasing legislative mandates and contentious multidisciplinary

meetings take the joy out of this position (Billingsley, 2002; Kucuksuleymanoglu, 2011; Saricam & Sakiz, 2014; Tyler & Brunner, 2014). Special education teachers enter the field to “see the light go on in a student’s eyes and have an integral part of the lives of my students and their families”, yet the politics and responsibilities of the job impede the teacher’s ability to teach (Felfelti & Brewer-LaPorta, 2016). Teachers are frustrated, sad, and don’t want to face this reality for the rest of their careers (Billingsley, 2002; Kucuksuleymanoglu, 2011; Saricam & Sakiz, 2014; Tyler & Brunner, 2014). These factors result in the aforementioned high attrition rates and shortages in qualified staff, giving evidence of the need to examine leadership behaviors of those staff who support special-needs students.

Due to the challenges of high levels of detailed paperwork, challenging students, a litigious culture, loss of creativity and significant boundaries on professional decision-making, special education teachers are walking away from the profession (Billingsley, 2002). The emotional exhaustion and high depersonalization rates of this group result in further challenges for the administrators that oversee them (Billingsley, 2002; Kucuksuleymanoglu, 2011; Saricam & Sakiz, 2014; Tyler & Brunner, 2014). Additionally, special education administrators must navigate the working conditions, wages, and hours of their teachers through a teacher’s union governed by the National Labor Relations Board. The NLRB dictates all aspects of a special education teacher’s job. Thus, it is extraordinarily difficult for special education administrators to make time for programmatic improvement, compliance training, and the creation of individualized student programs as those constitute a “change in working condition”, which is greatly protected by the labor union in public schools.

Meaning/Creating Meaning

With the highly charged political climate and level of job complexity in special education, leadership has a profound impact on the satisfaction of those working in the field. Creating and maintaining personal and organizational meaning for special education teachers stands as one of the single most important aspects of a special education administrator's job. It is ultimately up to the special education administrators to create and maintain personal and professional meaning to attract quality teachers to come and remain in public school districts within this gravely difficult federal and state compliance system. A growing body of research shows the dire importance of creating and maintaining personal and professional meaning in organizations. Early theorists Abraham Maslow (1943) and Victor Frankl (1946) laid a research foundation with their studies of humans' need for meaning (Soni & Soni, 2016). Additionally, more current researchers have further explored the vital desire and importance of personal and professional meaning. Conley (2007), Mautz (2015), Ulrich and Ulrich (2015) and most recently, Kofman (2018) all emphasize that when meaning is present in the workplace, human potential flourishes, which can result in true transformational change in organizations.

Conley (2007) bases his research on Maslow's hierarchy of need—a foundational theory that has been widely accepted in the field of human development. Maslow posits that one has the capacity for the development of a higher tier of his five-layered triangle only when the foundation stages are met (Soni & Soni, 2016). According to Maslow, the pinnacle of the triangle or top level of development is self-actualization, which allows for humans to be creative, flexible, courageous, willing to make mistakes, open, collegial, and humble (Soni & Soni, 2016). Yet Conley (2007) suggests that experiencing meaning *in* and *at* has a direct correlation to the pinnacle of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. The meaning *in* and *at* work allows employees to feel a

part of something greater than themselves, and leaders are directly responsible for creating the environment for that development (Conley, 2007).

Viktor Frankl, in his book *Man's Search for Meaning* (1946), uses the platform of his traumatic experience as a prisoner in a concentration camp to exemplify the power of meaning. He asserts that even in the most unbearable and horrific conditions, meaning can always be extrapolated. Frankl predicates that the core drive for all human behavior is to seek and find meaning (Frankl, 1946). Frankl's work vindicates the true power of meaning and gives hope to the special education field, in which meaning is rapidly disintegrating.

Mautz (2015) discussed the conditions that create meaning in and at work, and suggests that there are leadership traits that support that cultivation. When leaders create an environment of fun, engagement, innovation, productivity, and competition, productivity and dedication in the workplace drastically improve (Mautz, 2015). According to Mautz (2015), the "passion for potential", "caring with a connective undercurrent", and "framing finesse" are the leadership traits required for meaning in organizations.

Ulrich and Ulrich (2015) add to the research on meaning in organizations through the exploration of the why and how in the development of meaning. Leaders are charged with instilling seven drivers (evolving identity through the use of personal values; staying grounded in purpose and direction; experiencing satisfying relationships; positive work environments; opportunities for growth; finding value in setbacks; and experiencing civility, creativity, pleasure, and humor in the workplace) in their followers in order for meaning to be created.

Most recently, Kofman (2018) claims that people in the workplace are plagued by the fear that they are wasting their life at work and that "the end of life will overtake us when our

song is still unsung”. Kofman (2018) conjects that transcendent leaders have the agency to lay aside self-interest in supporting their followers in feeling connected to a great mission granting them a sense of purpose. Those leaders are challenged with identifying the purpose greater than themselves and inspiring their followers to take part (Kofman, 2018).

Theoretical Framework

The core researchers spanning decades show crucial evidence of the power of meaning in human existence. However, two researchers, Dr. Keith Larick and Dr. Cindy Peterson (2015), applied the foundation of meaning to a theoretical construct termed “meaning-makers”. Larick and Peterson (2015) proposed through conference and university presentations that there are five domains of leadership that all have individual merit, yet their interaction aids in supporting the development of personal and professional meaning. Furthermore, Larick and Peterson (2015) posit that the progression of personal and organizational meaning lays the foundation for increased production, innovation, and agency for organizational-transformation change to occur. The meaning-maker framework purports that those leaders who encompass the behavioral skills of character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration aid in creating personal and professional meaning for themselves and their followers (Larick and Peterson, 2015). Additionally, through thematic research at Brandman University, 12 studies were conducted between 2016-2018 using Larick and Peterson’s (2015) meaning-maker framework across multiple disciplines. However, the meaning-maker framework has not been applied to the field of special education, where the administrators require the highest level of transformational leadership skills in order to attract and maintain quality teachers in public schools within the complex compliance system.

Problem Statement

The meaning-maker leadership model stands as a relatively new construct introduced first through university and conference presentations by Larick and Peterson (2015), and was substantiated by 12 researchers in a thematic dissertation process. Larick and Peterson (2015), along with the 12 thematic researchers, show how leaders create and maintain personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their disengaged followers. The meaning-maker leadership framework demonstrates the interaction of five variables—character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration—that leaders use with their followers to create meaning, resulting in a reengagement of the workforce.

The research on this framework shows that the five variables effective leaders use interact to not only create meaning but also maintain meaning for their followers and for the leaders themselves (Bartels, 2017; Herrera, 2017; Hodge, 2017; Thompson, 2018; Villanueva, 2017). Creating meaning in the workplace results in higher job satisfaction, more productivity, and lower attrition rates (Hall, 2013; Wang et al., 2015). While each population had its unique qualities, the key findings of these meaning-maker studies were very similar. The researchers found that the five meaning-maker domains (character, relationships, wisdom, inspiration, vision) were all critical in creating and maintaining meaning for leaders and followers in an organization (Bartels, 2017; Herrera, 2017; Hodge, 2017; Thompson, 2018; Villanueva, 2017). The researchers found that none of the five domains of leadership can exist independently to create the meaning; rather, it is the dynamic interplay between the five domains that creates and maintains the meaning (Bartels, 2017; Herrera, 2017; Hodge, 2017; Thompson, 2018; Villanueva, 2017). The 12 thematic researchers applied the meaning-maker leadership construct to different populations including university presidents, superintendents, female CEOs, and law

enforcement. However, there remains a significant gap in the research for expanding this new construct to other populations and fields.

The aforementioned data on special education administrators and the special education teachers they lead highlights the substantial difficulty in the field for all parties involved. The complexity of the federal compliance regulations, the field's litigious nature, the extraordinary amount of paperwork, and the boundaries on professional decision-making make special education employment riddled with emotional exhaustion and high depersonalization rates (Kucuksuleymanoglu, 2011; Saricam & Sakiz, 2014; Tyler & Brunner, 2014). Furthermore, special education is one of the most federally underfunded laws in existence (National Council on Disability, 2018). The interaction of all of these factors results in extraordinary attrition rates and a shortage of quality people entering the field (Kucuksuleymanoglu, 2011; Saricam & Sakiz, 2014; Tyler & Brunner, 2014). Special education is arguably at a point of crisis, in need of exemplary leaders to not only attract quality people but also retain them in the workplace. As such, applying the meaning-maker construct to special education may propose a foundation of leadership that could greatly benefit the field.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this mixed-methods case study is to identify and describe the behaviors that exemplary special education administrators use to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers through the qualities of character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration.

In addition, it is the purpose of this study to determine the degree of importance that special education teachers attach to the behaviors related to character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration help to create personal and organizational meaning.

Research Questions

1. What are the behaviors exemplary special education administrators use to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers through character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration?
2. To what degree do special education teachers perceive that the behaviors related to character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration help to create personal and organizational meaning?

Significance of the Problem

The literature illustrates that special education is a field with unique set of needs that are both challenging and ever-evolving. These inimitable needs may be greatly impacting the personal and organizational meaning for special education administrators and their followers. The aforementioned research demonstrates that the legal changes, evolving case law, collective bargaining units, special education advocates, and significant underfunding all add to already significant job complexity for special education leaders and their followers (Billingsley, 2002; Chalbeat, 2014; CTA, 2009; Kucuksuleymanoglu, 2011; Mueller, 2009; Saricam & Sakiz, 2014; Singh, 2015; Tyler & Brunner, 2014). Furthermore, these drivers may be lowering teacher morale and decreasing the meaning they experience at work, resulting in the astounding attrition rates of special education teachers. As such, the nearly 775,000 students in California with disabilities are ultimately the ones suffering from a system designed to protect them.

Additionally, the 27,667 special education teachers entering the field are changing careers as a result of the unforeseen negative consequences of the implementation of special education law.

While information is known about meaning-maker leadership across many fields, little is known about special education administrators in public education settings. Special education administrators' roles are among the most complicated due to the myriad of contentious political forces that they must navigate (Billingsley, 2002; Chalbeat, 2014; CTA, 2009; Kucuksuleymanoglu, 2011; Mueller, 2009; Saricam & Sakiz, 2014; Singh, 2015; Tyler & Brunner, 2014). Furthermore, the special education teachers they lead are leaving the field at astounding rates as a result of the aforementioned challenge drivers. Little is known about how meaning-maker leadership could be applied to special education. There exists a large gap in the research and a unique opportunity to apply meaning-maker leadership to the field of special education during this time of crisis with one of the most marginalized populations in the country.

Filling this research gap by applying the meaning-maker construct to special education will bring additional knowledge to special education administrators, teachers, and school district administration/personnel by potentially giving leaders more fundamental tools to effectively lead. Furthermore, exploring this research gap may raise awareness of the multifaceted challenges in special education and increase the wellbeing of leaders and their followers in this challenging field. Additionally, filling this research gap may contribute information that may mitigate the abnormal attrition rates of special education teachers by potentially allowing burnt-out teachers to experience more meaning at work. Most importantly, the current study has significant importance as our nearly 1,000 administrators, 27,667 teachers, and our 775,000 children in California alone deserve to have an educational system in place that creates meaning in their lives.

Definitions

The following are definitions of terms relevant to the study. The theoretical and operational definitions are provided and were created through the thematic process of the 12 Brandman University meaning-maker researchers.

Exemplary

Theoretical definition. Someone set apart from peers in a supreme manner, suitable behavior, principles, or intentions that can be copied (Goodwin, Piazza, & Rozin, 2014).

Operational definition. Exemplary leaders are defined as those leaders who are set apart from peers by exhibiting at least five of the following characteristics: (a) Evidence of successful relationships with followers; (b) evidence of leading a successful organization; (c) a minimum of five years of experience in the profession; (d) articles, papers, or materials written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings; (e) recognition by their peers; and (f) membership in professional associations in their field.

Meaning

Theoretical definition. Meaning is a sense of purpose as a fundamental need, which leads to significance and value for self and others (Bennis, 1999; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Frankl, 2006; Kouzes & Posner, 2006, 2007; Pearson, 2015; Varney, 2009; Yeoman, 2014).

Operational definition. Meaning is the result of leaders and followers coming together for the purpose of gathering information from experience and integrating it into a process, which creates significance, value and identity within themselves and the organization.

Character

Theoretical definition. Character is the moral compass by which a person lives his or her life (Bass & Bass, 2008; Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; T. Moore, 2008; Quick & Wright, 2011; Sankar, 2003).

Operational definition. Character is the alignment of a value system, which promotes ethical thoughts and actions based on principles of concern for others through optimism and integrity while being reliable, transparent, and authentic.

Vision

Theoretical definition. A bridge from the present to the future created by a collaborative mindset, adding meaning to the organization, sustaining higher levels of motivation, and withstanding challenges (Kouzes & Posner, 2006, 2007; Landsberg, 2003; Mendez-Morse, 1993; Nanus, 1992).

Operational definition. Vision is foresight demonstrated by a compelling outlook on the future, shared by leaders and followers who are engaged to create the future state.

Relationships

Theoretical definition. Relationships are the bonds that are established between people through encouragement, compassion, and open communication, which lead to feelings of respect, trust, and acceptance (Frankl, 2006; B. George, 2003; B. George & Sims, 2007; Henderson, 2011; Kouzes & Posner, 2006, 2007, 2009; Liborius, 2014; Mautz, 2015; McKee, Boyatzis, & Johnston, 2008; Reina & Reina, 2015; Seligman, 2002; D. M. Smith, 2011; Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010).

Operational definition. Relationships are authentic connections between leaders and followers involved in a common purpose through listening, respect, trust, and acknowledgement of one another.

Wisdom

Theoretical definition. Wisdom is the ability to utilize cognitive, affective, and reflective intelligences to discern unpredictable and unprecedented situations with beneficial action (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000; Kekes, 1983; Pfeffer, 2010; Spano, 2013; Sternberg, 1998).

Operational definition. Wisdom is the reflective integration of values, experience, knowledge, and concern for others to accurately interpret and respond to complex, ambiguous, and often unclear situations.

Inspiration

Theoretical definition. Inspiration is a source of contagious motivation that resonates from the heart, transcending the ordinary and driving leaders and their followers forward with confidence (Kouzes & Posner, 2007; I. H. Smith, 2014; Thrash & Elliot, 2003).

Operational definition. Inspiration is the heartfelt passion and energy that leaders exude through possibility-thinking, enthusiasm, encouragement, and hope to create relevant, meaningful connections that empower.

Followership

Theoretical definition. Followership is the role held by certain individuals in an organization, team, or group. Specifically, it is the capacity of an individual to actively follow a leader. Followership is the reciprocal social process of leadership. Specifically, followers play an active role in organization, group, and team successes and failures. (Baker, 2007; Riggio, Chaleff, & Blumen-Lipman, 2008).

Operational definition. For purposes of this study, a follower is defined as a special education teacher, holding a valid special education teaching credential(s) in the state of California and employed and working under the leadership of the selected participant.

Delimitations

Delimitations for the current study narrow the scope for the participants involved. The study was delimited to exemplary special education administrators working in K-12 public education in Marin and Solano counties in California. To be considered exemplary, the leader must demonstrate at least five of the following criteria:

- Evidence of successful relationships with followers
- Evidence of leading a successful organization
- A minimum of five years of experience in the profession
- Articles, papers, or materials written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings
- Recognition by peers
- Membership in professional association in their field

Furthermore, the current study was delimited to “followers” described as K-12 public school teachers holding a valid special education credential and working under the leadership of the identified exemplary special education administrator.

Organization of the Study

The current study will encompass five chapters, including the references and needed materials in the appendix. Chapter I serves as the introductory foundation of the theoretical framework for the study, special education administrators and teachers foundations, and meaning-maker domains. Chapter I introduces the problem statement, purpose, research

questions, delimitations and definitions of the current study. Chapter II stands as an expansion of the review of the current literature related to meaning-makers, special education administrators, special education teachers, and the five domains of meaning-makers' leadership. Chapter III describes the research design, methodology, population, sample, and limitations to the study. Chapter IV reports on the analysis of the collected data and a discussion of the findings. Finally, Chapter V synthesizes the collected data, summarizes the study, draws conclusions and has implications for future research.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Chapter II of this study explores and reviews the literature related to the drivers that influence personal and organizational meaning for leaders and their followers in the field of special education. Additionally, Chapter II reviews the theoretical and historical literature relating to meaning in leadership and the meaning maker construct. This comprehensive literature review explores the five domains of meaning (character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration) and the interactions of these variables to create and maintain personal and organizational meaning for leaders and their followers.

Special Education

Since the development of IDEA, children have been promised a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE), a civil-rights issue that has led to decades of disagreements and contention, resulting in costly litigation for both families and public-school districts (McHatton, Glenn & Gordon, 2012; No Child Left Behind Act, 2002). The intent behind IDEA was to grant students equal access to an education, but this effort has resulted in unforeseen outcomes for special education teachers, administrators, and families as well as a culture of disagreement over interpretation of special education regulations and laws. Additionally, these disagreements have led to substantial district underfunding for a federal mandate and potential impacts to a loss of meaning for special education administrators and staff.

Today IDEA mandates that students receive FAPE in the least restrictive environment alongside their typically developing peers to the maximum extent possible (USDOE 2010, Lachman 2017). Additionally, school districts are required to seek and find children with disabilities and assess whether they meet special education requirements under the eligibility criteria of 13 disabling conditions (US Department of Education 2010). Once a child is

identified, a multidisciplinary team is required to conduct a comprehensive assessment and to develop an Individualized Education Plan consisting of a continuum of supports and services at the public-school district's expense (US Department of Education, 2010; Lachman, 2017). These federal mandates, which originated from honorable intentions to support children with disabilities as well as support school districts and their staff, are based on a team's interpretation of the word *appropriate* (US Department of Education, 2010). However, determining what is appropriate for these students in their complex situations has extensive financial impact to school budgets, and leads to one of the most contentious aspects of public education that changes with the trends of case law.

Legal Implications on Special Education

Complicating matters is the evolving case law, which causes school staff to continuously update their understanding of decision guidelines. Case law gives examples of judicial opinions that help to clarify and guide legal teams, public-school employees, and families on how laws are interpreted (Summey, 2018). The outcomes of case law set the trend on decision-making in special education (Summey, 2018). As such, district administrators and special education staff must attend legal symposiums 2-3 times per year to remain informed on compliance changes and to help guide special education teams in their decision-making. After attending such legal conferences, special education administrators must provide their staff (followers) with professional development to keep them current on legal trends determined through case law. Consequently, special education staff must update their practice and potentially shift their mindset from commitment and professional creativity to compliance with current law. These frequent legal shifts cause potential confusion regarding pedagogy and practice that is driven by case law and not professional decision-making. These legal trends cause personal frustration and

may limit the creativity and commitment of the special education teacher, potentially further decreasing the meaning teachers/followers experience in the field.

There are many influential special education legal cases; however, two of the most influential cases in special education history regarding IEP team decision making are *Rowley v. Board of Education* (1982) and, most recently, *Endrew F v. Douglas County School District* (2017). Both of these instrumental cases guided special education teams in decision-making surrounding what does and does not constitute an “appropriate” education for students with disabilities (Prince, 2018).

The Rowley standard was established in 1982 following the outcome of a Supreme Court hearing. The Rowley standard found that school districts are required to provide a “basic floor of opportunity” rather than required to “maximize student potential” (Prince, 2018). Since 1982, this has been the standard applied in special education and has guided special education school staff to base the IEP offer on a basic floor of opportunity for students (Prince, 2018; Seligmann, 2012). The basic premise of the Rowley standard potentially created one of the greatest areas of contention between school districts and families. On the one hand, families have a deep-rooted desire to access their children’s full potential, whereas school districts work with finite and often insufficient resources to provide sufficient support services that allow students to benefit educationally from instruction (Prince, 2018; Seligmann, 2012). This is a fundamental difference in belief system and interpretation of the law between districts and families.

Most recently, in 2017, the *Endrew F v. Douglas County School District* case was reviewed by the Supreme Court, which ruled that school districts were now required to provide an education that is “substantially equal to the opportunities afforded children without disabilities” (Prince, 2018; Seligmann, 2012). Essentially, the Endrew F ruling stated that

districts must now must provide instruction that allows students in special education to benefit from their education to the same level as their typically developing peers. The Endrew F court decision was substantially different from the guiding principle of the Rowley standard (Prince, 2018; Seligmann, 2012). Special education teachers now find that one of the guiding principles of their practice since 1982 was found to be unethical and illegal, and these types of legal changes disrupt staff's confidence in decision-making.

Major changes in case law such as these can potentially reduce the meaning that special education teachers and staff gain from their work with this difficult and contentious population. Furthermore, the ever-evolving case law and changes to special education regulations substantially impact how students with disabilities are served, which ultimately affects funding, increases teacher frustration, lowers creativity for teachers, and increases the complexity of the field of special education. In summary, these factors may potentially lead to a significant reduction in meaning for special education leaders and their followers.

Impact of Special Education Underfunding

In addition to the innate contention of how the law was written, IDEA is said to be the greatest underfunded federal mandate to date (Legislative Analyst's Office, 2018). With a promise of 40% federal funding, districts have received no more than a maximum of 11%-12% of federal funding, causing significant encroachment to the general fund (Legislative Analyst's Office, 2018). This encroachment results in a negative mindset about special education for school boards and upper administration (Beals, 1993). Consequently, underfunding results in significant pressure on administrators to lower the costs of special education (Beals, 1993; Journal on Special Education Leadership, 2001). Given that the greatest program cost is personnel, special education administrators then pressure their staff to meet their students' needs

with fewer resources, which complicates their jobs (Beals, 1993; Journal on Special Education Leadership, 2001). Reducing the breadth of special education program expenditures can result in increased disagreement amongst families and school personnel on what programs and resources are available and appropriate for their child. In response to fewer services, special education parents can become angry or frustrated and take action by informing school boards, speaking at public comment in school-board meetings, or hiring attorneys or special education advocates (Edutopia, 2018). This public attention on special education decision-making may add additional pressure on special education staff to provide additional costly resources for students. As such, special education administrators are in a constant strategic balancing act between district pressure for cost-saving measures and the impact those cost-saving measures have on their staff's hopes for their students (Beals, 1993; Journal on Special Education Leadership, 2001). These conflicting forces may further increase the tension that special education administrators and their followers (teachers) experience in their day-to-day work. (McHatton, Glenn & Gordon, 2012; No Child Left Behind Act, 2002; Nohr Schultz, 2003).

Special Education Administrator Impact

Research shows that positions in special education administration are difficult to fill and have significant turnover rates. This is seemingly due to the high stress levels and a belief that holding a special education leadership position may limit future opportunities in executive leadership (Bakken, O'Brian, Sheldon, 2006; Litchka, 2007; Meeks, 2016; Sjostrom, 2009; Wheeler, LaRocco, 2009). Sjostrom (2009) states that "the changing role of the special education administrator is moving beyond special education disability expertise, compliance and implementation, and knowledge of laws and regulations to school reform and assuring all students succeed" (p. 9), giving evidence of the significant complexity and challenge of this

administrative position. Special education administrators are experiencing significant levels of stress, time limitations, work overload, politics in the workplace, and an everchanging role with increased expectations (COPSSE, 2004; Crockett, 2007; Normore, 2006; Sjostrom, 2009; Wheeler et al., 2009). Additionally, there stands a great body of research that outlines how significantly special education leadership impacts a district's functionality and success (Bakken et al., 2006; Billingsley, 2007; Boscardin, 2007; Keenoy, 2012; IDEiA, 2004; Sjostrom, 2009; Toups, 2006; Wagner et al., 2010; White, 2005). Furthermore, a special education teacher's belief in the administrative support present in the district stands as one of the most important factors in a decision to remain in their position (Billingsley, 2005; Fish et al., 2010; Gehrke et al., 2006). These factors and the disproportionate increase in pay are deterring potential special education administrators from entering the field and lowering the job satisfaction and meaning that current administrators experience (Litchka, 2007, Meeks, 2016).

Special Education Teacher Impact

Multiple forces show that that special education staff are operating under conflict, confusion, and time constraints, resulting in a loss of meaning for special education employees. Teachers enter the field with a noble purpose: to serve the underserved and make a difference in a historically misunderstood and marginalized population (Gersten et al., 2001; Miller et al., 1999; Nance et al., 2008). Yet teachers begin their work with the students and find the job to be significantly different than what they envisioned. Special education teachers are faced with intense legal challenges, stringent policies, and crushing paperwork that result in a stress level and workload that take them away from what they really want to do: teach children (Billingsley, 2002; Kucuksuleymanoglu, 2011; Saricam & Sakiz, 2014; Tyler & Brunner, 2014). The complexities of the described challenging realities in special education are resulting in special

education teachers leaving the field at alarming rates (Billingsley, 2002; Kucuksuleymanoglu, 2011; Saricam & Sakiz, 2014; Tyler & Brunner, 2014). The California Department of Education (CDE) reports that all but three states reported significant special education staffing shortages in 2017-2018 (CDE, 2018). In summary, the progression of regulations in special education has had a great impact on special education teachers. The federal and legal mandates limit the creativity and autonomy in education. It has caused a monumental shift to a practice of procedural processes rather than a creative endeavor for what is best for students and families. Moving forward, special education dynamics may limit the core tenets of autonomy of teaching, professional decision-making, and academic freedom.

School/Family Disagreement

Complicating the job satisfaction of special education teachers are the tension and remedies of disagreements between families and school districts. Parents frequently enter the IEP process with a pressing sense of advocating for what is best for their child. Fran Russell (2003) stated that “Following the diagnosis of a child’s disability, parents have to develop new expectations concerning the child, their role as parents, and the support services that are designed to meet their needs” (p. 144). Parents of students in special education may hold feelings of anger or grief following the diagnosis of their child’s disabilities. This grief may result in behaviors akin to externalizing blame, discontent with school districts, as well as other behaviors that can negatively impact a school district and family partnership (Russell, 2003; Schischka, 2011).

When families and public districts disagree on what constitutes FAPE for students, there are many paths that can be exercised. Families and public districts have due-process rights to a fair hearing in which a judge from the Office of Administrative Hearings will travel to hear the case and make a ruling. Mueller (2009) posits that the average cost, \$60,000, of a due-process

hearing is extremely impactful to school districts and their continuously shrinking budgets. As such, there are many steps taken prior to hearing in an effort to settle disagreements outside of the courtroom (Mueller, 2009). These steps may include advocates, IEP meetings with attorneys present to offer alternative services and/or placements for students, Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR), and mediation. Frequently, special education administrators will calculate that it is more cost-effective to capitulate to parent requests than to fight legal costs, regardless of the reasonableness of the parents' wishes. In other words, special education administrators often succumb to the requests of the family instead of following their professional judgement (Mueller, 2009). Capitulating to legal pressure and using it as a strategy for cost savings rather than a moral stand on what is right occurs frequently in many districts. When cost-avoidance decisions are made in special education, staff are directed to adopt fiscal strategies rather than to use the research-based educational practices in the field (Mueller, 2009; Singh, 2015). These fiscal solutions can further erode teachers' sense of efficacy and professional judgment. Often those IEP decisions were the legally and educationally sound decisions based on IDEA; however, it is more cost-effective to settle than to enter costly and risky due-process hearings. Teachers may lose their sense of efficacy, professionalism, and meaning when disagreements are settled through a cost-savings strategy rather than a deep examination of the law and a full consideration of educational best practices espoused by the professional staff.

An additional complication for the role of special education administrators and teachers is the rise in family advocates as a for-profit business in communities throughout the state. The roles and responsibilities of both teachers and administrators have evolved from being advocates to children to needing to be trained in not only understanding special education law but navigating how case law and court rulings impact daily practices (Singh, 2015). The presence of

family advocates in IEP meetings is now commonplace but has resulted in increased stress and reduced meaning for both teachers and administrators as the focus of the meeting shifts from the best practice and the best interest of the child to regulation, compliance, and legal jargon (Singh, 2015). While family advocates play a positive role in helping the laws to evolve at a policy level, the practical level of their presence serves to lower the meaning and increase job complexity for special education teachers and administrators.

Labor Unions

Adding further complexity to the special education administrator's role is the navigation of labor unions' influence on special education decisions. According to the California Teacher's Association, the presence of students in special education and their impact on general education teachers and classes must be negotiated through collective bargaining units—especially when the issues include class size, planning time and inclusion programs (CTA, 2009). In fact, there has been more than a 60 percent increase in the number of complaints filed by the United Federation of Teachers regarding a change in working conditions involving special education issues in a one-year period (Chalbeat, 2014). As such, decisions regarding special education student placement and services involving the general education setting need to be deeply considered by the special education administrator. The special education administrators must not only consider the legal regulations of special education law and LRE to avoid potential costly legal ramifications, but they must also consider and negotiate with teachers' unions about the impact of their special education decisions on teachers' working conditions and class size.

It is clear that there are unique needs in the field of special education that impact the personal and organizational meaning for special education administrators and their followers. The aforementioned research shows that the legal changes, evolving case law, collective

bargaining units, special education advocates, and significant underfunding all add to significant job complexity for special education leaders and their followers (Billingsley, 2002; Chalkbeat, 2014; CTA, 2009; Kucuksuleymanoglu, 2011; Mueller, 2009; Saricam & Sakiz, 2014; Singh, 2015; Tyler & Brunner, 2014). Furthermore, these drivers may decrease teacher morale and the meaning they experience at work, resulting in the astounding attrition rates among special education teachers.

Special education is a field that is impacted by laws, regulations, financial constraints, and the incentive to avoid legal actions. In his TED talk, Barry Schwartz (2009) posits that regulations and procedures are expected outcomes to regulate errors and uncertainty. However, too many rules and incentives cause an overreliance that diminishes a person's ability to improvise and be creative (Schwartz, 2009). As such, Schwartz (2009) asserts that a system with high levels of regulation and incentives breeds mediocrity and lowers morality. Special education is a system that is impacted by laws, regulations, and incentives. Furthermore, the laws are based on determining a student's education based on the ambiguous word "appropriate". Special education is a field that originated with the intention of bringing equal access to the most marginalized population. Yet the developed and evolving regulation and compliance systems of special education may be leading to mediocrity and potentially a decreased personal and organizational meaning for leaders and their followers and, in the worst cases, loss of skilled and experienced staff to other occupations.

Theoretical Foundation on Meaning

The review of the literature regarding the population of special education is clear that there is a significant need for leaders to create and maintain personal and organizational meaning for leaders and their followers to work in this complicated field. Yet a further examination of the

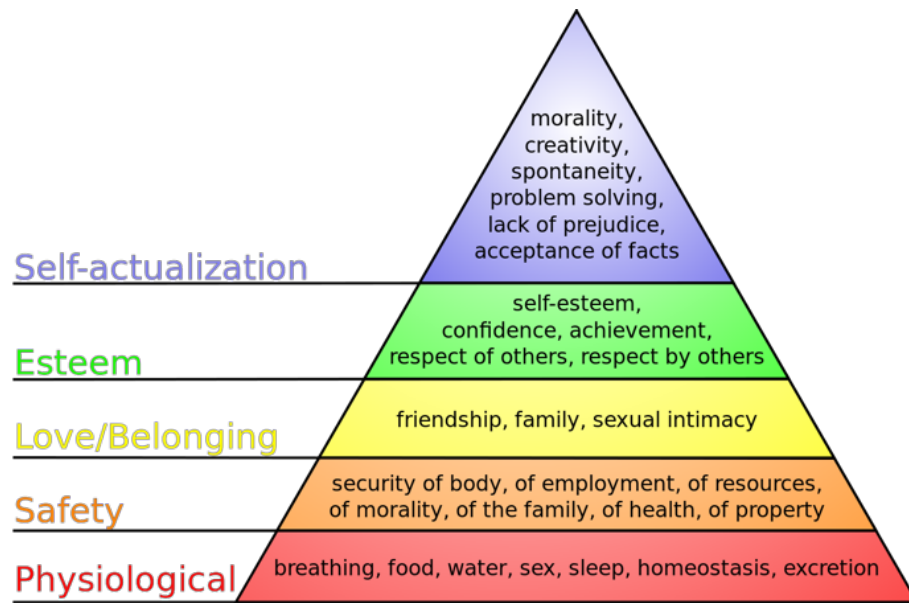
literature regarding meaning is necessary. The search for meaning dates back to early man and spans centuries (Bartles, 2017). Early theorists Abraham Maslow (1943), Victor Frankl (1946), and Frederick Herzberg (1959) laid our current foundation for understanding humanity's need for meaning (Soni & Soni, 2016). Additionally, recent research has further explored the vital importance of personal and professional meaning. Conley (2007), Mautz (2015), Ulrich and Ulrich (2015), Larick & Peterson (2015) and, most recently, Kofman (2018) all emphasize that when meaning is present in the workplace, human potential flourishes, which can result in true transformational change in organizations.

One of the pioneers in meaning, Viktor Frankl, was a Holocaust survivor who came to be a respected psychiatrist and neurologist. Through his work in the mental-health field and his life experiences, he posited that the constant and pervasive search for meaning is man's true purpose in life (Frankl, 1946, 1992, 2006). Through his life's work and experiences, Viktor Frankl (1946, 1992, 2006) denoted that there is meaning in life's every circumstance, from the most difficult to the most pleasurable, and that meaning is man's main motivation for living. Frankl (1946, 1992, 2006) asserted that every person has the freedom in life to seek and find meaning in all they do, but there are three main ways in which meaning is found: through work, experience or attitude. Accordingly, when seeking to understand how current leaders build and maintain meaning for themselves and their followers, Frankl's work is monumental. In the field of special education, where the loss of meaning is so profound, Frankl's (1946, 1992, 2006) position that meaning is gained through work, experience or attitude can greatly add to the understanding of how leaders create and maintain personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers.

Chip Conley (2007) is a successful entrepreneur who used the tenets of Abraham Maslow's infamous hierarchy of needs as the foundation for finding meaning in leadership.

Maslow's work (1954) is depicted by a pyramid in which a person progresses upward as each level is satisfied. Figure 1 demonstrates Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

Figure 1



The top part of the pyramid stands as the most developed and contributes to human beings' drive to develop into the best version of themselves and to have strong human relationships/connectedness (Maslow, 1954). Chip Conley (2007) used Maslow's developed hierarchy on needs to drive leadership in organizations. Conley (2007) posited that leaders can leverage humans' drive for self-actualization to build and maintain relationships that contribute to the development of meaning in organizations. Conley's (2007) work adds foundational evidence that special education administrators may be able to greatly impact the meaning of themselves and their followers by leveraging the human drive for self-actualization and relationship-building within the workplace.

Frederick Herzberg (1959) also theorized factors that affect people's feelings and motivation toward work. Herzberg (1959) described factors such as interpersonal relations,

working conditions, and salary as more than simply a “motivator”; rather, they are essential for job satisfaction. In other words, similar to the highest level of Maslow’s pyramid, without proper working conditions, strong interpersonal relationships in the workplace, and a fair salary, people will not just be unmotivated, but they will be dissatisfied with their jobs. Furthermore, Herzberg (1959) described motivators as achievement, recognition, responsibility, and advancement, which are also a required aspect of job satisfaction. Herzberg’s (1959) work is essential in understanding meaning and satisfaction at work as understanding job satisfaction and motivation can support leaders in developing and sustaining meaning for themselves and their followers.

Ulrich and Ulrich (2010) describe the search for meaning through the *why* and *how*. Leaders are continuously seeking to find *how* they can influence themselves and those that they lead to seek meaning in what they do. Ulrich and Ulrich (2010) engage the *why* through the premise that “human[s] search for meaning that finds its way into our offices and factories, a search that motivates, inspires and defines us” (p. 3). Through the journey to find the *why* and *how* of work, Ulrich and Ulrich (2010) demonstrate the core need and importance of creating and maintaining meaning for leaders and followers to support productivity and satisfaction in the workplace for all. Ulrich and Ulrich (2010) continue by observing that there are seven meaning drivers for the development of meaning, which include loss of identity, loss of purpose, loss of relationships, loss of positive work environment, loss of adversity, loss of value and loss of daily delights (civility, creativity, humor, playfulness and pleasure). Previous special education factors will lead to the loss of these core values. Ulrich and Ulrich’s (2010) work underscores the importance of meaning and lays a theoretical foundation for the meaning-maker construct. Furthermore, these findings support the critical need for meaning to be found in special

education. The development of meaning for special education leaders is critical for their followers in spite of the issues reviewed.

While Ulrich and Ulrich (2010) sought to find the *why* and *how* of meaning at work, Mautz's (2015) work strove to find the conditions in which people find meaning *in* and *at* work. People seek to have a purpose and value at work, which creates the meaning they feel in what they do every day. However, finding meaning at work is equally important; Mautz (2015) describes this meaning as feeling a sense of connectedness through social relationships with those around you. Mautz's (2015) work regarding meaning in and at work contributes greatly to the work on meaning in leadership specifically within the special education population.

Followership

While there is extensive literature on leadership, followership has a more limited body of research. However, what has been documented in the literature is the follower's connection to meaning (Mautz, 2015; Crowley, 2011; Conley, 2007; Cranston & Keller, 2013). People are spending a significant part of their lives at work, often at the cost of time spent with those they love most—family and friends (Crowley, 2011; Thompson, 2016). As such, there has been a tremendous shift in people's priority for employment (Mautz, 2015; Crowley, 2011; Conley, 2007; Cranston & Keller, 2013). Now more than ever, followership must include meaning and purpose for people to make the ultimate sacrifice of time with their loved ones (Mautz, 2015; Crowley, 2011; Conley, 2007; Cranston & Keller, 2013). In discussing followership, Conley (2007) stated that meaning is more important than ever before for three main reasons: (1) corporate transformation follows personal transformation, (2) work is a more dominant part of our lives than ever before and has replaced some of the social structures that previously created connection and meaning in our lives, and (3) over and over again, we see that companies that

create lasting success have a deep sense of mission and meaning in what they do. (pp. 85-86)

Clearly this information highlights the critical need for leaders to create meaning for their followers not just for the good of the employee, but for the greater good of the organization. In special education, “followers” are the teachers, who have some of the highest attrition rates in the education field due to burnout and loss of meaning.

Fred Kofman recently developed meaning maker research in his book, *The Meaning Revolution*. Kofman (2018) discusses leadership in organizations from a non-traditional standpoint and uses aspects of many theories such as mindfulness, meditation, economics, family systems, communication, business, and conflict to discuss meaning in organizations. Kofman (2018) states that only 15% of people’s work motivation and satisfaction is derived from salary and benefits and the other 85% is wrapped up in one’s desire for a meaning or finding a purpose greater than ourselves (Kofman, 2018). Kofman (2018) claims that exemplary leaders are able to put self-interest aside and build relationships with their followers to foster a sense of purpose and meaning in work. Research suggests that organizations with engagement from their employees far outperform organizations in which there are high levels of disengagement (Kofman, 2018). Furthermore, the engaged company’s employees report significantly higher job satisfaction (Kofman, 2018). Kofman (2018) states that money is not the primary motivator but “meaningful purpose, ethical principles, significant people, and personal mastery” are the primary contributing factors to personal and professional satisfaction and engagement at work. Kofman’s (2018) work has added to the meaning-maker construct, and his ideas support special education leaders’ development of personal and professional meaning for themselves and their followers in this complex compliance system of special education where meaning is rapidly declining.

In summary, many seminal authors posit that the search for meaning is ever-present and has spanned centuries. Leaders who create personal and professional meaning lay a foundation for their followers to have more satisfaction and productivity in the workplace. It is clear through the research that special education has many pressing challenges, resulting in people leaving the field at significant rates. Applying meaning-maker research to the field of special education may have significant positive benefits during a time of dire need.

Meaning-Maker Construct

The meaning-maker construct was initially developed by Dr. Keith Larick and Dr. Cindy Peterson through a series of conference presentations and lectures to various school administrators who attended conferences held by the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA) as well as presentations to doctoral students in leadership programs. Larick and Peterson (2015), through their own extensive school-district leadership experiences, sought to discover what factors contribute to leaders creating and maintaining meaning for themselves and those whom they lead. Larick and Peterson (2015, 2016) found that the dynamic interaction of five domains of leadership (character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration) create and maintain meaning for leaders and their followers. Larick and Peterson (2015, 2016) posit that leaders who lead with character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration create an environment for themselves and their followers that can be the foundation for transformational change to be cultivated. In determining their framework, the aforementioned seminal authors' research in the field of leadership supported Larick and Peterson (2015, 2016)'s development of the meaning-maker construct. Furthermore, 13 researchers from Brandman University conducted studies to further explore the leadership

behaviors from a variety of fields and their impact on the development and maintenance of meaning in an organization.

Thematic researchers from Brandman University conducted studies in varying populations about the meaning-maker construct. While each population had its unique qualities, the findings of the 13 studies show similar themes. The researchers found that the five meaning-maker domains (character, relationships, wisdom, inspiration, vision) were all critical in creating and maintaining meaning for leaders and followers in an organization (Bartels, 2017; Herrera, 2017; Hodge, 2017; Thompson, 2018; Villanueva, 2017). The researchers found that none of the five domains of leadership exists independently to create meaning, but rather it is the dynamic interplay between the five domains that creates and maintains the meaning (Bartels, 2017; Herrera, 2017; Hodge, 2017; Thompson, 2018; Villanueva, 2017). The findings of the meaning-maker thematic studies support the current researcher in the exploration of the meaning-maker construct in the very unique population of special education, where meaning is rapidly declining.

Larick and Peterson (2015, 2016), along with the thematic researchers from Brandman University, posited that there are five leadership domains that when dynamically integrated create an organizational system where personal and organizational meaning for the leader and follower is cultivated to ultimately establish an environment in which true transformational change can occur. There is an urgent need for transformational change in special education and an urgent need for leaders and followers to return to the motivations that drive people to enter the field. Special education leaders and staff need to find their personal meaning and thus give the organization the meaning needed to continue to cultivate the lives of the most marginalized population. As such, the five leadership traits (character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration) will be further examined through the literature.

Meaning-Maker Domains

Character

The Oxford English Dictionary defines character as “the mental and moral qualities distinctive to an individual”. Furthermore, character may include the qualities of integrity, forgiveness, and humility (Liborius, 2017). Patrick Liborius (2017) found that the impact that character has on followers’ positive perception of their leader is one of the most significant factors. Additionally, Liborius (2017) established that the follower’s perception that the leader is worthy of being followed is most greatly impacted by that leader’s character. People need to see that those who are guiding them, leading them, coaching them, and running their organization are people of worth, integrity, humility, and ultimately character, or they will not feel the passion to follow (Liborius, 2017). Within the domain of character fall a number of attributes that further describe what it means to have character as a leader.

Current and past literature show that the presence of morality supports the determination of character in leadership (Covey, 1991; Moore, 2008). Having a moral compass guides an exemplary leader in asking themselves prior to any decision, “is this the right thing to do?”. Acting in a moral manner, making moral decisions for themselves and their followers, and having ethics in their thoughts and actions improves the quality of work and job satisfaction in followers (Covey, 1991; Moore, 2008; Mautz, 2015).

Additionally, the presence of honesty, integrity and trust in leadership substantially adds to an exemplary leader’s character (Covey, 1991; Kouzes & Posner, 2006; Stone et al., 2004). Honesty, integrity and trust support the growth of both leaders and followers, leading to overall organizational growth and success (Covey, 1991; Kouzes & Posner, 2006; Stone et al., 2004). Furthermore, leaders who both possess and encourage the development of a value system for

their followers show greater success in the development of meaning (Covey, 2004; Kouzes & Posner, 2006, 2007). Within that values system, the presence of optimism or hope support the leader in guiding followers to have purpose and meaning at work (Peterson & Seligmann, 2004).

Furthermore, leaders demonstrating reliability and resiliency create an environment in which they can be depended upon and have consistency in their behavior and outlook (Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010). Reliability and resiliency are further attributes that leaders with character consistently demonstrate (Bartles, 2017). Lastly, leaders with transparency and authenticity show a level of vulnerability that supports their success in an organization as well as supporting the development of meaning for themselves and their followers (Bartels, 2017; Crowley, 2011; Herrera, 2017; Hodge, 2017; Thompson, 2018; Villanueva, 2017). Showing concern for others' wellbeing and using active listening and communication skills regularly support the development of authenticity and transparency that leaders with character possess (Bartels, 2017; Crowley, 2011; Herrera, 2017; Hodge, 2017; Thompson, 2018; Villanueva, 2017).

Vision

McKee et al. (2008) states that “A meaningful vision of ourselves and our future engages our desire to move toward that future and gives us the courage to try”. When people have a positive vision, a roadmap of where they are headed, their positivity and sense of purpose increases (McKee et al., 2008). A positive and structured vision develops positive foresight in organizational stakeholders that seems attainable and meaningful (McKee et al., 2008). Instilling vision paints a compelling and alluring picture to those within the organization that can be both motivating and inspiring (Anderson & Ackerman-Anderson, 2001). Anderson & Ackerman-Anderson (2001) state that vision is “by definition, a quest, a dramatic stretch that energizes and motivates the organization to pursue this very different and exciting outcome”. Anderson &

Ackerman-Anderson (2001) also state, “metaphorically, the vision is the picture of the future from the 30,000-foot level. The vision is directional and inspirational, not necessarily tangible”. Ackerman & Anderson & Ackerman’s statements above demonstrate the role that vision has in giving directionality, forward thinking, motivation, and inspiration to stakeholders within the organization. Vision provides a motivating and clear plan to address the gaps between the current state and the desired state (McKee et al., 2008). McKee et al. (2008) attests that “It [vision] must be a learning agenda filled with excitement and the joy of discovery, not one with the feeling of obligation of a to-do list”.

Additionally, Bennis and Nanus (2007) posit that the first of four strategies of effective leadership is creating a collective vision for the future of the organization. The development of a shared vision increases followers’ status, self-esteem, sense of accomplishment and meaning in the organization (Bennis and Nanus, 2007). When the organization creates vision, there is a collective benefit and reward for both leaders and followers.

Exemplary leaders excel not only at creating a shared organizational vision but at providing the “why” behind that vision. In doing so, exemplary leaders create forward thinking and innovation for not just their followers but for themselves (Ackerman-Anderson (2001); McKee et al., 2008; Senge, 2006). The outcomes discussed above regarding vision are key to finding and maintaining professional and personal meaning.

Relationships

A sense of love and belonging is the third tier in Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1968; Maslow, 1971; Maslow, 1999; Maslow, 2000; Soni & Soni, 2016). Abraham Maslow, an acclaimed psychologist, identified five tiers of human needs that are inherent in human nature (Soni & Soni, 2016). After the basic needs of food, water and shelter (tier 1) and physical safety

(tier 2) stands the sense of belonging (tier 3) (Soni & Soni, 2016). Relationships are the core to connectedness in humans and the core to the sense of belonging. Humans are hardwired to thrive on positive emotions with consistent positive feedback from those we interact with (Crowley, 2011). Organizations need to foster a sense of wellbeing by building emotional safety and security through relationship-building (Crowley, 2011). In effective organizations, strength in relationship is critical between stakeholders and leaders/followers to allow the critical components of coaching, teaching, mentoring (Crowley, 2011). The Center for Creative Leadership (2015) conducted a study in 2015 in which over 400,000 people from over 7,500 different companies affirmed that relationships are pivotal for success. The Center for Creative Leadership (2015) also found that more than 115 executives endorsed that relationships are a necessary and compelling aspect of building and maintaining a successful career.

Workplace friendships and relationships support the growth of trust, common purpose, encouragement, and care for others (Conley; 2017; Covey; 2004; Crowley, 2011; Kouzes & Posner, 2006). In order to thrive, people need to feel valued and respected. Healthy workplace relationships support feelings of meaning in their connections with others and have been identified as a significant factor in people's motivation and drive at work (Conley; 2017; Covey; 2004; Crowley, 2011; Kouzes & Posner, 2006). Safe and authentic relationships of mutual respect and vulnerability are crucial to the development of personal and professional meaning.

Wisdom

Nayak (2016) states that “Wisdom is almost always associated with doing the right thing in the right way under right circumstances in order to achieve the common good”. Leaders are faced with decisions daily—decisions of great importance and decisions of seemingly meaningless detail. However, exemplary leaders require the wisdom to do the right thing—to

make the right decision for the common good of the organization (Nayak, 2016). Leaders need to make decisions often very quickly with pressure from multiple stakeholders, and having the ability to make the most ethically and legally defensible choice takes an incredible amount of wisdom (Wei & Yip, 2008). Furthermore, leaders using their personal expertise and past experiences supports bringing forth wisdom or knowledge in all they do (Nayak, 2016). Exemplary leaders also develop and utilize a shared vision with their followers in the work they do (Nayak, 2006; Wei & Yip, 2008). Transcending wisdom may support the development of personal and organization meaning for both leaders and their followers.

Inspiration

“When you are inspired, your work can be inspirational to others. You tap into your most natural self and you can contribute at a much higher level. It becomes effortless” (Aronica & Robinson, 2009, p. Chapter 4). Clearly, Aronica and Robinson posit that inspiration is a key factor in success. The leader transcends inspiration to their followers through clearly communicating their own inspiration (Aronica & Robinson). Great leaders build trust through inspiration (McKee et al., 2008). As such, Gallo (2007) describes the seven simple secrets of influence that lead to his coined acronym, INSPIRE: (1) Ignite your influence, (2) Navigate the way to success with vision, (3) Sell the benefit—put listeners first, (4) Paint a picture with stories and actions, (5) Invite input, (6) Reinforce outlook and be a beacon of hope, and (7) Encourage with praise. Transformational leaders INSPIRE and through this process bring about more personal and organizational meaning (Gallo, 2007).

Scott Mautz (2018) also discusses the various drivers of inspiration. An exemplary leader must be able to motivate their followers in addition to recognizing and rewarding strengths (Kouzes & Posner, 2007; Mautz, 2018). Generating enthusiasm, honoring achievements, having

innovative thinking, encouraging risk-taking, and building confidence are all critical attributes of exemplary leaders who create inspiration for themselves and their followers (Kouzes & Posner, 2007; Mautz, 2018).

Integration of Leadership Domains

Major findings in meaning-maker leadership indicate that to create organizational and personal meaning, the integration of the five domains (character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration) is essential (Bartels, 2017; Herrera, 2017; Hodge, 2017; Thompson, 2018; Villanueva, 2017). Exemplary leaders in other populations all agree that all five leadership domains must be present to create meaning (Bartels, 2017; Herrera, 2017; Hodge, 2017; Thompson, 2018; Villanueva, 2017). Exemplary leaders strongly indicate that the integration of character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration are critical to meaning maker leadership.

Research Gap

Through thematic research at Brandman University, 12 studies were conducted between 2016 – 2018 using Larick and Peterson’s (2015) meaning-maker framework across multiple disciplines including university presidents, superintendents, female CEOs, and law enforcement. However, the meaning-maker framework has not been applied to the field of special education, where the administrators require the highest level of transformational leadership skills in order to attract and maintain quality teachers in public schools within the complex compliance system. Accordingly, there stands a significant gap in the research for expanding this new construct to other populations and fields.

This review of the literature has examined special education and how the procedural safeguards for students and families may have come at the unexpected cost of decreasing meaning and morale for special education leaders and their followers. It is imperative to

examine the ways in which special education administrators can create meaning for their followers who are leaving the field at alarming rates. In part, this study will use the meaning-maker framework by Larick and Peterson (2015, 2016) and 13 Brandman thematic researchers, which has looked at 13 populations and how their leaders create meaning for followers. With close to 1,000 public school districts in California with special education programs, it is critical for special education administrators to create and maintain meaning for their followers. This study will examine the behaviors that exemplary special education administrators use to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers through character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration. Additionally, this study will seek to find the degree to which special education teachers perceive the behaviors related to character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration help to create personal and organizational meaning.

Summary

This review of literature examines the current special education environment including how the legal changes, evolving case law, collective bargaining units, special education advocates, and significant underfunding all add to significant job complexity for special education leaders and their followers (Billingsley, 2002; Chalkbeat, 2014; CTA, 2009; Kucuksuleymanoglu, 2011; Mueller, 2009; Saricam & Sakiz, 2014; Singh, 2015; Tyler & Brunner, 2014). Furthermore, the review of the literature gives evidence of the drivers that may be decreasing teacher morale and decreasing the meaning they experience at work, resulting in the astounding attrition rates of special education teachers.

Additionally, this review of the literature explored the theoretical framework, first through the foundational work of Viktor Frankl, Frederick Herzberg, and Abraham Maslow and then through the more current work of Mautz and Fred Kofman. Additionally, the review of the

literature explored meaning-maker leadership and the five meaning-maker domains. The foundational work of Larick and Peterson (2015, 2016) found that the dynamic interaction of five domains of leadership (character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration) create and maintain meaning for leaders and their followers. Larick and Peterson (2015, 2016) posit that leaders who lead with character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration create an environment for themselves and their followers that can be the foundation for transformational change to be cultivated. In determining their framework, there are seminal authors whose research in the field of leadership supported Larick and Peterson's (2015, 2016) development of the meaning-maker construct. Furthermore, 13 researchers from Brandman University conducted studies to further explore the leadership behaviors from a variety of fields and their impact on the development and maintenance of meaning in an organization. Lastly, this review of the literature regarding the population of special education is clear in its finding that there is a significant need for leaders to create and maintain personal and organizational meaning if they and their followers are to work in this complicated field.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Overview

Chapter III serves as the explanation of the methodology of the current study. Roberts (2010 p. 133) states, “It describes the design and the specific procedures used in conducting the study” to review the methodology of the current mixed-methods case study, which seeks to identify and describe the behaviors used by exemplary special education administrators to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers. The study also assesses the degree to which followers believe the behavior of the special education administrators creates organizational meaning. Chapter III describes the purpose statement and research questions along with the rationale for using a mixed-methods research design. Furthermore, the population, sample, instrumentation, validity, reliability, data collection, data analysis, limitations to the study and references used will be expanded upon.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this mixed-methods case study was to identify and describe the behaviors that exemplary Directors of Special Education use to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers through character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration.

In addition, it is the purpose of this study to determine the degree to which special education teachers perceive that the behaviors related to character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration help to create personal and organizational meaning.

Research Questions

1. What are the behaviors exemplary Directors of Special Education use to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their students through character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration?
2. To what degree do Special Education Teachers perceive that the behaviors related to character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration help to create personal and organizational meaning?

Research Design

A mixed-methods case study was used to identify and describe the behaviors that exemplary Directors of Special Education used to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers. A mixed-methods exploratory case study allowed the researcher greater breadth and depth of the data collected. Cresswell (2003) stated that “results from two types of data produce a more complete understanding” (p. 79). The current mixed-methods study obtained in-depth, qualitative data through interviews from a small number of individuals and generalized it to a larger quantitative sample. The qualitative aspect of the mixed-methods design allowed the researcher to identify how special education administrators use character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers through an in-depth interview process. The quantitative inquiry consisted of collecting survey data from the followers of the selected exemplary special education administrators. The survey asked the followers about their perceptions of how their leader used character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration to create meaning.

A case study took a close look at a system that is unique to its time, place and participants—a “bounded system” (McMillan, 2010). The researcher made a choice on what to

study based on a unique set of circumstances with a specific or single entity rather than a methodology lending itself to be both qualitative and/or quantitative (McMillan, 2010). Creswell (2009, p. 14) stated that “case studies are a design of inquiry found in many fields, especially evaluation, in which the researcher develops an in-depth analysis of a case, often a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals”. As such, an in-depth analysis of the set of circumstances and behaviors used by exemplary special education administrators to create personal and professional meaning for themselves and their followers was completed.

Mixed-Method Rationale

The current mixed-methods case study was an effort to continue the collaborative thematic study of 12 researchers at Brandman University. The thematic studies crossed many fields including nonprofit universities, charter schools, nonprofit organizations, K-12 public schools, private-sector companies, technology firms, automotive organizations, NCAA Division 1 athletic organizations, healthcare organizations, and police departments. A mixed-methods case study was used among all 12 researchers in order to impart more breadth and depth to leadership behaviors through both qualitative and quantitative research design. By maintaining consistency of methodology, the researchers were able to establish correlations between data from different populations. As such, the current study intends to expand the Meaning Makers thematic to a special education population. Thus, the mixed-methods case study was determined to be the most effective methodology for the current study. The current researcher used a scripted interview guide with exemplary special education administrators in order to collect qualitative data. Additionally, approximately 30-40 special education teachers (followers) working under the special education administrators were given a survey to collect the quantitative data. The data

collected supported the researcher in identifying and describing the behaviors that exemplary directors of special education used to create personal and organizational meaning.

Qualitative Research Design

Qualitative research design gathers data through methods such as interviews that require the researcher to interpret information through informed judgement (Cresswell, 2003; Baker, 2001). In this case, major and minor themes were extrapolated through a structured interview with open-ended questions (Cresswell, 2003; Baker, 2001). The data was compared with past literature and archival data to increase the validity and confidence of the findings (Cresswell, 2003; Baker, 2001). The qualitative aspect of this proposed mixed-methods study was to collect information via face-to-face interviews from three exemplary special education administrators in order to impart both breadth and depth to the purpose of the study. The open-ended interview questions probed the leaders on their use of character, vision, wisdom, inspiration and relationships to create personal and professional meaning for themselves and for their followers. The open-ended questions focused on specific variables and insight within those leadership traits. The interviews were recorded and interpreted to identify themes and/or trends for creating personal and professional meaning.

Quantitative Research Design

Quantitative research was used to gather data to be explained through a quantified format in statistical analysis (Cresswell, 2003; Baker, 2001). In this exploratory, mixed-methods research design, the quantitative followed the qualitative to gather more breadth and depth of the research questions. In quantitative research, the researcher used a random sample to answer questions or gather data that was be coded into a statistical format to answer a question or explain something (Creswell, 2009). Furthermore, quantitative researchers used objective

questionnaires that are easy to administer to groups of people in order to gather the data used for statistical analysis (Cresswell, 2003; Baker, 2001). The quantitative aspect of this proposed mixed-methods study was to collect data via an electronic survey with closed-ended questions that special education teachers (followers) working under the selected special education administrators complete. The survey questions probed the degree of importance followers attach to the leadership behaviors (character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration) that special education administrators use to lead. It is important to note that the special education teachers did not reference their current administrator, but special education administrators in general. The survey used was considered a normed and valid survey on leadership behaviors that was developed with a group of researchers, faculty and an instrument expert at Brandman University. It consisted of 30 questions that probed exemplary leader behaviors on a Likert scale. The survey assessed the followers' perceptions of the leader's (special education administrator's) use of character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration in their role. Gathering this information allowed the researcher to determine the degree to which the five leadership characteristics were used to create meaning.

Population

The population stood as the “group of elements or cases, whether individuals, objects, or events, that conform to specific criteria and to which we intend to generalize the results of the research” (McMillan, 2010). Furthermore, Cresswell (2003, p. 644) identified population as “a group of individuals who comprise the same characteristics”. Thus, the population was the group that was used to generalize the findings of the research study. California has 977 public school districts, each of which has a special education administrator. These leaders, while serving only 10-12% of the general population, are held accountable for compliance regulations at the district,

state, and national levels while being charged with leading the special education teachers who experience high attrition rates. (McHatton, Glenn & Gordon, 2012; No Child Left Behind Act, 2002). As such, the population in which the current study strives to generalize was special education administrators and their followers in California.

Target Population

The target population was defined by Cresswell (2003 p. 393) as the “actual list of sampling units from which the sample is selected”. It was the group of individuals within the larger population for which the data was based upon. According to Cresswell and Guetterman (2019, p 390) and McMillan and Schumacher (2010), the target population is the frame from which the sample will draw. According to McMillan & Schumacher (2010), population is defined as “a group of elements of cases, whether individuals, objects, or events, that conform to specific criteria and to which we intend to generalize the results of the research” (p.129). Given there are close to 1,000 public school districts in California, it was not possible to use the entire population due to time, logistics, geography, and financial constraints; thus convenience sampling was used. According to Patton (2015), convenience sampling is used when researchers identify individuals for the study that can be approached in the most convenient way, usually based on geographical area. Consequently, the study was narrowed to three counties within the Northern California Bay Area—Sonoma County, Marin County, and Solano County. There are a total of 53 public school districts within the three identified counties; however, the study was narrowed to 25 special education leaders. Within the 53 public school districts of Sonoma, Solano, and Marin Counties, 25 of the public districts have special education leaders who employed at least 12 special education teachers (followers) under their supervision.

Qualitative Sample

McMillian & Schumacher (2010, p.129) describes the sample as “a group of subjects or participants from whom the data are collected”. In the current study, the qualitative sample was narrowed from the 25 identified special education administrators with at least 12 followers to 3 participants using purposeful and reputational sampling. Purposeful sampling supported the researcher in finding information-rich cases. Patton (2015) describes information-rich cases as those from which the researcher can learn a great deal about the issues of central importance to the purpose of the research. Patton (2015, p.265) stated that purposeful sampling is the selection of “information-rich cases to study, cases that by their nature and substance will illuminate the inquiry question being investigated.” Accordingly, the researcher used purposeful sampling to find a sample of information-rich cases of exemplary special education administrators who had at least 12 special education teachers who worked for them in in their organization. Patton (2015) was clear that there are “no rules for a qualitative sample size” (p.311). Rather, qualitative sample size was the number of people that could accurately represent the population (Patton 2015). Both purposeful and reputational sampling were selected to deeply examine complex cases by carefully identifying exemplary leaders. A database of special education administrators in California did not exist, so purposeful and reputational sampling was used to select participants for the study from the pool of possible special education administrators at large for a geographical area.

The current study, which is in alignment with previous research on meaning-makers, defined an exemplary leader as one who demonstrated at least five of the following criteria based upon a team of experts in the field that helped verify the top three leaders: (a) evidence of successful relationships with followers; (b) evidence of leading a successful organization; (c)

minimum of five years of experience in the profession; (d) articles, papers, or materials written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings (e) recognition by peers; and (f) membership in professional association in their field.

Reputational sampling was used to select participants. According to Patten (2015), “key informants or key knowledgeable” can be used in reputational sampling. Key informants are people who are considered highly knowledgeable on the topic being studied and are willing to share that knowledge. An expert panel of key informants assisted the researcher in selecting the sample participants. Three expert members in the field with specific knowledge, extensive experience, and education in the field of special education administration participated as the expert panel. The expert panel consisted of Mary Jane Burke, Jon Lenz, and Jan Tomsy.

Mary Jane Burke began her career in education as an instructional assistant but progressed to many other positions, including teacher, principal, special education administrator, assistant superintendent and deputy superintendent. In 1994, she was elected Marin County Superintendent of Schools and continues to serve in that office. Ms. Burke is the past Chair and current member of the Marin County Treasury Oversight Committee for the County of Marin and served as past President of the California County Superintendents Educational Services Association (CCSESA). She is a longtime member of the Fiscal Crisis and Management Assistance Team (FCMAT) Board of Directors and currently serves as President. Additionally, she serves as a member of the Board of Trustees of Dominican University of California.

Jon Lenz is the assistant superintendent of special education at the Marin County Office of Education. Prior to his current position, he held the following positions: Director of Marin County Special Education Local Planning Area, Director of Special Education and Alternative Education, Tuolumne County SELPA Director, Program Manager, Special Education

Coordinator, and School Psychologist. Mr. Lenz holds a School Psychology Credential, an Administrative Services Credential, a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology, a Master of Arts in Educational Psychology, an Educational Specialist certification in School Psychology, and a Doctorate of Educational Leadership. Mr. Lenz is widely respected throughout Northern California and has significant knowledge of all of the special education administrators throughout the North Bay.

Jan Tomsy is a partner at Fagen, Friedman & Fulfrost LLP, one of the largest and most respected special education law firms in California. Ms. Tomsy is nationally recognized leader in special education law and has worked closely with special education administrators throughout Northern California. Ms. Tomsy frequently presents at the Association of School Administrators conferences, national institutes, director's summits, and state/regional conferences throughout the United States. Prior to her work in special education law, she was Dean of Admissions and Financial Aid as well as the registrar at Dominican University in San Rafael. She has a master's degree in education with an emphasis in special education and graduated summa cum laude. Ms. Tomsy works on complex special education issues with dozens of special education administrators in the greater Northern California area.

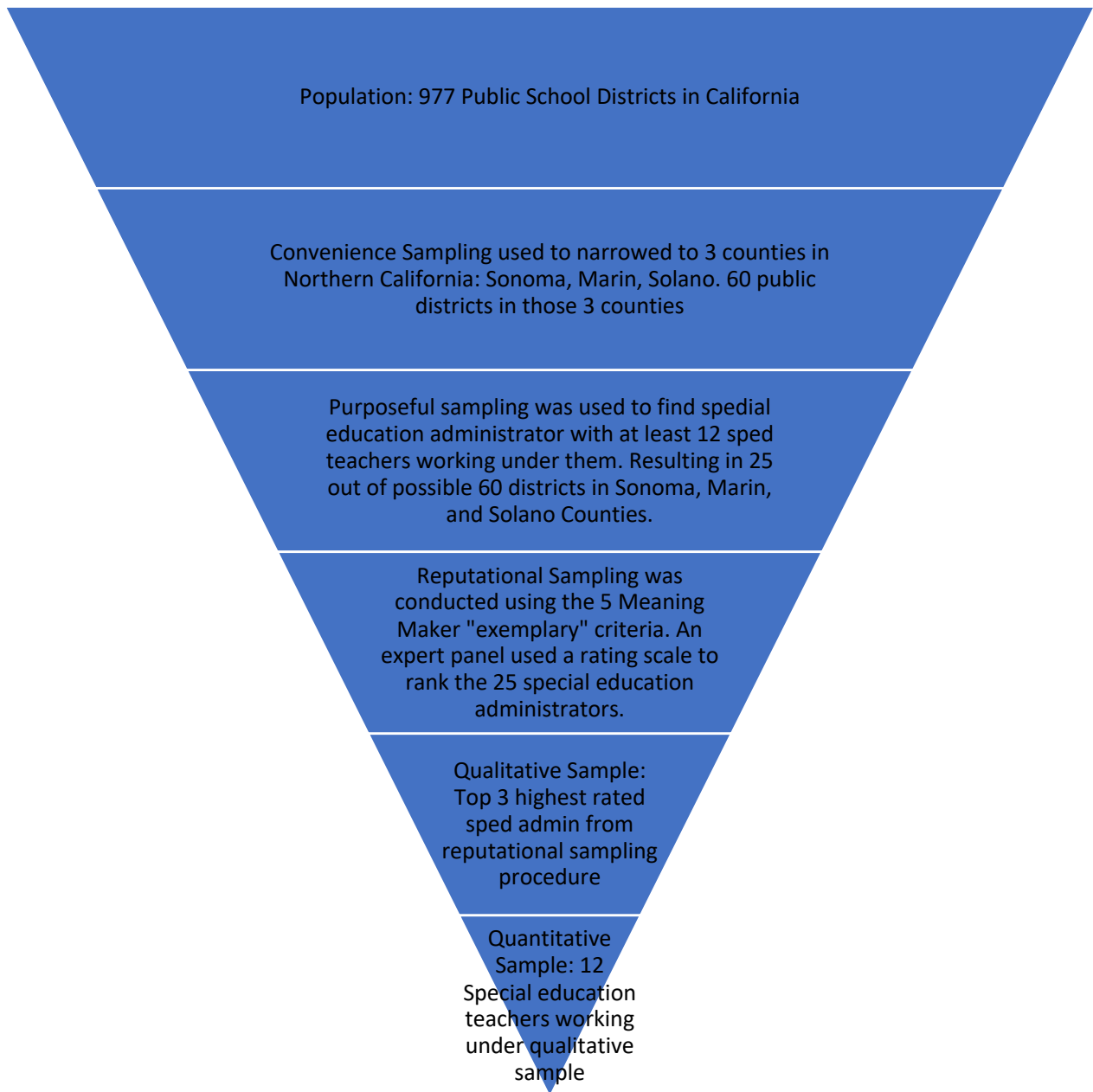
The expert panel identified and ranked 25 special education administrators based on the defined "exemplary" criteria using a five-point scale to rank the potential administrators, with most exemplary being 1 and least exemplary being 5. The three with the lowest scores were selected as the qualitative participants. Through a structured interview process, the intent of this study was to identify and describe the behaviors that the three selected exemplary special education administrators used to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers.

Quantitative Sample

After the qualitative sample's exemplary special education administrators were selected and interviewed, the researcher discussed the boundaries of the follower sample with the subject. The researcher explained that the followers must hold valid special education teaching credentials in the state of California and be employed and working under the leadership of the selected participant. Once 12 followers were verified, the researcher explained that the followers would be asked to complete an online questionnaire regarding the degree to which the special education teachers feel the leadership domains are important. Once the researcher completed the interview with the exemplary special education administrators, an email to the participants was sent. This email contained a gesture of gratitude and a prompt to the exemplary special education administrator to distribute the survey. The exemplary special education administrator or designee was responsible for distributing the online surveys to the quantitative participants. This email is provided in the Appendix of this study. See Figure 2 for the selection of the participants in the current study.

Figure 2

Graphical Representation of the Population and Sample Funnel



An Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval of Research Protocol to the Brandman University IRB was submitted and approved (Appendix I). According to Cresswell (2018), the IRB is a “committee on a college and university campus that reviews research to determine to what extent the research could place participants at risk during the study” (p. 248). The researcher was required to file an application with the IRB for the specific university and, when approved, obtain informed consent from participants acknowledging that the level of risk associated with the study was disclosed (Cresswell, 2018). The current researcher completed the online training through the National Institute of Health titled “Protecting Human Research Participants”, which is attached in Appendix II. Only after approval for the study through IRB were the participants contacted and asked to participate in the study. A series of 60-minute face-to-face interviews was scheduled, one with each of the three identified exemplary special education administrators. Prior to the interview, the participant was provided with a copy of the following: (a) informed consent (to be signed at time of interview, Appendix III), (b) invitation letter (Appendix IV), (c) script questions for review (Appendix V), and (d) Research Participants Bill of Rights (Appendix VI). The interviews were recorded and transcribed by the researcher (audio release, Appendix VII).

The three selected exemplary leaders selected at least 12 of their followers to complete the online survey (quantitative portion of the study). The followers received an introduction letter from the researcher requesting their participation in the study via online survey (Appendix VIII). Once the participants consented to the study, they received the online survey via email with instructions for completion (Appendix IX).

Instrumentation

Mixed-methods instrumentation was utilized for this study, yielding both quantitative and qualitative data. According to Cresswell (2018), a mixed-methods design gave more insight into the research problem and question as it integrated varying types of data. The current study utilized instruments developed by peer researchers, Brandman University faculty, and an instrumentation expert in the field. To keep in alignment and fidelity to the Brandman thematic research on the meaning-maker construct, instrumentation consistency was critical. Scripted interview questions developed through thematic research on Brandman meaning-makers research included all domains of inquiry required from the research questions. A SurveyMonkey quantitative instrument was created by Brandman University faculty and researchers, Dr. Larick and Dr. Peterson with the support of thematic researchers and Dr. James Cox, author of, *Your Opinion Please! How to Build the Best Questionnaires in the Field of Education*.

Qualitative Instrumentation

Cresswell (2018) reported that interviews have many advantages in qualitative research, including a gathering of historical information and allowing the researcher the ability to control the line of questioning. However, he cautioned that all the information can be filtered through the lens of the researcher, which can lead to potential bias (Cresswell, 2018). Additionally, both Cresswell (2018) and Patton (2015) posited that not all participants have equitable communication skills, and some may not be as articulate or perceptive as others, which could affect the data. In understanding this information, the researcher was mindful of these potential negative effects on the study and adjusted behavior as needed. The three interviews were completed with Brandman University Institutional Review Board's (BUIRB) approval. The researcher started the interviews by building rapport through conversation, which included an

overview of the study, an explanation of its purpose, and a review of the procedural safeguards. All three participants signed the informed consent, granting the researcher permission to record the interview. The scripted interview questions were followed and the recorded interview was transcribed and coded using NVIVO data.

Quantitative Instrumentation

The quantitative surveys were developed by Brandman University faculty and researchers, Dr. Larick and Dr. Peterson based on their Meaning Maker research and presentations (2016). Larick and Peterson (2016) had the support of thematic researchers and Dr. James Cox, author of, *Your Opinion Please! How to Build the Best Questionnaires in the Field of Education* in the instrument. The survey consisted of 30 questions on a six-point Likert scale using the research surrounding the five meaning-maker domains of character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration. Alignment tables (Appendix X) were developed as part of the instrumentation development and over 12 revisions were completed prior to the instrument being used in research. Both the interview protocol and the survey were used in multiple studies to date. The surveys were distributed by the three selected exemplary special education leaders to their followers via SurveyMonkey (www.surveymonkey.com). In addition, the participants signed informed consent after a brief overview of the study.

Reliability and Validity

Cresswell (2018) stated that “qualitative validity means that the researcher checks for the accuracy of the findings by employing certain procedures, whereas qualitative reliability indicates that the researcher’s approach is consistent across different researches and among different projects” (p. 199). For this study, an open-ended interview guide was created through the Brandman thematic researchers on Meaning Makers. The interview guide was developed to

ask standardized open-ended questions to understand their experiences using the five meaning-maker domains as a special education administrator (Patton, 2015). Included in the interview were seven questions probing participants on their experiences working in special education with regard to the five meaning-maker domains established by Larick & Peterson (2015, 2016). Additionally, follow-up probe questions were available to the researcher to inquire further into the leaders' experiences (Patton, 2015). The researcher chose this structured interview method to ensure that each of the special education administrators was asked the same questions. Patton (2015) emphasizes the researcher's responsibility to listen intently to the participants' answers to understand when probes are needed, and the responsibility to continuously be sensitive to the needs of the participant.

The aforementioned open-ended interview questions in addition to the Likert-scale quantitative survey were established through the development process with Larick and Peterson (2016) while supported by 12 peer researchers and an instrument expert. Alignment tables were developed as part of the instrumentation development and over 12 revisions were completed prior to the instrument being used in research. Both the interview protocol and the survey were used in multiple studies to date. Cresswell (2014) posits that validity "means that the researcher checks for the accuracy of the findings by employing certain procedures" (p.201). In contrast, McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patten 2014; Patton 2015) indicate that reliability measures work to ensure that the results are consistent, standardized, and produce trustworthy results. As such, in part to establish reliability and validity, the interview protocol/questions as well as the surveys were reviewed with the input of experts in the field, field testing was conducted, intercoder reliability was established, and triangulation was used.

Field Testing Interviews

Field testing for both qualitative and quantitative research methods of the study were conducted to “ensure content validity of scores on an instrument; to provide an initial evaluation of the internal consistency of the items; and to improve questions, format and instructions” (Cresswell, 2018 p.154). Furthermore, McMillan & Schumacher (2010) emphasize how field testing or a pilot test enhances the trustworthiness of the data collection. As such, a pilot test on a similar participant to the study was conducted. An expert researcher was present with the current researcher during the field testing to observe and give feedback on the style of the researcher including tone, body language, and interview skills.

Prior to following the interview protocol, the researcher established the participant’s qualifications to the exemplary leader criteria, demonstrating at least five of the following criteria: (a) evidence of successful relationships with followers; (b) evidence of leading a successful organization; (c) minimum of five years of experience in the profession; (d) articles, papers, or materials written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings (e) recognition by peers; and (f) membership in a professional association in their field. The established interview guide and questions were strictly followed on all field-test interviews to support the validity of the qualitative facet of the study.

Following the pilot test, a debriefing session took place where the interviewee and observer provided feedback. The researcher integrated the feedback from the pilot test to refine interview techniques prior to entering the field.

Field Testing Surveys

The survey used was field tested through the thematic team at Brandman University. The questions were created using the research surrounding the five meaning-maker domains of

character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration. Test-retest reliability was established through the Brandman faculty and the thematic research team. The thematic researchers selected 5 – 10 leaders with characteristics similar to those selected for their study to take the pilot survey. About 5 – 7 days later, the pilot survey was re-administered to the same group. Following this process, a third-party evaluator correlated the scores and reviewed the results of the two-test pilot to evaluate for stability over time.

Intercoder Reliability

Intercoder reliability refers to multiple researchers interpreting the same data, resulting in agreeable outcomes (McMillan & Schumaker, 2010). Using a peer researcher to review a portion of the data to check the plausibility of data interpretation is recommended by Cresswell (2014). Agreement in the interpretation of data indicated there was consistency in measurement (McMillan & Schumaker, 2010). When two or more researchers agree on the same codes for the same passages of text, intercoder reliability is established (Cresswell, 2014; McMillan & Schumaker, 2010). For the current study, intercoder reliability was established by having a third-party researcher review 10-12% of the qualitative data and compare it against the researcher's interpretation. This process ensured acceptable levels of reliability that the data made sense. The current researcher used Neuendorf's (2002) "rule of thumb" to establish acceptable levels of reliability. A coefficient of .80 or above is considered acceptable and will be used in the current study (Neuendorf, 2002).

Triangulation

The current study used both qualitative (interview data) and quantitative (survey data) to answer the research questions. Through the comparison of multiple sources of data, including the findings of this study with research reviewed in Chapter II, triangulation occurred. Thus, the

validity of the study's findings was strengthened. (Patton, 2015). According to Bloomberg & Volpe (2016), using various procedures of data collection within one study reduces the likelihood of misinterpretation of data and increases the overall reliability and validity of the study. Furthermore, using multiple sources of data, such as interviews and survey data, helps to clarify meaning and supports an in-depth understanding of what is being studied (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). As such, multiple sources of data were used.

Data Collection

Data collection for the current study supported the researcher in addressing the research questions. In keeping with Cresswell (2018), the researcher used a mixed-methods approach to integrate both the qualitative and quantitative data. Once the sample was defined, the three exemplary special education administrators were contacted to confirm the time, date and location for the hour-long interview process to take place. Once confirmation was established, an email with the BUIRB's informed consent form was provided. The face-to-face interviews were scheduled using the developed questions, and the interview protocol, including probes/follow-up questions, was closely followed. Two recording devices were utilized to ensure that all data was captured without error.

Following the qualitative data collection, the leader was given the link and information on data collection for the followers to complete via hard-copy instructions and email. In addition to the survey link, the informed consent agreement, descriptions of the study, questionnaire instructions, and demographic data collection was provided for distribution for the quantitative participants. The researcher remained in consistent connection with the leader to ensure that survey data was collected.

Table 1

Data-Collection Procedures

Steps for Data Collection	Detailed Checklist
<i>Interviews (qualitative)</i>	
1. Recruit and contact exemplary special education administrators with chair approval	➤ Obtain permission from Brandman University IRB to conduct the study
2. Send participants the Bill of Rights and the informed consent form	➤ Explain the study, its benefits and the process to potential participants via phone and email
3. Review the Bill of Rights and informed consent form prior to interviews	➤ Ensure potential participants meet the criteria of the study
4. Conduct interviews	➤ Schedule interviews with participants
5. Provide information to access the survey at conclusion of the leader interview	➤ Answer questions of the participant upon reviewing the Bill of Rights and informed consent
	➤ Provide the interview questions to the participant
	➤ Start recording devices
	➤ Read the interview document created by the thematic team including probes/follow up questions when needed
	➤ Upon completion, thank the participant and leave the instruction sheet for providing followers with the survey link and information
<i>Surveys (quantitative)</i>	
1. Follow up with an email to the administrator on how followers can access the survey	➤ Email leader to provide information on how the followers may access the survey, thanking them again for their participation
2. Follow survey submissions to ensure completion. Reach out to followers to ensure completion	➤ Check on follower submissions
3. Reach out to leader when necessary to ensure follower participation	➤ Send follower email to participant when necessary to ensure completion
	➤ Upon completion of followers, send leader thank you note

Data Analysis

In order to understand the data collected through the research study, Cresswell (2005) stated, “Analysis consists of taking the data apart to determine individual responses and then

putting it together to summarize it” (Cresswell, 2005, p.10). The current mixed-methods data, including both qualitative and quantitative data, were collected through interviews and surveys respectively. The mixed-methods approach was conducted in order to triangulate data through both qualitative and quantitative data sources.

Information gathered through the three interviews of exemplary special education administrators were used for the data analysis of the qualitative portion of the current study. By coding the data, the researcher discovered patterns that allow the researcher to interpret relationships among the categories (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). After interview data was collected, the researcher had the interviews transcribed through a confidential and professional transcription service. The transcribed interviews were shared with the participants in order to review for accuracy. Once accuracy was established, the transcribed interview data was coded for themes using NVIVO software. Open coding allowed for patterns and relationships to emerge from the data collected. Frequency tables of the themes were created in order to better understand what behaviors special education administrators used to create meaning for themselves and those they lead. In order to establish validity, 10% of the data was given to an independent researcher to cross-check. According to Neuendorf (2002), the levels of reliability that are targeted are: 90% (acceptable), 80% (acceptable in most situations), and 70% (acceptable in exploratory research).

Quantitative data was analyzed by collecting surveys completed by the follower participants identified in this study. A six-point Likert scale was used in the development of the instrument that ranged from 1-6: 1 (not important), 2 (marginally important), 3 (somewhat important), 4 (important), 5 (very important), and 6 (critically important). Follower participants completed the questionnaire online after distribution from their participant leader. Descriptive

statistics was used to determine the central tendency, standard deviation and variance. The mean, median, and mode were calculated to determine the average of the scores, the center scores, and the most frequently occurring score in order to summarize, identify, and describe the essential characteristics of the data (Salkind, 2017). The central tendency showed the average response of all of the participant responses. The standard deviation and variance showed how much deviation there was in the responses to that mean. This allows the researcher to better understand how much variability there are in the scores and how accurate the derived mean is to answer the research question. Qualitative data analysis will be compared with all data sources to support the development of inferences about information emerging from the data in order to answer the research questions of the study.

Limitations

Limitations are present in every study conducted, which may negatively impact the ability to generalize the research (Roberts, 2004). Roberts (2004) stated that “All studies have limitations, and it is important that you state them openly and honestly so that people reading your dissertation can determine for themselves the degree to which the limitations seriously affect the study” (Roberts, 2004, p. 146-147). The limitations to the current study are explored in the following sections.

Time

Time parameters were set for the interviews with the exemplary leaders. By nature, some participants may be more verbose or may need more probing for the data. The amount of depth that the leaders provided in each of the interview questions may have been limited by the length of time the interview took place. Furthermore, as mentioned in the first two chapters of this

study, special education administrators have some of the busiest schedules in a school district and finding adequate time in their schedules could be a limitation to the study.

Distance

The current study's geography is delimited to Marin, Sonoma, and Solano counties. Thus, the ability to generalize to a broader population with greater diversity and a range of differing needs may be limited.

Researcher as an Instrument of Study

The qualitative aspect of this study lends itself to the limitation of the researcher as an instrument of study. Patton (2015) indicated that the lens of the researcher and their confirmation/disconfirmation of evidence in the interview process may lead to observer bias. As a special education administrator, past teacher, and psychologist, it was critical for the researcher to maintain transparency regarding the lens that was brought to the study.

Sample Size

Utilizing only three exemplary directors of special education for the qualitative case study limits the researcher's ability to generalize the results to a broader population. While the sample size is appropriate for the mixed-methods study, it limits the ability to generalize to alternative populations.

Summary

There is a growing body of research on creating personal and professional meaning in the workplace that has been examined across a variety of disciplines. The research has focused on the how the five variables of character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration are used collectively to create personal and organizational meaning and how their followers perceive the importance of those variables. As stated, the meaning-makers research has focused on a variety

of disciplines, but there is a growing need to understand how special education administrators use those five leadership traits to create organizational and professional meaning for them and their special-education followers despite the challenges faced in the field. Thus, a mixed-methods case study was used to answer the research questions presented. The chapter examined the purpose, research questions, research design, population, sample, data collection, instruments, and data analysis to provide evidence in order to answer the proposed questions in the research. The limitations to the study are discussed and the results will yield further information on how the leadership traits of character, wisdom, vision, relationships, and inspiration are used to create personal and professional meaning in the workplace.

CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

Chapter IV outlines the process for the current study, including the data collection and findings. The purpose statement and research questions are reviewed, followed by a discussion on the population, sample, and demographics for the current study. Presenting the data findings is the predominant focus of this chapter—specifically, qualitative data surrounding the behaviors that exemplary special education leaders use to create meaning for themselves and their followers through character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration. Data analysis and the major findings related to the meaning maker domains are presented.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this mixed-methods case study was to identify and describe the behaviors that exemplary special education administrators use to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers through character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration.

In addition, it is the purpose of this study to determine the degree of importance that special education teachers attach to the behaviors related to character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration as they help to create personal and organizational meaning.

Research Questions

1. What are the behaviors exemplary Special Education administrators use to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers through character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration?
2. To what degree do Special Education Teachers perceive that the behaviors related to character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration help to create personal and organizational meaning?

Research Methods and Data-Collection Procedures

A mixed-methods case study will be used to identify and describe the behaviors that exemplary Directors of Special Education use to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their special education teacher followers. The researcher conducted in-depth interviews with three special education leaders who were identified through specific criteria as exemplary in their field. The interviews were conducted in the location most convenient to the leader and were recorded with permission of the leader. Following the interviews, a minimum of 12 special education teacher followers reporting to each leader completed an anonymous online survey via SurveyMonkey that further assessed the leadership behaviors of the exemplary leaders. The data obtained for the study were stored securely by the researcher.

Population

The population for the current study is special education leaders working in public schools in California. California has 977 public school districts, each having a special education administrator. The target population is defined by Creswell (2003 p. 393) as the “actual list of sampling units from which the sample is selected”. It is the group of individuals within the larger population upon which the data will be based. Given there are close to 1,000 public school districts in California, it was not possible to use the entire population due to time, logistics, geography, and financial constraints. The following section outlines in detail how the sample was derived.

Sample

Qualitative Sample

A qualitative sample stands as “a group of subjects or participants from whom the data are collected” (McMillian & Schumacher, 2010, p.129). Convenience sampling narrowed the

study to three counties within Northern California’s Bay Area—Sonoma County, Marin County, and Solano County. There are a total of 53 public school districts within the three identified counties. However, only 25 out of the possible 53 districts have special education administrators employing at least 12 special education teachers (followers) under their supervision. As such, convenience sampling was used in the study was narrowed to 25 special education leaders that fit the profile of exemplary special education administrators with at least 12 followers.

Following the convenience sampling, purposeful sampling was used to gain a qualitative sample of three exemplary special education administrators who have at least 12 special education teachers working for them in their organization. The current study, defines an exemplary leader as one who demonstrates at least five of the following criteria based upon a team of experts in the field that help verify the top three leaders: (a) evidence of successful relationships with followers; (b) evidence of leading a successful organization; (c) minimum of five years of experience in the profession; (d) articles, papers, or materials written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings; (e) recognition by peers; and (f) membership in a professional association in their field. These exemplary criteria are in alignment with the previous meaning maker thematic research.

A database of exemplary special education administrators in California does not exist, so purposeful and reputational sampling was used to select participants for the study from the pool of possible special education administrators from Sonoma, Marin, and Solano counties. From the pool of 25 potential special education administrators from those three counties that have at least 12 special education teacher followers, a panel of experts was used to narrow down the sample. The expert panel identified and ranked 25 special education administrators based on the defined “exemplary” criteria, using a 5-point scale to rank the potential administrators, with most

exemplary being 1 and less exemplary being 5. The three with the lowest scores were selected as the qualitative participants. One of the identified top three participants was not willing to participate in the study, and the fourth-ranked participant was subsequently selected.

Quantitative Sample

After the qualitative sample of exemplary special education administrators were selected and interviewed, the researcher discussed the boundaries of the follower sample with the subject. The researcher explained that the followers must hold valid special education teaching credentials in the state of California and be employed and working under the leadership of the selected participant. Once 12 followers were verified, the researcher explained that the followers would be asked to complete an online questionnaire. Once the researcher completed the interview with the exemplary special education administrator, an email to the participant was sent. This email contained a gesture of gratitude and a prompt to the exemplary special education administrator to distribute the survey. The exemplary special education administrator or designee was responsible for distributing the online surveys to the quantitative participants. This email is provided in the Appendix of this study.

Demographic Data

Three exemplary special education administrators were selected and interviewed as a part of the current study. The interview data obtained stands as the qualitative portion of the study. The three selected exemplary leaders met the criteria for “exemplary” and were selected through the aforementioned process of convenience and reputational sampling. Two of the participants were females and one was male; all three fell in the age range of 35-54. All three leaders have 12-13 years of experience and hold at least a Master’s Degree. One leader completed the coursework for a doctorate but did not complete a dissertation, indicating she is “All but

Dissertation” or ABD. While all three leaders have recognition by peers and memberships in professional organizations, only one leader has published or presented at a conference. Table 1 outlines the demographic breakdown of the qualitative participants in the study.

A total of 35 special education teacher participants completed the online survey as part of the quantitative part of this mixed-methods study. Given that each leader sent out 12 surveys, the return rate of quantitative survey was 97%. A majority (73.5% vs 26.5%) of the respondents to the survey were female and represented an age range spanning from 20-60+ years. Furthermore, the respondents represented from 0-21+ years working in the organization and ranges from 0-11+ years working under their current leader. Roughly half of the respondents were teaching in a special day class setting and the other half in a resource specialist/ed specialist position; they represented grade levels from elementary through post-secondary. Demographic information was included as part of the survey questions and is exhibited in Table 2.

Table 2

Demographic Information for Exemplary Special Education Administrators

Category	Participant A	Participant B	Participant C
Gender	Female	Female	Male
Age Range	35-54	35-54	35-54
Years as sped administrator		12	12.5
Level of education		ABD, MS	MA
Successful relationships with followers	X	X	X
Leading a successful organization	X	X	X
Minimum of 5 years of experience in the profession	X	X	X
Have published or presented at conferences/association meetings		X	
Recognition by peers		X	X
Membership in a professional association in field	X	X	X

Table 3

<i>Demographic Information for Special Education Teachers (followers)</i>		
Category	# of Respondents	% of Respondents
Gender		
Male	9	26.5%
Female	25	73.5%
Age		
20-30 years	1	2.9%
31-40 years	6	17.6%
41-50 years	10	29.4%
51-60 years	11	32.3%
60+ years	5	14.7%
Years in organization		
0-5 years	9	26.4%
6-10 years	10	29.4%
11-20 years	7	20.5%
21+ years	8	23.5%
Time with current leader		
0-2 years	18	52.9%
3-5 years	7	20.5%
6-10 years	7	20.5%
11+ years	2	5.8%
Teacher Type		
Special Day Class	18	52.9%
Resource Specialist/Ed Specialist	16	47%
Grade Level		
Elementary School	12	35.2%
Middle School	5	14.7%
High School	12	35.2%
Post-Secondary	5	14.7%

Note. N=34

Presentation and Analysis of Data

Qualitative and quantitative data addressed the research questions. Face-to-face interviews with three exemplary special education administrators and surveys from the special education teachers working under those leaders yielded both qualitative and quantitative data.

This data that was analyzed to answer the two research questions and was presented in the following section.

Intercoder Reliability

In pursuance of reliable data and reduce errors, intercoder reliability measures were exercised for this study. According to Creswell (2018), having two or more coders code the same data to ensure that there is agreement on where the data is coded increases the reliability of the data and decreases the risk of potential bias. As such, 33% of the current study's qualitative data was shared and coded by another expert researcher. The intercoder reliability was above 89%, which indicates that agreement between data coding was evident. According to Creswell (2018), at least 80% agreement is needed for "good qualitative reliability" (p. 202). Accordingly, the intercoder reliability for this study was found to be acceptable and the qualitative results can be considered valid.

Data Analysis for Research Question 1

Research question one for this study was stated in the following way: "What are the behaviors exemplary Special Education administrators use to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers through character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration?". The qualitative data analysis is shared below:

Data Analysis for Meaning-Maker Domains

The following section displays the qualitative data that were coded into themes from the three interviews with exemplary special education administrators. The data presented was collected from five out of seven of the interview questions. This is important to note as the remaining two interview questions asked the participants which leadership domains they felt

were *absolutely necessary* or of *critical importance*. The aforementioned two interview questions are listed below:

1. “Here are five leadership behaviors that research suggests are necessary in an exemplary leader. Looking at these, would you agree that these are all important?
 - Realizing that they are all important, do any jump out as being absolutely essential?
2. Of all the things we have spoken about today—vision, relationships, character, inspiration, and wisdom—are there absolute ‘musts’! that you believe are essential behaviors for an exemplary leader to have?”

The subsections below outline the responses to the above questions. Table 3 outlines the research question, interview questions, and the data to the five domains overall.

Participant A. Participant A was an exemplary female special education administrator working in a large Northern California County Office of Education, overseeing special education programs and teachers ranging from preschool through post-secondary programs. Participant A believed that all five leadership domains were necessary for exemplary leadership. However, she indicated that vision stood out as the most important, accounting for 33% of the total codes collected for this interview question. Participant A supported her response of vision being the most critical leadership domain as she stated, “you’ve got to have something that your teachers and your whole group is going to be on board, buy-in, and want to be excited to be a part of”. Her response directly implied that vision creates meaning for special education teacher followers as it gives them something to “buy into”.

Participant B. Participant B was also an exemplary female special education administrator working in a large Northern California County Office of Education overseeing

special education programs and teachers ranging from preschool through post-secondary programs. Accordingly, Participant B indicated that all five leadership domains are essential in being an exemplary leader. However, she fell into the 66.6% of the respondents indicating that relationships stood out as the most crucial domain with its most notable behaviors as mutual support and trust-building. Participant B stated, “relationships are also what get us through the hard times when things aren’t going well. That relationship we’ve built over time is what we can rely on... it’s like that water-in-the-well feeling”. Participant B stated that with supportive and trusting relationships, the more difficult times at work are more bearable.

Participant C. Participant C was an exemplary male special education administrator working in a large Northern California Public School District who oversees special education programs and teachers ranging from preschool through post-secondary programs. Participant C opined that all 5 leadership domains are essential in exemplary leadership. However, he was part of the 66.6% of the respondents that indicated that relationships stood out as the most important. He gave evidence of this by stating, “you have to be a good collaborator if you’re going to last so really working that relationship angle to create teams...it is the binding agent”. He felt that that ability to build relationships with leaders, peers, students, and parents is critical to success in any aspect of work in special education.

Table 4

<i>Common Themes in Responses for the Interplay of Meaning-Maker Domains</i>				
Research question	Interview question(s)	Common themes for wisdom	Number of occurrences in collected responses	Percentage from total codes collected
What are the behaviors exemplary Special Education administrators use to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers through character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration?	Here are five leadership behaviors that research suggests are necessary in an exemplary leader. Looking at these, would you agree that these are all important?	1. All five leadership domains are important	3	100%
		2. Vision stands out as most important	1	33.3%
		3. Relationships stands out as most important	2	66.6%
	Realizing that they are all important, do any jump out as being absolutely essential?			
	Of all the things we have spoken about today—vision, relationships, character, inspiration, and wisdom—are there absolutes “must”! that you believe are essential behaviors for an exemplary leader to have?			

In summary, 100% of the participants strongly believe that all five leadership domains are critical in exemplary leadership. All three exemplary special education administrators believe the most essential meaning-maker domains are relationships (reported by two out of three participants—66.6%) and vision (reported by one out of three participants—33.3%). As mentioned above, this information regarding the most essential domains of meaning-maker

leadership was gathered from only two of the seven interview questions. The remaining five interview questions were more specific to the five meaning-maker domains. An analysis of the qualitative data on the individual domains is in the following section.

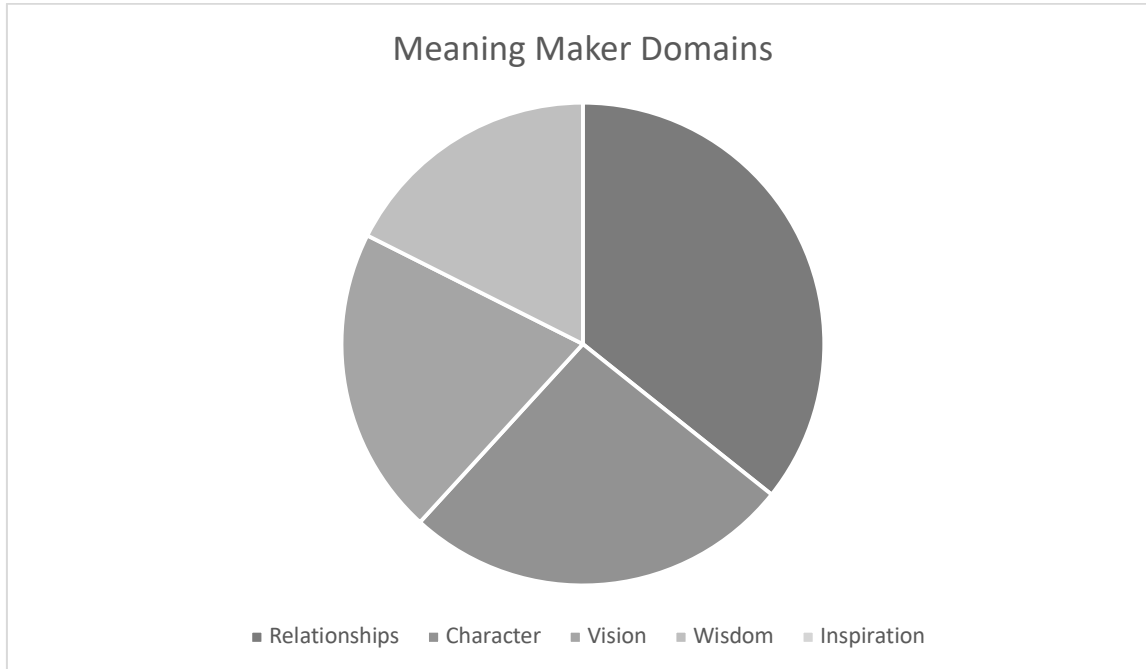
Summary of Data Collected for Individual Meaning-Maker Domains

The three exemplary participant leaders' responses to the remaining five interview questions provided the researcher with critical information in answering the first research question. Again, the first research question is: "What are the behaviors exemplary Special Education administrators use to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers through character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration?". A total of 317 responses were collected through the three qualitative interviews. Within the interview data, the leadership domain of relationships was most frequently occurring with 100 collected responses equating to a total of 31.5% of the total codes was relationships. Following relationships was character (73 collected responses totaling 23% of the total codes), vision (58 collected responses totaling 18.2% of the total codes), wisdom (49 collected responses totaling 15.5% of the total codes), and inspiration (37 responses totaling 11.7% of the total codes). This information is indicated in Table 4 and a visual representation in Figure 4.

Table 5

<i>Meaning-Maker Domains—Number of Occurrences/Percentages</i>			
Research Question	Meaning-maker domains	Number of occurrences in collected responses	Percentage from total codes collected
What are the behaviors exemplary Special Education administrators use to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers through character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration?	1. Relationships	100	31.5%
	2. Character	73	23.0%
	3. Vision	58	18.2%
	4. Wisdom	49	15.5%
	5. Inspiration	37	11.7%

Figure 3



However, within each meaning-maker domain, there were three to four themes that were most commonly found by the researcher. The coded data including the individual themes will be

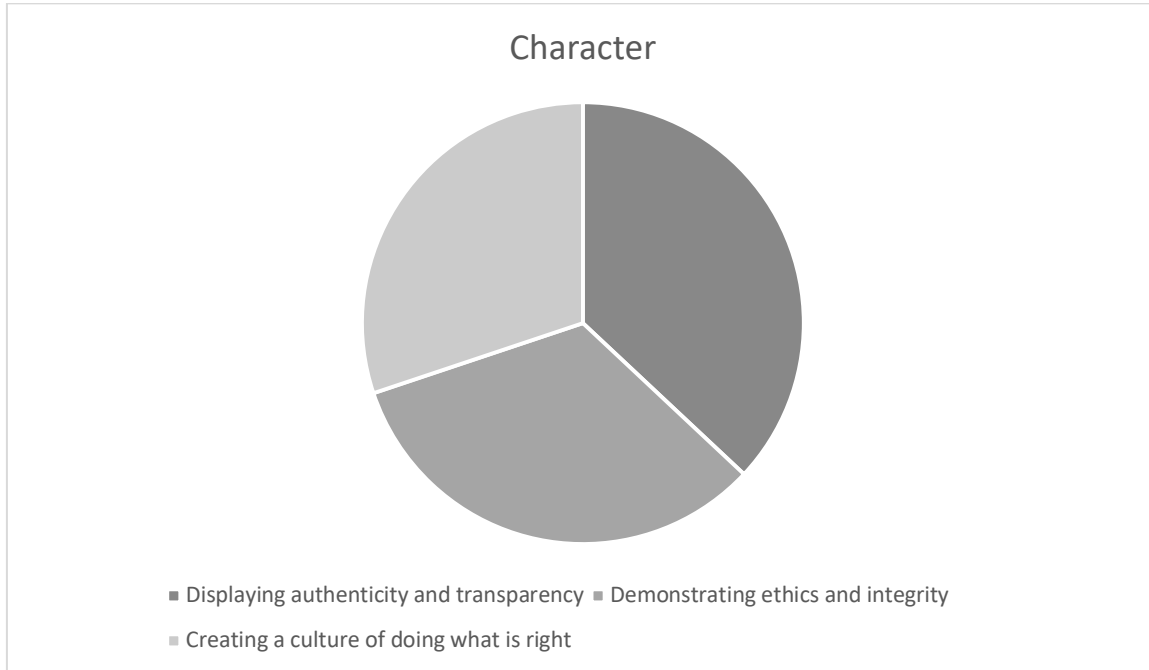
presented in the order outlined in the research question rather than in order of significance or importance. Each individual leadership domain and its most frequently occurring themes will be presented below.

Character. Through the qualitative interview data from exemplary special education administrators, three common themes emerged within the leadership domain of character. Character ranked second out of the five leadership domains for the overall frequency counts. Out of a total of 317 lines of code, 73 of them aligned with the leadership domain of character in three common themes. The themes and number of occurrences in the collected responses is outlined in Table 5 and displayed in Figure 5; however, the themes within the domain of character will be discussed below.

Table 6

<i>Common Themes in Responses for the Meaning-Maker Domain of Character</i>		
Research question	Common themes for character	Number of occurrences in collected responses
What are the behaviors exemplary Special Education administrators use to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers through character?	1. Displaying authenticity and transparency	27
	2. Demonstrating ethics and integrity	24
	3. Creating a culture of doing what is right	22

Figure 4



The following the themes were identified as the most frequently occurring themes for the meaning-maker domain of character.

Displaying authenticity and transparency. The meaning-maker domain of character yielded 73 total codes; however, 27 of those codes articulated the need for leaders to display authenticity and transparency. These 27 codes represented 36.9% of the lines of coded data under this theme. The participant responses articulated that “being real”, having behavioral consistency across settings, and being forthright with intentions were critical. Leaders believed that authenticity and transparency were core factors in effective leadership. Participant C stated, “I think it’s about laying your cards on the table and just being as authentic as possible with people”. Participant A stated, “The teacher, the principal, the parents, have to understand what decisions are being made, what we’re offering as services or programs, but it’s very clear that each person is understanding what direction were going in”. The primary example by all three

participants was the need to be totally open with everyone, even when that information won't be well-received.

Demonstrating ethics and integrity. Demonstrating ethics and integrity was frequently referenced in the interview data surrounding the leadership domain of character. Out of a possible 73 total codes under the character domain, 24 of them referenced exemplary leaders demonstrating ethics and integrity. This amounts to 32.9% of the lines of code for this theme. One participant stated that having morality and ethics in how one works “buys you a lot of capital as a leader”. That “having a strong character and having people know that you're without question, at all time, you're in it for the right reason”; he continues that the infallible display of character “gives you cover” as leaders make mistakes. It was stated that “he can be forgiven because he's got the best intentions at all times”.

Creating a culture of doing what is right. The third theme that emerged from the data under the leadership domain of character was creating a culture of doing what is right. In all, 22 out of a possible 73 lines of code, or 30.1% of responses, referenced the exemplary leaders creating such culture in the workplace. The leaders indicated that all organizations have times of disagreement or difficulty, but “when we have a strong relationship and that trust that what we're doing is for the good of the program—for the good of the students, ultimately, that those hard conversations become easier”. Furthermore, one participant stated, “I can direct people to do things within the scope of their work. But unless they actually feel that empowerment to do it in a way that they truly feel from their heart is the right thing for the student, I think the outcome looks different”. The leaders were clear in their responses that the culture of doing what is right from everyone in the workplace is the core of special education leadership, stating, “Nobody

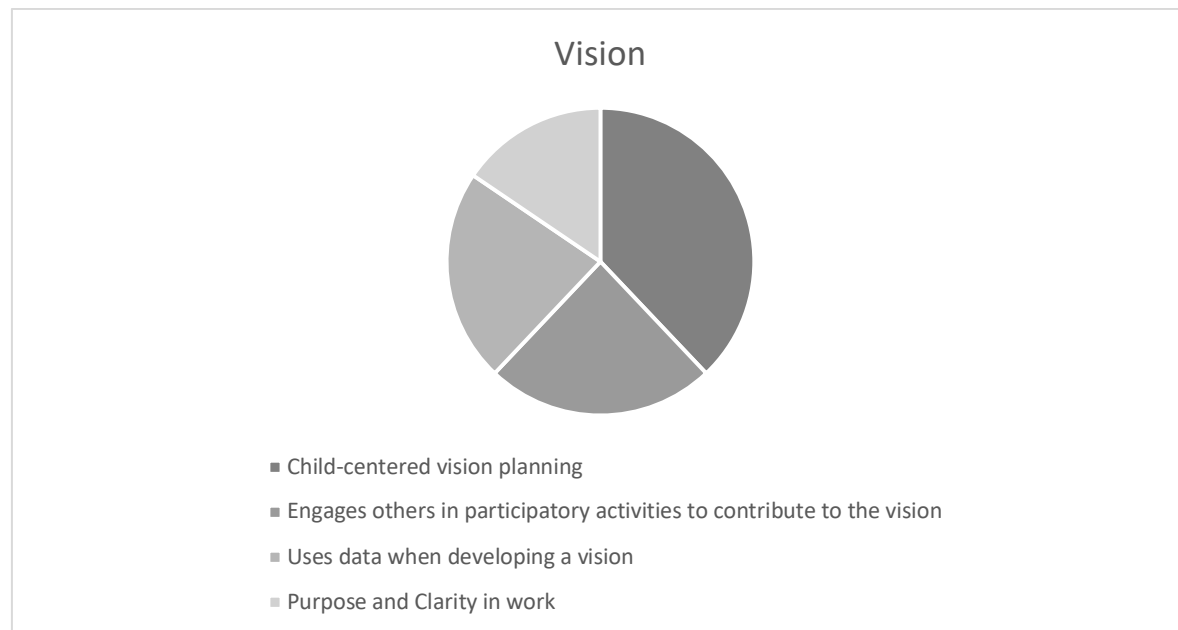
chooses to have a child with special needs, and our obligation as a district is to make sure that those kids have what they need”.

Vision. Within the five leadership domains in meaning-makers, vision had the third-highest number of occurrences in the gathered data. There were a total of 58 codes totaling 18.2% of the coded data under the domain of vision. Four common themes emerged from the data, which are presented in Table 6 and Figure 6 and will be further explained below.

Table 7

<i>Common Themes in Responses for the Meaning-Maker Domain of Vision</i>		
Research question	Common themes for vision	Number of occurrences in collected responses
What are the behaviors exemplary Special Education administrators use to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers through vision?	1. Child-centered vision planning	22
	2. Engages others in participatory activities to contribute to the vision	14
	3. Uses data when developing a vision	13
	4. Purpose and clarity in work	9

Figure 5



Child-centered vision planning. Out of a possible 58 lines of code within the domain of vision, 22 of them (37.9%) related to child-centered vision planning. More specifically, the special education leaders indicated that keeping the child at the center of all that is done, and communicating that value, is critical in meaningful leadership. One participant reported the importance of long-term planning, stating, “we work with kids who are as young as 9 months old up to age 22, so we ask ourselves, ‘what do we want for our kids at age 22 when they leave us?’”. The leaders all indicated that child-centered vision planning took a lot of asking questions and engaging in reflection. One participant stated, “it was really great for us to ask ourselves, ‘what is it at the classroom level? How does everyone play a role in what our ultimate goal is for these kids? And what do we need to do to get there?’”. Child-centered vision planning was the most prominent theme under the leadership domain of vision.

Engaging others in participatory activities to contribute to the vision. This common theme of engaging others in participatory activities to contribute to the vision occurred in 14 out of the possible 58 lines of data (24%). All of the leaders suggested that the “buy-in” from the special education teachers is critical in everyone’s commitment to the vision. For example, participants shared that “you’ve got to have something that your teachers and your whole group is going to be on board, buy-in, and want to be excited to be a part of” and “whether I’m telling them to do it or whether I’m creating the opportunities for them to the same work from that scope but they have developed it”. Engaging others in participatory activities to contribute to the vision was a consistent theme under the domain of vision.

Uses data when developing vision. All three of the participants indicated that using data in vision planning was essential to meaningful leadership. Bringing the information to the forefront so all stakeholders can see the data that lays the foundation for how decisions are made

was a them. 13 out of 58 lines of data had this theme, accounting for 22.4% of the lines of code in this leadership domain. Participant A stated, “You’ve got to assess the program, understand the program, see where there’s weaknesses that need to be focused on the strengths” while Participant C opined that, “...really sharing these compelling data points with people and bring them in”, giving evidence of the participants’ strong belief that using data in developing a vision is critical.

Purpose and clarity in work. The final theme under the leadership domain of vision is leaders creating vision to support followers’ finding purpose and clarity in work. In all, 9 out of a possible 58 codes—15.6%--supported the notion that creating a vision in the workplace gives purpose and clarity in the workplace. “You’ve got to have a strong vision and a very clear vision” so that “everyone has understanding what direction we’re going, and that they’re feeling like they’re part of it”. Exemplary leaders indicated that having a vision helps followers find purpose and clarity at work.

Relationships. Relationships was found to have the highest number of codes in the data set, making up 31.5% or 100 out of a possible 317 lines of code. While four major themes were extracted from the data, some of the lines of code fell into more than one theme. Table 7 and Figure 7 show the themes and number of responses under the leadership domain of relationships.

Table 8

<i>Common Themes in Responses for the Meaning-Maker Domain of Relationships</i>		
Research question	Common themes for relationships	Number of occurrences in collected responses
What are the behaviors exemplary Special Education administrators use to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers through relationships?	1. Promotes trust and respect	30
	2. Available to consistently coach/support staff through challenges	28
	3. Intentionally making time for professional and personal connections	24
	4. Acknowledges and validates the value of others	18

Figure 6



Promotes trust and respect. All three participants gave examples of how leaders promote trust and respect in the organization. The three exemplary leaders produced 30 occurrences out of a possible 100, standing as 30% of the data under this theme. One participant shared, “we can build that trusting relationship where a teacher can come and say exactly what they need, exactly

what they're feeling, and trust that I'm going to hear what they say and support them". Another stated, "when you've developed that kind of trust with your teachers and your team, then this relationship is there, and it builds on each other". The statements from the leaders shows the importance of building trust and respect to form relationships with followers giving solid examples of exemplary leadership.

Available to consistently coach/support staff through challenges. The information provided by the exemplary special education leaders gave evidence that being available to consistently coach/support staff through challenges is a major theme in the leadership domain of relationships. There were 28, or 28% of occurrences in the compiled data giving examples of coaching/supporting staff through challenges. One participant described the experience with teachers, stating, "Teachers really trust that I'm on their team and they can come to me with problems and that I will immediately go into problem-solving mode and support them," while another participant explained that at every staff meeting has an opportunity for coaching through challenges: "I'll usually do my training or topics that I need to cover in policy, then the last half hour is spent going over what is not working".

Intentionally making time for professional and personal connections. The common theme of intentionally making time for professional and personal connections was present in 24 or 24% out of a possible 100 lines of compiled data. The three exemplary special education leaders stated that the amount of policy and paperwork is exponential in special education, making it necessary to be intentional about carving out time to build relationships. For example, one participant shared "being there, being present, that's, I think, first and foremost" and making sure to ask, "who are the players that we work with? And making sure that we're connecting with them all, and being proactive about it".

Acknowledges and validates the value of others. A fourth theme evident under the leadership domain of relationships acknowledges and validates the value of others, which accounted for 18 occurrences in the collected responses (18%). The exemplary leaders opined that people need to feel appreciated and validated in their work to be able to build relationships. For example, one participant shared, “we need to value the professionalism in the work that everyone brings to the table” and “I think taking time to make sure that the teachers know... and all the staff know... that you see how hard they’re working and all that they do for the kids”.

Wisdom. The meaning-making domain of wisdom had 49 occurrences in the 317 lines of compiled data, making up for 31.5% of the total codes collected. Four common themes emerged from the compiled data and Table 8 and Figure 8 display those four themes and their prominence in the interview responses.

Table 9

<i>Common Themes in Responses for the Meaning-Maker Domain of Wisdom</i>		
Research question	Common themes for wisdom	Number of occurrences in collected responses
What are the behaviors exemplary Special Education administrators use to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers through wisdom?	1. Using past experiences or knowledge base in ambiguous situations	15
	2. Utilizing knowledge or strengths of others	13
	3. Using innovation in problem solving	11
	4. Confidence	10

Figure 7



Using past experiences or knowledge base in ambiguous situations. Under the leadership domain of wisdom, 15 out of a possible 51 occurrences fell under the theme of using past experiences or knowledge base in ambiguous situations. These data accounted for 29.4% of the compiled lines of code under the leadership domain of wisdom. One exemplary special education leader shared, “It is a constant navigation and conversation drawing upon, ‘Where have we been in the past as it relates to some of the areas of litigation or case law when we start working on those more complex cases?’”, giving evidence that having a knowledge base and experiences in the field helps to pull the team together to guide in working through ambiguous challenges.

Utilizing knowledge or strengths of others. Exemplary special education administrators indicated through 13 out of a possible 51 occurrences that utilizing knowledge and the strengths of others is a theme in the behaviors used to create meaning under the leadership domain of wisdom. The leaders shared that “you have to rely on all of your experts” and that bringing in all

of the different stakeholders “brings diversity in how we think about problems”. Furthermore, we have to “learn how to work with the team and know where everyone’s strengths lie”.

Using innovation in problem-solving. All of the exemplary special education directors were clear that special education is a complicated field with many grey areas and many fiscal restrictions. 11 out of 51 occurrences or 21.6% of the compiled data showed that using innovation in problem-solving is a critical theme in the behaviors that leaders use to create meaning under the leadership domain of wisdom. One leader discussed the need for constant questioning: “sometimes there are a lot of questions around why, ‘Why would we change? Things are great? ...but things could always be better” and asking “What’s not important here? There is nothing that is not important, so how can we do things differently to better meet the student’s needs.” She continues, “We have to always look at thing with a new lens on”. Using innovation to create change in the complex word of special education was a theme in the qualitative data.

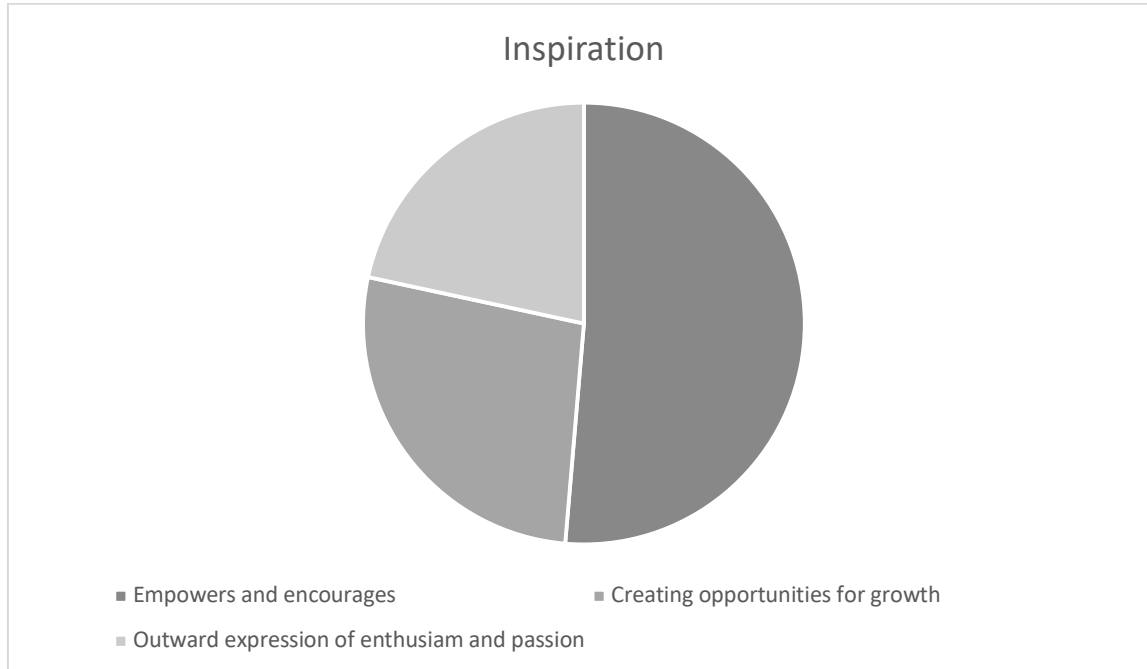
Confidence. The three exemplary special education leaders indicated that having confidence was a consistent theme when discussing the leadership domain of wisdom. 10 out of 51 responses related to confidence, showing that 19.6% of the responses fell under this theme. One leader stated that it’s important to “be able to lead a team through when you’re not exactly sure, I there has to be that balance of your team feeling confident that you can lead them to what the answer is”. While another participant shared with levity, “I think I do a decent job of not looking rattled all the time”, which is important as “you need to speak with confidence” as people see leaders as “the keeper of the wisdom”. All participants acknowledged that they don’t all have the answers, but appearing confident to the followers is critical in leading with wisdom.

Inspiration. Inspiration held the least amount of occurrences of the five leadership domains. Inspiration was referenced 37 times or 11.7% of the time when discussing the behaviors that exemplary leaders use to create meaning. Table 9 and Figure 9 show the occurrences and themes that emerged from the data, which will be further discussed below.

Table 10

<i>Common Themes in Responses for the Meaning-Maker Domain of Inspiration</i>		
Research question	Common themes for inspiration	Number of occurrences in collected responses
What are the behaviors exemplary Special Education administrators use to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers through inspiration?	1. Empowers and encourages	19
	2. Creating opportunities for growth	10
	3. Outward expression of enthusiasm and passion	8

Figure 8



Empowers and encourages. The three exemplary special education leaders referenced the theme of empowerment and encouragement 19 times or in 51% of the data under the

leadership domain of inspiration. One participant shared, “I also have to let them do the job that they’ve been hired to do, and trust that they will. So that’s where that empowerment is really important.” Another stated “I always try to exude enthusiasm, encouragement, and hope”. Empowerment and encouragement emerged as a significant theme under the leadership domain of inspiration.

Creating opportunities for growth. 26% of the compiled data under the domain of inspiration correlated with the theme of creating opportunities for growth. One participant stated, “in my current position, one of the things I love is hiring teacher and the professional development to give the tools to the teachers that they need to be successful” while another shared, “we look at our staff meetings as professional development, and find out not only what they want, but how we can help support the areas that we’re seeing across all programs that we thing we could bring in to help them grow”. Exemplary leadership under the domain of inspiration included creating opportunities for the followers in the organization.

Outward expression of enthusiasm and passion. The final theme falling under the leadership domain of inspiration was leaders having an outward expression of enthusiasm and passion. This theme accounted for 8 of the responses in the 51 in the compiled data. One participant shared that she regularly states to her staff, “It is my expectation that we’re in here for the joy and love of children, and we’ve got hard work to do”. Furthermore, another participant shared that in all the difficult work that leaders cannot forget to “have fun”, “exude enthusiasm, encouragement, and hope”, and “be as excited to see them as passible”. The three participants all gave evidence that the theme of an outward expression of enthusiasm and passion is an important behavior in using wisdom to create meaning in organizations.

Summary of Qualitative Data. Table 10 summarizes qualitative data, displaying all five meaning-maker domains and the themes that were most frequent in the compiled data.

Table 11

<i>Summary of Five Meaning-Maker Domains and Common Themes</i>		
Research question	Common themes for	Number of occurrences in collected responses
	relationships	
	3. Intentionally making time for professional and personal connections	24
	4. Acknowledges and validates the value of others	18
	character	
	1. Displaying authenticity and transparency	27
	2. Demonstrating ethics and integrity	24
	vision	
	1. Child-centered vision planning	22
	2. Engages others in participatory activities to contribute to the vision	14
	3. Uses data when developing a vision	13
	4. Purpose and clarity in work	9
	wisdom	
	1. Using past experiences or knowledge base in ambiguous situations	15
	2. Utilizing knowledge or strengths of others	13
	3. Using innovation in problem solving	11
	4. Confidence	10
	inspiration	
	1. Empowers and encourages	19
	2. Creating opportunities for growth	10
	3. Outward expression of enthusiasm and passion	8

Meaning-Maker Domains in Concert: Unprompted Interview Data. The qualitative interviews from all three exemplary special education administrators yielded unprompted data indicating the significant challenges within the field of special education. Table 11 shows the significantly high number of referenced challenges in special education.

Table 12

Integration of Meaning-Maker Domains- Unprompted responses that reference the challenges in special education

	Number of references to sped challenges	Percentage from total codes collected
Participant A	12	.04%
Participant B	32	10.1%
Participant C	53	16.7%
Total	97	30.6%

All three special education administrators referenced these special education challenges throughout their interviews in speaking about the leadership domains. In fact, 30.6% of the occurrences in the collected responses reference the challenges specific to special education. Participant C stated, “relationships get fragmented, whether it’s relationships with a parent or if a student is especially challenging or if it’s tension with a general education teacher, when there’s two lawyers and advocates and all that stuff”, citing the presence of attorneys and advocates in special education meetings. Another participant stated, “there has long been litigation in special education and that’s part of the game—the kids have federally protected rights and in circumstances, families, if they feel the rights of their students aren’t being honored, then there’s safeguards in place, which includes looping in advocates and attorneys”. Demonstrating the tension between general education and special education, one participant shared, “we’re getting more and more general education teachers who think that it’s just special ed’s problem to fix so that has created a lot of tension”. Lastly, there was evidence of the financial/funding stress in

special education from all three participants: “We encroach on the general fund a lot. I am fortunate that in this district I have board members who get it, but a lot of places don’t” and “People in the audience at board meetings ask questions like, ‘why is that [costs] so high?’. The financial encroachment on district general funds was also evidenced by public document review of the three school districts’ budgets. Special education costs far exceeded the allotted budget amounts in all three districts. Exemplifying the challenges with labor unions it was shared, “we ask, ‘what’s in the best interest of our students?’ but clearly we’re bound by some of our contracts that we have with our teacher and classified unions, and so we have to follow those rules that are out there”. The challenges with labor unions were also evidenced by publicly available documents on collective bargaining units, outlining the boundaries of both general and special education teachers’ numbers of students with IEPs in classrooms, caseload sizes, and behavioral boundaries of students. Clearly through discussing the five domains of leadership, an unprompted finding is the significant challenges in the population of special education.

Data Analysis for Research Question 2

The second research question for the current study was “To what degree do special education teachers perceive that the behaviors related to character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration help to create personal and organizational meaning?”. As such, the following section reports on the quantitative data that supports answering this question.

The current section exhibits the quantitative data under each of the meaning-maker domains collected through an online survey that was distributed to the special education teachers working under the exemplary leaders selected for the study. Each of the leadership domains of character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration has a narrative discussion below with a table outlining the significance in answering research question 2. It is important to note that the

quantitative data was collected through a 1-6 Likert scale with the following levels: 1 (*not important*), 2 (*marginally important*), 3 (*somewhat important*), 4 (*important*), 5 (*very important*), 6 (*critically important*).

Character

The special education teachers were asked through an online survey to rate five leadership behaviors that relate to character through five questions on the survey. The five behaviors rated were as follows:

- Behaves in an ethical manner when dealing with others.
- Actively listens when communicating with others.
- Responds to challenging situations with optimism.
- Actions with others shows that he/she can be trusted.
- Actions that show concern for the well-being of others.

99.9% of the special education teachers who took the leadership survey felt that the five stated leadership behaviors falling under the domain of character were *important* to *critically important*. The 99.9% breaks down to 71.3% feeling they are *critically important*, 28% feeling they are *very important*, and 6.3% feeling they are *important*. The overall mean was 5.6 out of 6, indicating that the special education teachers' average fell within the *critically important* range overall with very low variance, implying that the data is not skewed. The behavior most supported is “actively listens when communicating with others” with a mean of 5.8. Following that behavior, the teachers endorsed that “actions with others show that he/she can be trusted” and “behaves in an ethical manner when dealing with others” which both have a mean of 5.7. Closely following with a mean of 5.5, the special education teachers endorsed “actions with others show that he/she can be trusted”, and lastly, with a mean of 5.1, the teachers reported

“responds to challenging situation with optimism”. Table 12 outlines the quantitative data under the leadership domain of character.

Table 13

<i>Electronic Questionnaire Results for the Meaning-Maker Domain of Character</i>														
Meaning-Making domain: Character	Not important		Marginally important		Somewhat important		Important		Very important		Critically important		Total mean	SD
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%		
Behaves in an ethical manner when dealing with others.	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	2.9%	6	17.1%	28	80%	5.7	
Actively listens when communicating with others.	1	2.9%	0	0%	0	0%	1	2.9%	11	31.4%	24	68.6%	5.8	
Responds to challenging situations with optimism.	0	0%	0	0%	1	2.9%	6	17.1%	18	51.4%	10	28.6%	5.1	
Actions with others show that he/she can be trusted.	0	0%	0	0%	1	2.9%	2	5.7%	5	14.3%	27	77.1%	5.7	
Actions show concern for the well being of others.	0	0%	0	0%	2	5.7%	1	2.9%	9	25.7%	23	66.7%	5.5	
Overall importance	1	.01%	0	0%	4	.02%	11	6.3%	49	28.0%	112	71.3%	5.6	0.79

Note. 1 (not important), 2 (marginally important), 3 (somewhat important), 4 (important), 5 (very important), 6 (critically important). SD= Standard Deviation

Vision

Five behaviors under the leadership domain of vision were rated by the special education teacher respondents (followers) to help answer research question 2. Table 13 outlines the quantitative data under the leadership domain of vision. The five behaviors under vision are listed below:

- Demonstrated thinking toward the future through conversations and actions.

- Communicated the organization’s vision in a way in which team members support it.
- Engages team members in creating a vision when making decisions.
- Behavior reflects organizational vision when making decisions.
- Promotes innovation that aligns with the organization’s vision.

The total mean for the respondents’ results for the leadership domain of vision was 4.9 out of 6. 87.5% of the responses endorsed vision as *important to critically important*. Within the five listed behaviors, “engages team members in creating a vision when making decisions” had the highest mean of 5.5, followed by “behavior reflects organizational vision when making decisions” with a mean of 4.8. Closely following was “demonstrates thinking toward the future through conversations and actions” with a mean of 4.8. The last two behaviors, “communicates the organization’s vision in a way in which team members support it” and “promotes innovation that aligns with the organization’s vision” had the same mean of 4.7. There is little variance in the mean scores, indicating there is little scatter among the means.

Table 14

<i>Electronic Questionnaire Results for the Meaning-Maker Domain of Vision</i>														
Meaning-making domain: Vision	Not important		Marginally important		Somewhat important		Important		Very important		Critically important		Total mean	SD
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%		
Demonstrates thinking toward the future through conversations and actions.	0	0%	1	2.9%	3	8.6%	7	20%	14	40%	10	28.6%	4.8	
Communicates the organization's vision in a way in which team members support it.	0	0%	1	2.9%	4	11.4%	12	34.3%	7	20%	11	31.4%	4.7	
Engages team members in creating a vision when making decisions.	0	0%	2	5.7%	5	14.3%	9	25.7%	13	37.1%	12	34.3%	5.5	
Behavior reflects organizational vision when making decisions.	0	0%	1	2.9%	2	5.7%	8	22.9%	12	34.3%	12	34.3%	4.9	
Promotes Innovation That aligns with the organization's vision.	0	0%	2	5.7%	1	2.9%	13	37.1%	10	28.6%	9	25.7%	4.7	
Overall importance	0	0%	7	4.0%	15	8.5%	49	28.0%	56	32.0%	54	30.1%	4.9	1.08
<i>Note. 1 (not important), 2 (marginally important), 3 (somewhat important), 4 (important), 5 (very important), 6 (critically important). SD= Standard Deviation</i>														

Relationships

Five behaviors under the leadership domain of relationships were rated by the special education teacher respondents (followers) to help answer research question 2. Table 14

outlines the quantitative data under the leadership domain of relationships. The five behaviors under vision are listed below:

- Continuously promotes our team’s moving together as one unit to serve a common purpose.
- Creates an environment of trust among leaders and team members in the organization.
- Behaves in a way that shows he/she cares about the team members.
- Communicates in a clear, meaningful way.
- Encourages team members to share leadership when performing tasks.

The total mean for the respondents’ results for the leadership domain of relationships was 5.2 out of 6. An overwhelming 95.5% of the responses endorsed relationships as *important to critically important*, just following the highest rated domain of character. Within the above five rated behaviors under the domain of relationships, “behaves in a way that shows he/she cares about the team members” had the highest mean of 5.5. The following three behaviors have very close means of 5.4, 5.3, and 5.2 respectively and were “communicates in a clear, meaningful way”, “creates an environment of trust among leaders and team members in the organization”, and “continuously promotes out team’s moving together as one unit to serve a common purpose”. The lowest mean of 4.7 was “encourages team members to share leadership when performing tasks”. Again, there is little variance in the mean scores.

Table 15

<i>Electronic Questionnaire Results for the Meaning-Maker Domain of Relationships</i>														
Meaning-making domain:	Not important		Marginally important		Somewhat important		Important		Very important		Critically important		Total mean	SD
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%		
Relationships continuously promotes our team's moving together as one unit to serve a common purpose.	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	5	14.3%	1	48.6%	1	37.1%	5.2	
Creates an environment of trust among leaders and team members in the organization.	0	0%	1	2.9%	1	2.9%	4	11.4%	8	22.9%	2	60%	5.3	
Behaves in a way that shows he/she cares about the team members.	0	0%	1	2.9%	0	0%	1	2.9%	1	37.1%	2	57.1%	5.5	
Communicates in a clear, meaningful way.	0	0%	0	0%	2	5.7%	1	2.9%	1	40%	1	51.4%	5.4	
Encourages team members to share leadership when performing tasks.	0	0%	0	0%	3	8.6%	1	34.3%	1	34.3%	8	22.9%	4.7	
Overall importance	0	0%	2	4.4%	6	5.7%	2	13.2%	6	36.6%	8	45.7%	5.2	0.89

Note. 1 (not important), 2 (marginally important), 3 (somewhat important), 4 (important), 5 (very important), 6 (critically important). SD=Standard Deviation

Wisdom

The wisdom leadership domain was slightly different than the other leadership domains in that it had 10 behaviors that were rated by the special education teachers. The complexity of

this domain warranted more behaviors to be rated. The behaviors under the leadership domain of wisdom were rated by the special education teacher respondents (followers) to help answer research question 2. Table 15 outlines the quantitative data under the leadership domain of wisdom. The 10 behaviors under wisdom are listed below:

- Evaluates the quality of decision-making by discussing similarities of past situations with team members.
- Demonstrates compassion toward team members.
- Behavior reflects an understanding of life's complexities.
- Integrates personal values with organizational values when interacting with team members.
- Brings personal knowledge to the table when responding to complex situations within the organization.
- Considers past experiences when responding to complex situations within the organization.
- Shows concern for others in a variety of organizational settings.
- When working with teams and team members, continuously keeps the overall goals of the organization as part of conversations.
- Takes action by doing the “right thing” in a variety of organizational settings.

The total mean for the respondents' results for the leadership domain of vision was 5.0 out of 6. 90.9% of the responses endorsed relationships as *important* to *critically important*. Within the above 10 rated behaviors under the domain of wisdom the three behaviors of, “demonstrates compassion toward team members”, “when working with teams and team members, continuously keeps the overall goals of the organization as part of conversations”, and “takes

action by doing the ‘right thing’ in a variety of organizational settings”, all had the highest mean of 5.3. The following behavior of “shows concern for others in a variety of organizational settings” had a mean of 5.2 followed by “displays expertise when working in a variety of situations within the organization” and “brings personal knowledge to the table when responding to complex situations within the organization” with a mean of 5.1. The next behaviors under the domain wisdom, “behavior reflects an understanding of life’s complexities”, “integrates personal values with organizational values when interacting with team members”, “considers past experiences when responding to complex situations within the organization”, and “elevates the quality of decision making by discussing similarities of past situations with team members” have means of 4.9, 4.8, 4.8, and 4.3 respectively. As mentioned previously, there is little scatter among the data, as shown by a low standard deviation (1.25).

Table 16

<i>Electronic Questionnaire Results for the Meaning-Maker Domain of Wisdom</i>														
Meaning-making domain: Wisdom	Not important		Marginally important		Somewhat important		Important		Very important		Critically important		Total mean	SD
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%		
Elevates the quality of decision making by discussing similarities of past situations with team members.	0	0%	2	5.7%	9	25.7%	9	25.7%	7	20%	8	22.9%	4.3	
Demonstrates compassion toward team members.	1	2.9%	0	0%	1	2.9%	3	8.6%	12	34.3%	18	51.4%	5.3	
Behavior reflects an understanding of life's complexities.	2	5.7%	0	0%	2	5.7%	6	17.1%	12	34.3%	13	37.1%	4.9	
Integrates personal values with organizational values when interacting with team members.	0	0%	2	5.7%	2	5.7%	6	17.1%	16	45.7%	9	25.7%	4.8	
Brings personal knowledge to the table when responding to complex situations within the organization.	0	0%	0	0%	1	2.9%	6	17.1%	17	48.6%	11	31.4%	5.1	
Considers past experiences when responding to complex situations within the organization.	0	0%	1	2.9%	1	2.9%	13	37.1%	10	28.6%	10	28.6%	4.8	
Displays expertise when working in a variety of situations within the organization.	0	0%	0	0%	1	2.9%	6	17.1%	16	45.7%	12	34.3%	5.1	
Shows concern for others in a variety of organizational settings.	0	0%	2	5.7%	0	0%	5	14.3%	10	28.6%	18	51.4%	5.2	
When working with teams and team members, continuously keeps the overall goals of the organization as part of conversations.	0	0%	1	2.9%	3	8.6%	9	25.7%	11	31.4%	11	31.4%	5.3	
Takes action by doing the "right thing" in a variety of organizational settings.	0	0%	1	2.9%	0	0%	5	14.3%	12	34.3%	17	48.6%	5.3	
Overall importance	3	0.9%	9	2.6%	20	5.73%	68	19.4%	123	35.2%	127	36.3%	5.0	1.25

Note. 1 (*not important*), 2 (*marginally important*), 3 (*somewhat important*), 4 (*important*), 5 (*very important*), 6 (*critically important*). SD=Standard Deviation

Inspiration

Five behaviors were under the leadership domain of inspiration were rated by the special education teacher respondents (followers) to help answer research question two. Inspiration had the lowest mean of the five leadership variables. Table 16 outlines the quantitative data under the leadership domain of inspiration. The five behaviors under inspiration are listed below:

- Works with team members in a way that generates enthusiasm within teams
- Recognizes achievements of teams and team members.
- Encourages team members to innovate in order to advance the organization's leading edge.
- Engages in activities that build confidence among team members.
- Empowers team members to take reasonable risks when problem solving.

The total mean for the respondents' results for the leadership domain of vision was 4.7 out of 6. 82.2% of the responses endorsed vision as *important to critically important*. Within the five listed behaviors, "works with team members in a way that generates enthusiasm within teams" had the highest mean of 5.0, followed by "recognizes achievements of teams and team members" with a mean of 4.8. Closely following was "engages in activities that build confidence among team members" with a mean of 4.6. The last two behaviors, "empowers team members to take reasonable risks when problem solving" and "encourages team members to innovate in order to advance the organization's leading edge" had means of 4.5 and 4.3 respectively. There is little variance in the mean scores indicating there is little scatter amongst the means.

Table 17

Electronic Questionnaire Results for the Meaning-Maker Domain of Inspiration

Meaning-making domain:	Not important		Marginally important		Somewhat important		Important		Very important		Critically important		Total mean	SD
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%		
Inspiration														
Works with team members in a way that generates enthusiasm within teams.	1	2.9%	0	0%	2	5.7%	5	14.3%	15	42.9%	12	34.3%	5	
Recognizes achievements of teams and team members.	0	0%	1	2.9%	3	8.6%	9	25.7%	10	28.6%	12	34.3%	4.8	
Encourages team members to innovate in order to advance the organization's leading edge.	0	0%	0	0%	4	11.4%	18	51.4%	10	28.6%	3	8.6%	4.3	
Engages in Activities that build confidence among team members.	0	0%	3	8.6%	1	2.9%	11	31.4%	11	31.4%	9	25.7%	4.6	
Empowers team members to take reasonable risks when problem solving.	0	0%	1	2.9%	3	8.6%	12	34.3%	15	42.9%	4	11.4%	4.5	
Overall importance	1	.01%	5	3.6%	13	9.3%	55	39.2%	61	43.6%	40	28.6%	4.7	1.04

Note. 1 (not important), 2 (marginally important), 3 (somewhat important), 4 (important), 5 (very important), 6 (critically important). SD=Standard Deviation

Findings Related to the Five Meaning-Maker Domains

In establishing the findings for the current study on how exemplary special education administrators create meaning for themselves and their followers, the qualitative and quantitative data was compiled and analyzed. The researcher compared the qualitative and quantitative data leading to additional findings for the study. Special education administrators created personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers through the following meaning-maker behaviors:

Research Question One Findings

Research question one asked, “what are the behaviors exemplary special education administrators use to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers through character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration? The following are the findings under this research question:

Character (Qualitative). Special education administrators reported that character is of critical importance in creating meaning for themselves and their followers. The domain of character accounted for 23% of the total number of collected codes across domains:

1. Special education administrators displayed authenticity and transparency to create meaning, accounting for 37% of the total qualitative responses in the meaning-maker domain of character.
2. Special education administrators demonstrated ethics and integrity to create meaning, accounting for 33% of the total responses in the meaning-maker domain of character.
3. Special education administrators create a culture of doing what is right to create meaning, accounting for 30% of the total responses in the meaning-maker domain of character.

Vision (Qualitative). Special education administrators reported that vision is of critical importance in creating meaning for themselves and their followers. The domain of vision accounted for 18% of the total number of collected codes across domains:

1. Special education administrators used child-centered vision planning to create meaning, accounting for 38% of the total responses in the meaning-maker domain of vision.
2. Special education administrators engage others in participatory activities to contribute to the vision, accounting for 24% of the total responses in the meaning-maker domain of vision.
3. Special education administrators used data when developing a vision, accounting for 22% of the total responses in the meaning-maker domain of vision.
4. Special education administrators had purpose and clarity in work, accounting for 16% of the total responses in the meaning-maker domain of vision.

Relationships (Qualitative). Special education administrators reported that relationships are of critical importance in creating meaning for themselves and their followers. The domain of relationships accounted for 31.5% of the total number of collected codes across domains:

1. Special education administrators promote trust and respect to create meaning, accounting for 30% of the total responses in the meaning-maker domain of relationships.
2. Special education administrators are available to consistently coach/support staff through challenges in order to create meaning, accounting for 28% of the total responses in the meaning-maker domain of relationships.
3. Special education administrators intentionally make time for professional and personal connections in order to create meaning, accounting for 24% of the total responses in the meaning-maker domain of relationships.

4. Special education administrators acknowledge and validate the value of others, accounting for 18% of the total responses in the meaning-maker domain of relationships.

Wisdom (Qualitative). Special education administrators reported that wisdom is of critical importance in creating meaning for themselves and their followers. The domain of wisdom accounted for 15.5% of the total number of collected codes across domains:

1. Special education administrators use past experiences or knowledge base in ambiguous situations in order to create meaning, accounting for 30.6% of the total responses for the meaning-maker domain of wisdom.
2. Special education administrators used knowledge or the strengths of others in order to create meaning, accounting for 26% of the total responses for the meaning-maker domain of wisdom.
3. Special education administrators use innovation in problem-solving in order to create meaning, accounting for 22% of the total responses for the meaning-maker domain of wisdom.
4. Special education administrators use confidence in order to create meaning, accounting for 20% of the total responses for the meaning-maker domain of wisdom.

Inspiration (Qualitative). Special education administrators reported that inspiration is of critical importance in creating meaning for themselves and their followers. The domain of inspiration accounted for 11% of the total number of collected codes across domains:

1. Special education administrators empower and encourage in order to create meaning, accounting for 51% of the total responses for the meaning-maker domain of inspiration.

2. Special education administrators create opportunities for growth in order to create meaning, accounting for 27% of the total responses for the meaning-maker domain of inspiration.
3. Special education administrators had an outward expression of enthusiasm and passion in order to create meaning, accounting for 22% of the total responses for the meaning-maker domain of inspiration.

Research Question Two Findings

Research question two asked, “To what degree do special education teachers perceive that the behaviors related to character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration help to create personal and organizational meaning?” The findings under this research question follow:

Character (Quantitative).

1. Special education teachers endorsed character as *very important* to *critically important* through the following leadership behaviors listed on the survey (overall mean of 5.6):
 - Behaves in an ethical manner when dealing with others
 - Actively listens when communicating with others
 - Responds to challenging situations with optimism
 - Actions with others show that he/she can be trusted
 - Actions show concern for the well-being of others

Relationships (Quantitative).

1. Special education teachers endorsed relationships as *very important* to *critically important* through the following leadership behaviors listed on the survey (overall mean of 5.2):

- Continuously promotes our team’s moving together as one unit to serve a common purpose
- Creates an environment of trust among leaders and team members in the organization
- Behaves in a way that shows he/she cares about the team members
- Communicates in a clear, meaningful way

Wisdom (Quantitative).

1. Special education teachers endorsed wisdom as *very important to critically important* through the following leadership behaviors listed on the survey (overall mean of 5.0):

- Demonstrates compassion toward team members
- Brings personal knowledge to the table when responding to complex situations within the organization
- Displays expertise when working in a variety of situations within the organization
- Shows concern for others in a variety of organizational settings
- When working with teams and team members, continuously keeps the overall goals of the organization as part of conversations
- Takes action by doing the “right thing” in a variety of organizational settings

Integration of Meaning-Maker Domains (Qualitative and Quantitative Comparison)

1. Special education administrators reported that the leadership domains of character, relationships, and vision are of critical importance in creating meaning for themselves and their followers. All three domains had 20 or more occurrences in the compiled qualitative data. Additionally, special education teachers (followers) endorsed two of the same leadership domains of character and relationships but also endorsed wisdom as

being *very important to critically important* with means 5.0 or above. Both leaders and followers feel that the leadership domains of character and relationships are the most important as evidenced by the key findings in both qualitative and quantitative data.

2. Special education leaders endorsed relationships as being the most important leadership domain with 31.5% of the total codes collected. However, when asked about relationships, all three stated that relationships were not possible without a leader having character. They continued that a component of character is being trustworthy and that relationships are built upon trust. Special education teachers reported the domain of character as the most important; however, this was closely followed by relationships. The qualitative and quantitative data indicates a finding that relationships and character are not only the most important domains but they are interwoven.

Unexpected Findings

1. The population of special education holds challenges that impact the meaning-maker domains. While there was not an interview question prompting the challenges in special education, 30.6% of the collected responses from the three exemplary special education leaders reported on the challenges specific to the special education population. The challenges brought up by the leaders were unprompted.

Summary

Chapter IV of the current study presented both the qualitative and quantitative data collected in order to answer the study's two research questions. Three exemplary special education administrators were interviewed and the data were coded, cross-checked, and compiled to 317 lines of code categorized in 18 common themes. While these 18 themes spanned

the five meaning-maker leadership domains, findings in the qualitative research only spread across the three domains of character, relationships and vision.

A total of 35 special education teachers, working under the leadership of the selected participant special education leaders, completed the Leadership Survey via an electronic survey. The survey data was compared with the qualitative results to triangulate the data in order to answer the study's two research questions. Similar to the qualitative data, the survey data yielded results of findings spread across three of the five leadership domains—character, relationships, and wisdom. As such, both qualitative and quantitative data showed findings in character and relationships. However, qualitative data supports vision and quantitative data supports wisdom. Chapter IV concluded with the findings related to the meaning-maker domains. Conclusions, implications, and recommendations regarding the key findings will be explored in the final chapter of this study, Chapter V.

CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings, conclusions, and recommendations are presented in the final chapter of this research study. The key findings and the unexpected findings are reported, followed by the conclusions drawn from those findings. A discussion regarding the implications for action outline the concrete behaviors special education leaders can use in creating meaning for themselves and the special education teachers they lead. Additionally, recommendations for future research that may add to the breadth and/or depth of knowledge surrounding the topic of meaning as well as the knowledge surrounding the population of special education will follow. This final chapter will conclude with the researcher's reflections and remarks.

Methodology Review

An exploratory mixed-methods case study was used to answer the two research questions outlined below:

1. What are the behaviors exemplary special education administrators use to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers through character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration?
2. To what degree do special education teachers perceive that the behaviors related to character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration help to create personal and organizational meaning?

A mixed-methods case study was used to identify and describe the behaviors that exemplary Directors of Special Education use to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their special education teacher followers. The researcher conducted in-depth interviews with three special education leaders who were considered through specific criteria to be exemplary in their field. The current study defines an exemplary leader as one who demonstrates at least five

of the following criteria, based upon the advice of a team of experts in the field that helped to verify the top three leaders: (a) evidence of successful relationships with followers; (b) evidence of leading a successful organization; (c) minimum of five years of experience in the profession; (d) articles, papers, or materials written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings (e) recognition by peers; and (f) membership in professional association in their field.

The three qualitative interviews were conducted in the location most convenient to the leader and were recorded with permission. Following the interviews, a minimum of 12 special education teachers that report to the selected leader each completed an anonymous online survey via SurveyMonkey that further assessed the leadership behaviors of the exemplary leaders. The data obtained for the study was stored securely by the researcher.

The population for the current study is special education leaders working in public schools in California. A database of special education administrators in California does not exist, so purposeful and reputational sampling was used to select participants for the study from the pool of possible special education administrators from Sonoma, Marin, and Solano counties. From the pool of 25 (the number of administrators in the selected counties) potential exemplary special education administrators from those three counties that have at least 12 special education teacher followers, a panel of experts was used to narrow down the sample. The expert panel identified and ranked the 25 special education administrators based on the defined “exemplary” criteria using a five-point scale to rank the potential administrators with most exemplary being 1 and less exemplary being 5. The three with the lowest scores were selected as the qualitative participants. One of the identified top three participants was not willing to participate in the study and the fourth-ranked participant was subsequently selected.

Key Findings

In establishing the key findings for the current study on how exemplary special education administrators create meaning for themselves and their followers, the qualitative and quantitative data were compiled and analyzed. Within the qualitative data, the researcher established that the data having 20 or more occurrences in the collected responses was considered a key finding. Additionally, given the Likert scale for the study, a special education teacher who endorsed a 5 or a 6 on the survey indicated that specific leadership behavior was *very important* or *critically important*. Accordingly, the researcher established that at least an overall mean of 5 is the threshold establishing significance in the quantitative study. Lastly, the researcher compared the qualitative and quantitative data leading to additional key findings for the study. The leadership domains of character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration are presented in order that they are sequenced in the research question. Special education administrators created personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers through the following meaning-maker behaviors:

Research Question One Key Findings

Research question one asked, “What are the behaviors exemplary special education administrators use to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers through character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration?” The following are the key findings under this research question:

Character (Qualitative).

1. Authenticity and transparency are critical special education administrators’ ability to create meaning, accounting for 37% of the total responses in the meaning-maker domain

of character. Leaders displaying authenticity and transparency demonstrate a “realness” to their followers that makes them seem more approachable. Research shows that leaders with transparency and authenticity, show a level of vulnerability that supports their success in an organization as well as supports the development of meaning for themselves and their followers (Bartels, 2017; Crowley, 2011; Herrera, 2017; Hodge, 2017; Thompson, 2018; Villanueva, 2017). Showing concern for others’ wellbeing and using active listening and communication skills regularly support the development of authenticity and transparency that leaders with character possess (Bartels, 2017; Crowley, 2011; Herrera, 2017; Hodge, 2017; Thompson, 2018; Villanueva, 2017). One participant shared, “I think it’s relieving for people, sometimes, to know that not everyone has every answer”, showing that a leader being transparent and authentic about not knowing every answer makes them more relatable and approachable. Furthermore, participants shared the importance of transparency in resource allocation. Although someone may not hear the answer they are seeking, knowing that there are not false promises increases the trust in the leader’s character. For example, one participant shared, “people need to see that we are being so transparent that we are able to say, ‘You know what? I can’t do that, but maybe on November 15th we can meet again and discuss it.’ Then that way, you’ve got solid dates, something that is very concrete”. While people don’t always like hearing no for an answer, the transparency in that is more credible than a promising something that can’t be delivered.

2. Ethics and integrity are highly important in special education administrators’ creation of meaning, accounting for 33% of the total responses in the meaning-maker domain of character. Special education is a field where multidisciplinary teams are making decisions

for children that are guided by federal law. The decisions that are made affect children and families' lives in some of the most profound ways. As such, a leader who demonstrates ethics and integrity is of the most critical importance. Current and past literature note that the presence of morality supports the determination of character in leadership (Covey, 1991; Moore, 2008). Having a moral compass guides an exemplary leader in asking themselves prior to any decision, "Is this the right thing to do?". A leader needs to show that while there are legal and fiscal factors to consider, doing what is in the best interest of children needs to exude from every aspect of the leader. For example, one participant shared, "When you think of our work it is not just a product. It's a child. For every family, the most important thing in their lives is their kids. And to know that the parents are entrusting us with those kids, it's a lot".

3. Creating a culture of doing what is right is a necessary component in special education administrators' ability to create meaning, accounting for 30% of the total responses in the meaning-maker domain of character. Special education administrators feel that while there are competing pressures in decision-making from multiple stakeholders (primarily families, teachers, and district upper administration), creating a culture of doing what's right is of critical importance. One participant shared a statement that was shared at a school board meeting: "Nobody chooses to have a child with special needs, and our obligation as a district is to make sure that those kids have what they need", which exemplifies the public statement to produce a culture of doing what is right for children. Additionally, one participant shared how important creating a culture of doing what's right is to character in the workplace by stating, "having a strong character and having

people know that you're without question, at all times, you're in it for the right reason is the most important thing".

Vision (Qualitative).

4. Using child-centered vision planning to create meaning, is absolutely necessary for special education administrators, accounting for 38% of the total responses in the meaning-maker domain of vision. The administrator participants shared how important it is to bring a child-centered vision into the work in special education. One leader who has staff working in special education programs spanning age 9 months to 22 years stated, "We had our classroom teams work on their own classroom goals and vision for what they wanted in their own classroom... Then we came together and started talking about what do we want for our kids at age 22 when they leave us? Ultimately, the goal is that they can be as independent as possible when they leave the school system. And so we talked about that as, 'What does it take for us to get there?' and then backwards mapped it through all of our programs so they could see how they were all connected together to ultimately get to that end". In special education, it is easy to develop "tunnel vision" in working with one's caseload so intently and failing to keep the "big picture" for students in mind. The power of unifying the teams through the ultimate shared vision of doing what is best for the students was a powerful tool for leaders in special education.

Relationships (Qualitative).

5. Promoting trust and respect is essential for special education administrators to create meaning, accounting for 30% of the total responses in the meaning-maker domain of relationships. These data suggest that leaders feel that trust and respect are critical

behaviors in creating meaning for themselves and followers. Workplace friendships and relationships support the growth of trust, common purpose, encouragement, and care for others (Conley; 2017; Covey; 2004; Crowley, 2011; Kouzes & Posner, 2006). In order to thrive people, need to feel valued and respected. As such, not only will the workplace function better with regard to decision-making, but it will be more meaningful for everyone with the relationships built with those around them. One participant shared, “I think back and so many conversations that I’ve had where it’s come down to I’ve got a strong enough relationship with that person” while another shared, “If you can’t have that trusting relationship with everyone you work with, you’re going to run into problems [from all sides]”. Without trust and respect relationships struggle to form where those relationships have a significant impact on the meaning that is created in the workplace.

6. Special education administrators’ availability to consistently coach/support staff through challenges is a required behavior in creating meaning for themselves and their followers, accounting for 28% of the total responses in the meaning-maker domain of relationships. Special education is a complicated field with ever-evolving legal guidelines and unpredictable diagnoses in children. As such, no person in the field will ever have the “right” answer all the time and there are frequent times of uncertainty for all parties. As such, leaders showing their support for their followers in being able to consistently coach and support their staff through these uncertain or challenging times is critical in creating meaning. One leader stated, “Teachers really trusted that I was on their team and that they could come to me with problems and that I will then immediately go into problem-solving mode and support them in that way”. Another showed how they responded to an error with a teacher: “When things didn’t go so well, I remind people that there’s about

10 million ways to make a mistake in special ed, and we've made them all, and it's not the end of the world, and let's just fix things so it's not an issue again". The support and coaching may be lowering the follower's stress about doing things correctly, which supports the growth of meaning.

7. Intentionally make time for professional and personal connections is critical for special education administrators' ability to create meaning, accounting for 24% of the total responses in the meaning-maker domain of relationships. A review of the literature showed the multifaceted responsibilities that special education administrators have. Often the legal and fiscal responsibilities take up much of the leader's time, and creating time to form relationships is critical in creating meaning. Special education administrators are the sole position ultimately held accountable to district, state and national compliance regulations while also managing the employees within the special education department (McHatton, Glenn & Gordon, 2012; No Child Left Behind Act, 2002; Nohr Schultz, 2003). Failure to adhere to these compliance standards driven by legislation results in high-cost litigation riddled with stress, negative press, and insurmountable amounts of time (McHatton, Glenn & Gordon, 2012; Norh, 2003. As such, the exemplary leaders described how they need to be intentional in finding time to develop both personal and professional relationships with their followers. Participants shared, "we have to really create the opportunity for these relationships" and "being there, being present, that's, I think, first and foremost". These statements show not only the value in relationships but also how there needs to be real effort in creating the opportunity for the connections. Another administrator showed how they share personal, relatable facts with staff: "when I'm meeting with staff, I totally go on bird walks and start talking about my kids, pets and

funny things we saw on TV and who is going to sit on the Iron Throne”. Having connections with people takes time and in the busy world of special education, leaders who intentionally create that time have more meaning for themselves and their followers.

Research Question Two Key Findings

Research question two asked, “To what degree do special education teachers perceive that the behaviors related to character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration help to create personal and organizational meaning?” The following are the key findings under this research question:

Character (Quantitative).

8. Special education teachers strongly believe that their leaders must use the following behaviors under the domain of character to create meaning (overall mean of 5.6):
 - Behaves in an ethical manner when dealing with others
 - Actively listens when communicating with others
 - Responds to challenging situations with optimism
 - Actions with others show that he/she can be trusted
 - Actions show concern for the well-being of others

The special education teacher followers reported through the survey data that ethics, active listening, optimism, trust, and concern for others are all behaviors that leaders must demonstrate to show character. Character is critical in creating meaning in the workplace for both leaders and followers. The aforementioned behaviors allow followers to feel that they people who lead them are people with character.

Relationships (Quantitative).

9. Special education teachers indicate that the following behaviors under the leadership domain of relationships are *very important to critically important* (overall mean of 5.2):

- Continuously promotes our team's moving together as one unit to serve a common purpose
- Creates an environment of trust among leaders and team members in the organization
- Behaves in a way that shows he/she cares about the team members
- Communicates in a clear, meaningful way

The special education teacher's endorsement of the above leadership behaviors suggest how important it is for leaders to encompass trust, care, and communication in order for relationships to develop and grow. Relationships are critical in the development of meaning for both leaders and followers.

Wisdom (Quantitative).

10. Special education teachers feel that the following behaviors under the leadership domain of wisdom are *very important to critically important* in experiencing meaning (overall mean of 5.0):

- Demonstrates compassion toward team members
- Brings personal knowledge to the table when responding to complex situations within the organization
- Displays expertise when working in a variety of situations within the organization
- Shows concern for others in a variety of organizational settings

- When working with teams and team members, continuously keeps the overall goals of the organization as part of conversations
- Takes action by doing the “right thing” in a variety of organizational settings

The importance of special education administrators showing wisdom at work through compassion, expertise, morality, and knowledge is highly valued by special education teachers. Wisdom means more than just having the answer, special education teachers endorse that wisdom also means having the ability to navigate how to share knowledge, support others, and guide teams through the big picture of special education. Meaning can be created through the use of wisdom for both special education administrators and teachers.

Integration of Meaning-Maker Domains (Qualitative and Quantitative Comparison)

11. Special education administrators must use the behaviors under the leadership domains of character, relationships, and vision when creating meaning for themselves and their followers. All three domains had 20 or more occurrences in the compiled qualitative data. Additionally, special education teachers (followers) feel that the behaviors under the same leadership domains of character, relationships are critical for special education administrators to use however, also feel the behaviors under the domains of wisdom are *very important to critically important* with means of 5.0 or above. Both leaders and followers feel that the leadership domains of character and relationships are the most important, as evidenced by the key findings in both qualitative and quantitative data. This data shows that character and relationships are potentially the most important aspects within the meaning maker domains and that with both, mean is created.

12. Special education leaders believe that the behaviors under the domain of relationships are the most important leadership domain with 31.5% of the total codes collected. However, when asked about relationships, all three stated that relationships were not possible without a leader having character. They continued that a component of character is being trustworthy and that relationships are built upon trust. Special education teachers reported the domain of character as the most important, however this was closely followed by relationships. The qualitative and quantitative data indicates a finding that relationships and character are not only the most important domains but they are interwoven.

Unexpected Findings

Through analyzing the qualitative and quantitative data, two unexpected findings emerged from the study. The first unexpected key finding was that both qualitative and quantitative data showed the importance of two out of the five leadership domains: character and relationships. Qualitative data also showed significance for the domain of vision. However, while special education teachers (followers) endorsed two of the same leadership domains of character and relationships of being *very important* to *critically important* with means 5.0 or above they also endorsed the domain of wisdom with a mean of 5.0. This finding was unexpected given the prior thematic research on the five domains of meaning-maker leadership. The thematic studies all concluded that all five leadership domains were critical and the interplay between the variables is significant (Bartels, 2017; Herrera, 2017; Hodge, 2017; Thompson, 2018; Villanueva, 2017) whereas the current study only endorsed two as being a key finding in both qualitative and quantitative data. This unexpected finding of only two of the domains are supported by both quantitative and qualitative data does not validate the framework proposed by

Larick and Peterson (2015, 2016). Larick and Peterson (2015, 2016) and the meaning-makers thematic team found that all five domains of leadership not only have merit but have interplay that supports the meaning-making in the organization.

The second unexpected finding was that there are specific challenges specific to the special education population. These specific challenges were present in all three qualitative participant responses under every leadership domain. In fact, 30.6% of the occurrences or 97 out of a possible 317 lines of code in the collected responses reference the challenges specific to special education. The leaders clearly indicated the complexities and difficulties in the field of special education and how much of an impact they have. Specifically, the legal implications, underfunding, paperwork challenges for teachers, and labor unions may be impacting meaning that is created for both leaders and followers across the five domains.

Conclusions

The key findings resulted in five conclusions on how special education administrators create meaning for themselves and their followers through character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration. The five conclusions have supporting evidence drawn from the qualitative and quantitative data as well as from the literature.

Conclusion 1

Special education administrators must be people of strong character. The leaders in special education need to be people who display authenticity, transparency, ethics, integrity, active listening, and optimism in order to create meaning for themselves and their followers. People need to see that those who are guiding them, leading them, coaching them, and running

their organization are people of worth, integrity, humility, and ultimately character or they will not feel the passion to follow (Liborius, 2017). Special education administrators must create a culture of “doing what’s right” and show concern for the well-being of others. Liborius (2017) established that followers’ perceptions that the leader is worthy of being followed are most greatly impacted by that leader’s character. Having a moral compass guides an exemplary leader in asking themselves prior to any decision, “Is this the right thing to do?” As one participant shared, “Nobody chooses to have a child with special needs, and our obligation as a district is to make sure that those kids have what they need”, which exemplifies producing a culture of doing what is right for children. “Acting in a moral manner, making moral decisions for themselves and their followers, and having ethics in their thoughts and actions improves the quality of work and job satisfaction in followers (Covey, 1991; Moore, 2008; Mautz, 2015). The following evidence supports this conclusion:

1. Exemplary special education administrators reported significant responses aligned with the domain of character such as they displayed authenticity/transparency, demonstrated ethics/integrity, and they created a workplace culture of “doing what is right”. The behaviors related to character accounted for 23% of the total codes collected.
2. Special education teachers working under the exemplary leaders endorsed the leadership domain of character to be most important of the five. The mean of the character domain was a 5.6 out of 6 with 99.9% of the special education teachers who took the leadership survey felt the leadership behaviors falling under the domain of character were *important to critically important*.

Conclusion 2

Leaders in special education administrators must use clear, honest communication, take a genuine interest in their staff, and be intentional in making time for personal and professional connections in order to create trusting, respectful, and authentic relationships. Workplace friendships and relationships support the growth of trust, common purpose, encouragement, and care for others (Conley; 2017; Covey; 2004; Crowley, 2011; Kouzes & Posner, 2006). In order to thrive, people need to feel valued and respected. Healthy workplace relationships support feelings of meaning in their connections with others and has been demonstrated as a significant factor in people's motivation and drive at work (Conley; 2017; Covey; 2004; Crowley, 2011; Kouzes & Posner, 2006). The following evidence supports this conclusion:

1. Exemplary special education administrators reported significant responses aligned with the domain of relationships that included promoting trust and respect, being available to consistently coach/support staff through challenges, intentionally making time for professional and personal connections, and acknowledging/validating the value of others. The four themes in relationships accounted for 31.5% of the total codes collected and was considered the most important domain by exemplary special education administrators.
2. The total mean for the special education teacher respondents' results for the leadership domain of relationships was 5.2 out of 6. An overwhelming 95.5% of the responses endorsed relationships as *important to critically important* just following the highest rated domain of character.

Conclusion 3

Special education administrators must create a shared vision that is student-centered by engaging team members in collaboratively creating the vision. Team members must feel a part of the organization in order to be inspired and buy into the work they spend so many hours of their life engaged in. McKee et al. (2008) state that “A meaningful vision of ourselves and our future engages our desire to move toward that future and gives us the courage to try”. When people have a positive vision, a roadmap of where they are headed, their positivity and sense of purpose increases (McKee et al., 2008). Anderson & Ackerman-Anderson (2001), state that vision is “by definition, a quest, a dramatic stretch that energizes and motivates the organization to pursue this very different and exciting outcome”. The following evidence supports this conclusion:

1. Exemplary special education administrators reported significant responses aligned with the domain of vision that included engaging team members in collaboratively creating a student-centered vision. The themes in vision accounted for 18.2% of all codes collected.
2. The mean for the special education teacher respondents’ results on the behavior of engaging team members in creating a vision when making decisions was 5.5.

Conclusion 4

Special education leaders must bring their knowledge forward, display expertise when working in a variety of settings, show concern for others, demonstrate compassion, and take action by “doing the right thing” at work. Demonstrating wisdom through these behaviors adds meaning for leaders and followers. Nayak (2016) states that “Wisdom is almost always associated with doing the right thing in the right way under right circumstances in order to achieve the common good”. Leaders are faced with decisions daily—decisions of great

importance and decisions of seemingly meaningless detail. However, exemplary leaders require the wisdom to do the right thing—to make the right decision for the common good of the organization (Nayak, 2016). The following evidence supports this conclusion:

1. The total mean for the special education teacher respondents' results for the leadership domain of wisdom was 5.0 out of 6.

Conclusion 5

Special education administrators must empower and encourage special education teachers in order to create meaning. Without feeling this inspired in what you are doing daily meaning is not possible. While the domain of inspiration did not reach the cut off to be considered a “key finding”, the literature supports the necessity of inspiration in the meaning maker model. Scott Mautz (2018) posits that an exemplary leader must be able to motivate their followers as well as recognize and reward their strengths. Additionally, Aronica and Robinson (2009) indicate that inspiration is an essential factor for success. The leader transcends inspiration to their followers through clearly communicating their own inspiration. In considering both the literature and the qualitative data, Inspiration is considered an essential factor that cannot be overlooked for leaders to create meaning for themselves and their followers.

Conclusion 6

It is critical for special education administrators to use an interplay of behaviors from all five of the five meaning-maker domains (character, relationships, vision, and wisdom) in order to create meaning for themselves and their followers. Research on meaning-maker leadership indicates that to create organizational and personal meaning, the integration leadership domains is essential (Bartels, 2017; Herrera, 2017; Hodge, 2017; Thompson, 2018; Villanueva, 2017). Exemplary leaders in other populations all agree that the interplay of the leadership supports

creating meaning (Bartels, 2017; Herrera, 2017; Hodge, 2017; Thompson, 2018; Villanueva, 2017). The following evidence supports this conclusion:

1. Three exemplary special education administrators' interview data were coded, cross-checked, and compiled to 317 lines of code categorized in 18 common themes. While these 18 themes spanned the five meaning-maker leadership domains, key findings (data having 20 or more occurrences in the collected responses was considered a key finding) spread across the three domains of character, relationships and vision.
2. Quantitative survey data yielded results of key findings spread across three of the five leadership domains—character, relationships, and wisdom. Key findings were determined by having a mean of 5 or higher.

Conclusion 6

Special education is a field that is riddled with challenges specific to the legal climate, underfunding, compliance regulations, and labor unions that are significantly impacting the meaning for special education administrators and special education teachers. Since the development of IDEA, children have been promised a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE), a civil-rights issue that has led to decades of disagreements and contention, resulting in costly litigation for both families and public-school districts (McHatton, Glenn & Gordon, 2012; No Child Left Behind Act, 2002). IDEA is said to be the greatest underfunded federal mandate to date (Legislative Analyst's Office, 2018). With a promise of 40% federal funding, districts have received no more than a maximum of 11%-12% of federal funding, causing significant encroachment to the general fund (Legislative Analyst's Office, 2018). Special education teachers are faced with intense legal challenges, stringent policies, and crushing paperwork that

results in a stress level and workload that takes them away from what they really want to do: teach children (Billingsley, 2002; Kucuksuleymanoglu, 2011; Saricam & Sakiz, 2014; Tyler & Brunner, 2014). Adding further complexity to the special education administrator's role is the navigation of labor unions' influence on special education decisions. According to the California Teacher's Association, the students in special education's presence and impact on general education teachers and classes must be negotiated through collective bargaining units—especially when the issues include class size, planning time and inclusion programs (CTA, 2009). The following evidence supports this conclusion:

1. The population of special education holds challenges that impact the meaning-maker domains. While there was not an interview question prompting the challenges in special education, 30.6% of the collected responses from the three exemplary special education leaders reported on the challenges specific to the special education population. The challenges brought up by the leaders were unprompted.

Implications for Action

Implication for Action 1: Professional Development

Special education has a multitude of significant challenges that contribute to work-related stress associated with high depersonalization rates and emotional exhaustion (Kucuksuleymanoglu, 2011; Saricam & Sakiz, 2014; Tyler & Brunner, 2014). With the highly charged political climate and level of job complexity in special education, the attrition rates and a shortage of quality people entering the field are at an all-time high (Kucuksuleymanoglu, 2011; Saricam & Sakiz, 2014; Tyler & Brunner, 2014). Special education is arguably at a time of dire crisis as California alone has over 775,000 students with disabilities in need of special education

teachers to educate them. Accordingly, there is a call to action for special education administrators to embrace leadership behaviors that create meaning for themselves and their followers to avoid the field having even worse circumstances. The challenges in special education will continue to increase until serious political and monetary change happens, which will make recruiting and maintaining quality people in the field even more challenging than it is. Without meaning in this field, the future for our most marginalized students, hardworking teachers, and administrators will be greatly compromised as it continues to decline.

Special education administrators spend much of their professional development time at conferences focused on legal updates, case law, compliance, and fiscal responsibilities. However, the current research shows that while the knowledge is important, creating meaning in the workplace is of equal importance. If there is not a shift in the satisfaction rates of special education teachers and leaders, the attrition rates will continue to rise and the shortage of professionals in the field will continue to grow. The people who suffer from these shortages are not only children, but the most vulnerable children who entered the world with an unforeseen challenge that they must endure—a disability.

The focus of professional development for special education leaders needs to expand. While the compliance regulations and legal trends are of significant importance in decision-making, understanding how to be an impactful, exemplary leader that brings the meaning back for special education teachers who have lost it. Regular and ongoing professional development that is targeted to specific behaviors and areas of growth is necessary. Continued growth in being an open, transparent leader driven by a moral compass takes time, reflection, and ongoing training. Furthermore, special education leaders need to learn the power of relationship-building with their staff, how a show of character can inspire teachers, how using ethically driven wisdom

in decision-making impacts others, and how including staff in student-centered vision planning can all create meaning that has been lost in the field. School leaders must advocate and demand ongoing training on how to create meaning in the workplace. Having required, ongoing professional development for special education leaders at the district and county levels to continue fostering meaning making leadership behaviors is an absolute must for the future of special education.

Implication for Action 2: Preparation Programs

Employees in public education work under credentials derived by the California Commission on Teaching Credentialing (CCTC). However, a number of institutions, both public and private, provide the education to meet the requirements of those credentials. Special education administrators require a California Administrative Credential, which can be obtained in one of two ways: (a) passing an examination followed by continued education to clear the credential; (b) completing a graduate-level administrative services program. Neither of these avenues has a focus on leadership behaviors, but rather a focus on the logistics of running an organization. The current study indicates the impact that meaning-maker leadership can have on the field of special education. It is critical to demand the integration of meaning maker leadership from into the standards required from CCTC as well as public and private institutions. Being intentional with the preparation of all our future leaders in learning how to encompass and integrate the necessary behaviors within the domains of character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration will greatly impact not only the future of special education, but will impact the lives of the marginalized children and hardworking teachers in the field.

Implication for Action 3: Hiring Practices

Walt Disney eloquently said, “You can dream, create, design, and build the most wonderful place in the world... but it requires people to make the dream a reality”. Hiring the right people can be challenging and needs to follow a stringent process in public school districts. However, the impact of leadership behaviors on the creation of meaning demonstrates the importance of hiring people who possess or have the potential for the leadership behaviors of character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration. Hiring committees in schools absolutely must integrate assessments on potential candidates that bring forward the meaning maker leadership behaviors to potential candidate may possess. This could be attained in a number of ways. The *Leadership Behaviors* survey used in this study could be administered to assess the perceptions of potential candidates on the leadership behaviors within each of the meaning maker domains. Additionally, hiring committees must integrate questions related to meaning-maker leadership domains in order to gather a narrative understanding of the potential candidate’s perceptions. Understanding the meaning maker attributes of the potential leaders who may work with marginalized students and unhappy teachers is a key determining factor in a school’s success in special education. Lastly, it is of critical importance that the hiring committee engage in a thorough investigation of character through publicly available records such as social media, internet searches, and disciplinary databases.

Implication for Action 4: Professional Associations

Special education leaders frequently attend conferences with learning opportunities through professional organizations specific to the field of special education. Working with professional organizations to present the research on the impact that leading with meaning can

have on special education is crucial in shifting the mindset from the focus on compliance to an equal focus on meaning-maker leadership. Meaning maker leadership pedagogy must be vocalized and dispersed to reach a greater number of leaders in the field through conferences will positively impact a broader pool of special education administrators. Special education administrators need also participate in networking available to leaders through professional organizations. Administrators from all areas of education can collaborate with one another as thematic research shows the meaning-maker framework is not specific to industry.

Implication for Action 5: Special Education Teacher Mentorship

Teachers enter the field with a noble purpose: to serve the underserved and make a difference in a historically misunderstood and marginalized population (Gersten et al., 2001; Miller et al., 1999; Nance et al., 2008). One special education teacher stated, “I teach to lift souls, to help my students find their wings, and to show them how to reach beyond their dreams” (Office of Special Education and Rehabilitations Services, 2016). Yet teachers begin their work with the students and find the job to be significantly different than what they envisioned. Special education teachers are faced with intense legal challenges, stringent policies, and crushing paperwork that results in a stress level and workload that takes them away from what they really want to do: teach children (Billingsley, 2002; Kucuksuleymanoglu, 2011; Saricam & Sakiz, 2014; Tyler & Brunner, 2014). Special education teachers leave their positions at nearly double the rate of their general education counterparts (12.3% vs. 7.6%) and 49 of our states report that there is a shortage in special education staff (United States Department of Education, 2010). The data shows that 50% of new teachers leave the profession within the first few years. (Billingsley, 2002; Kucuksuleymanoglu, 2011; Saricam & Sakiz, 2014; Tyler & Brunner, 2014).

Given these staggering statistics, special education teachers need more support- especially early in their careers. Developing a mentorship and collaboration program to support new and seasoned special education teachers is a powerful way to begin to develop relationships, show character, inspire new teachers, gain/give wisdom, and create a shared vision. This is mutually beneficial as teachers may feel supported through the complexities of inexperience or burnout. Furthermore, by through the support of teacher mentorship, leaders can continue the development of their own leaderships skills, set an example for teachers, and potentially impact the high rates of turnover in the field.

Implication for Action 6: Political Action

The current study shows that the population of special education holds challenges that impact the meaning-maker domains. Further research is needed to determine the specifics of what those challenges are and why the population of special education varies from other meaning-maker research studies. Yet the impact of special education challenges was evident in the data as 30.6% of the collected responses from the three exemplary special education leaders reported on the challenges specific to the special education population. The challenges brought up by the leaders were unprompted.

The literature showed that the financial constraints of special education are and continue to be an area for significant impact. The federal mandates of special education derived through IDEA are said to be the greatest underfunded federal mandates to date (Legislative Analyst's Office, 2018). With a promise of 40% federal funding, districts have received no more than a maximum of 11%-12% of federal funding, causing significant encroachment to the general fund (Legislative Analyst's Office, 2018). This encroachment results in a negative mindset about

special education for school boards and upper administration (Beals, 1993). Consequently, underfunding results in significant pressure on administrators to lower the costs of special education (Beals, 1993; Journal on Special Education Leadership, 2001). Furthermore, lowering the breadth of special education program expenditures can result in increased disagreement amongst families and school personnel on what programs and resources are available and appropriate for their child. These conflicting forces may further decrease the tension that special education administrators and their followers (teachers) experience in their day-to-day work. (McHatton, Glenn & Gordon, 2012; No Child Left Behind Act, 2002; Nohr Schultz, 2003). Of even greater significance are the 775,000 students with disabilities who are most impacted by these challenges.

Education. The negative cycle of special education will continue until there are changes to federal mandates or the funding structure at a state and federal levels. Making political change takes voice and action from many stakeholders. However, the implications to the funding structure in special education are not widely known. Without that knowledge, change is unlikely. As such, the unexpected findings of this study are a call to action for political change in special education. The first step in change is education: working with local public-school districts to educate employees, community members, and local political leaders to create opportunities for education on the political problems in special education and the impact it has on *all* students served in a public school. With education comes power. As such, a special-interest group can be formed by key stakeholders who can follow the process for political change. The special interest group must be vocal in letters, rallies, appearances at public meetings, and working with local and state media sources. The first step to any change is education the public on the facts.

Collaborative Legal Action. Public school districts operating special education programs under the current conditions are not able to uphold the rights of our students with disabilities without devastating impact on **every** student and staff member in a public system. Special education’s encroachment on the general fund is unavoidable with the current funding reality in our public system. The federal government must fully fund the special education laws and regulations and the public schools must demand that. The federal government must be held accountable to the promised amount of fiscal resources when the governing laws were originated. Counties and states must become a united front and pursue litigation on the federal government in order to demand the full funding of the federal law that districts must adhere to. While this implication for action may appear insurmountable or challenging, without true change the status quo will continue. Without this stand, all students, teachers, administrators, and staff in public schools will be forced to endure continued violation of their rights and continued marginalized education full of contention, turf wars, and system that lacks meaning. Barack Obama stated, “Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we’ve been waiting for. We are the change we seek”. This statement brings forth the power that a group of educated people has to make change. Having a voice to demand equity through political and legal action at the local, state, and federal political levels is critical for the future of education for every child in this nation.

Recommendations for Future Research

The current study added breadth and depth to the meaning-maker construct. While the current study was a snapshot of how the meaning-maker leadership construct applies to special education, it has the potential to invite future researchers to further explore the complexities of

leadership as well as special education. Based on the data from the current study, the following are recommended for future research:

1. This study used a mixed-methods case study gathering qualitative data from special education leaders and quantitative data from special education followers. A future study using a mixed-methods approach with both qualitative and quantitative data from both *leaders and followers* could add breadth and depth to the data collected. A better narrative understanding of the perspective of followers will add powerful information to the framework.
2. This study focused on only three exemplary special education administrators from public schools who have 12 or more followers. Expanding this mixed method case study to additional populations on the meaning-maker construct or other aspects of special education will add validity and strength to the meaning maker framework.
3. Further meaning maker research using a mixed-methods case study gathering qualitative and quantitative data from both leaders and followers in special education will yield information to understand if the population of special education is an “outlier” in meaning-maker research.
4. A qualitative case study examining special education administrators’ perceptions of the leading drivers in special education that are negatively impacting the development of meaning will give valuable information on if and/or how the nuances specific to special education impact the meaning-maker construct.
5. A mixed methods study examining the impact of the behaviors within the domain of inspiration will add depth to the understanding of the 5 leadership domains in the meaning maker literature.

6. This study examined the meaning-maker leadership behaviors of exemplary special education administrators and the perceptions of their followers. A qualitative case study using meaning maker interviews with special education teachers who left can yield valuable information that may impact teacher attrition rates.
7. This study applied meaning-maker leadership research to special education administrator leaders and special education teacher followers. Special education teachers also play a leadership role in many aspects of their job description. A future study qualitative study examining meaning-maker leadership in teachers and the impact on their followers (students) measured through student outcome data could be powerful in expanding teacher pedagogy.
8. This study focused on exemplary special education administrators working within three counties in Northern California. A mixed-methods case study expanding to other special education administrators from other locations or to different populations will give further strength and information to the meaning maker framework.

Concluding Remarks and Reflections

The current study closes with my reflections and concluding remarks surrounding the research process. Embarking on the dissertation journey has challenged and expanded my thinking in ways I could not have previously anticipated. *Exemplary Leadership: A Mixed-Methods Case Study Discovering How Special Education Leaders Create Meaning* has been a labor of love requiring endless hours, energy, sacrifice, and dedication. The journey would not have been possible without the true devotion and support of many people including the professors guiding me, my family, my fierce cohort, and my friends.

The research process is demanding and complex. This journey reminded me of the incredibly difficult policy-driven obstacles that our educators face. Despite these challenges, educators compassionately support children and families through the adversities of their daily lives while often receiving negative feedback and a lack of understanding from those around them. I have emphatic gratitude and respect for all people working in all facets of education. While this study solidified my perceptions of the complexities within special education, it ignited a wildfire within me to demand change. As a leader in special education, I now see that I can't accept the challenges we face as "part of the job". I must empower the educators and families around me to unite in an effort make our jobs and our lives meaningful by disrupting the status quo in special education. We must unite to demand equity for all the children in our educational system.

The process of the dissertation journey and the content that I studied reinforced the concept that meaning is woven into every aspect of our personal and professional lives. We have been searching for meaning in what we do for centuries. Accordingly, we need to take action to make our time in this world matter and contribute the betterment of every life on this earth.

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Appendix I: IRB Approval

7/22/2019

Brandman University Mail - BUIRB Application Approved: julia vandervennet



Julia Vander Vennet <jvanderv@mail.brandman.edu>

BUIRB Application Approved: julia vandervennet

1 message

MyBrandman <my@brandman.edu>

Sat, Jun 15, 2019 at 9:25 AM

Reply-To: webmaster <webmaster@brandman.edu>

To: "jvanderv@mail.brandman.edu" <jvanderv@mail.brandman.edu>

Cc: "Devore, Douglas" <ddevore@brandman.edu>, "McCarty, Timothy" <tmccarty@brandman.edu>

Dear julia vandervennet,

Congratulations! Your IRB application to conduct research has been approved by the Brandman University Institutional Review Board. Please keep this email for your records, as it will need to be included in your research appendix.

If you need to modify your BUIRB application for any reason, please fill out the "Application Modification Form" before proceeding with your research. The Modification form can be found at IRB.Brandman.edu

Best wishes for a successful completion of your study.

Thank You,

BUIRB
Academic Affairs
Brandman University
16355 Laguna Canyon Road
Irvine, CA 92618
buirb@brandman.edu
www.brandman.edu
A Member of the Chapman University System

This email is an automated notification. If you have questions please email us at buirb@brandman.edu.

Appendix II- NIH Certificate



Appendix III- Informed Consent Leaders

INFORMED CONSENT

INFORMATION ABOUT: Exemplary Leadership: A Mixed-Methods Case Study Discovering How Special Education Leaders Create and Maintain Personal and Organizational Meaning for Themselves and their Followers

RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR: Julia S. VanderVennet, M.S., Doctoral Candidate

PURPOSE OF STUDY: You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Julia VanderVennet, a doctoral candidate from the Ed.D. program in Organizational Leadership at Brandman University. The purpose of this mixed-methods case study was to identify and describe the behaviors that exemplary Special Education administrators use to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers through character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration. In addition, it is the purpose of this study to determine the degree of importance to which special education teachers perceive the behaviors related to character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration help to create personal and organizational meaning.

This study will contribute to existing knowledge of best practices for current and future special education administrators, teachers, and school district administration/personnel by potentially giving leaders more fundamental tools to effectively lead. Furthermore, this study may raise the awareness of the multifaceted challenges in special education and increase the wellbeing for leaders and their followers in this challenging field. Additionally, the study may contribute information that may help to mitigate the abnormal attrition rates of special education teachers by potentially allowing burnt out teachers to experience more meaning at work. Most importantly, the current study has significant importance as our administrators, teachers, and our children deserve to have meaning in their lives.

ACTIVITIES: By participating in this study, occurring in June 2019, I agree to the following:

- 1.) Participate in an individual interview lasting approximately 60 minutes in a private location convenient to you.
- and
- 2.) Agree to send a short survey via Survey Monkey to at least 12 of your followers to assess their performance of the meaning instilled with the organization.

I understand that:

- a) There are minimal risks associated with participating in this research.

- b) The researcher will protect my confidentiality by keeping the identifying codes and research materials in a locked file drawer that is available only to the researcher.
- c) The interview will be audio recorded. The recordings will be available only to the researcher and the professional transcriptionist. The audio recordings will be used to capture the interview dialogue and to ensure the accuracy of the information collected during the interview. All information will be identifier-redacted and my confidentiality will be maintained. Upon completion of the study all audio recordings will be destroyed.
- d) All other data and consents will be securely stored for three years after completion of data collection and confidentially shredded or fully deleted.
- e) The possible benefits of this study to me is that my input may bring the potential benefits of adding additional knowledge of best practices for current and future special education administrators, teachers, and school district administration/personnel by potentially giving leaders more fundamental tools to effectively lead. Furthermore, this study may raise the awareness of the multifaceted challenges in special education and increase the wellbeing for leaders and their followers in this challenging field. Additionally, the study may contribute information that may help to mitigate the abnormal attrition rates of special education teachers by potentially allowing burnt out teachers to experience more meaning at work. Most importantly, the current study has significant importance as our administrators, teachers, and our children deserve to have meaning in their lives.
- f) The findings will be available to me at the conclusion of the study and will provide new insights about the interdisciplinary collaboration process in exemplary counseling-enriched high school programs.
- g) I will not be compensated for my participation.
- h) I understand that I may refuse to participate in or I may withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences. Also, the investigator may stop the study at any time. I also understand that no information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent and that all identifiable information will be protected to the limits allowed by law. If the study design or the use of the data is to be changed I will be so informed and my consent obtained. I understand that if I have any questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may write or call the Office of the Vice Chancellor Academic Affairs, Brandman University, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618 Telephone

(949) 341-7641. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this form and the Research participant's Bill of Rights.

If you have any questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, you are encouraged to contact Julia VanderVennet at jvandervennet@mail.brandman.edu or by phone at 415-250-7774; or Dr. Tim McCarty, Advisor, at tmccarty@brandman.edu.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT: I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this form and the "Research Participant's Bill of Rights." I have read the above and understand it and hereby consent to the procedure(s) set forth.

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Principal Investigator

Date

Appendix IV- Invitation Letter, Exemplary Leader

DATE

Dear _____,

I am a graduate student in the Doctorate of Education in Organizational Leadership Program in the School of Education at Brandman University. I am conducting a study on how exemplary special education leaders create meaning for themselves and their followers through the use of the leadership skills of character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration. Through a rigorous identification process you have been identified as being an “exemplary leader” in special education. As such, I am asking for assistance in the Research Study by participating in an interview which will take around 60-90 minutes at a time that is convenient with you. The interview will be recorded in order to ensure that I accurately capture the interview and refer back to it as needed. If you agree to participate in an interview, you may be assured that it will be completely confidential. No names will be attached to any notes or records from the interview. All information will remain in locked files accessible only to the researcher. No employer, supervisor, or agency will have access to the interview information. You also have the freedom to stop the interview and withdraw from the study at any time. Further, you may be assured that the researchers are not in any way affiliated with _____ school district (leader’s organization).

Following the interview and with assistance, I would also like to send a short survey via Survey Monkey to at least 12 of your followers to assess their performance of the meaning instilled with the organization.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this mixed-methods case study was to identify and describe the behaviors that exemplary Special Education administrators use to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers through character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration. In addition, it is the purpose of this study to determine the degree of importance to which special education teachers perceive the behaviors related to character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration help to create personal and organizational meaning.

PROCEDURES: If you decide to participate in a one-on-one interview and asked a series of questions designed to allow you to share your experience as an exemplary special education administrator and how you use character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration to create meaning. The interview will be audio recorded for transcription purposes.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS: Your participation in this study education may bring the potential benefits of adding additional knowledge of best practices for current and future special education

administrators, teachers, and school district administration/personnel by potentially giving leaders more fundamental tools to effectively lead. Furthermore, this study may raise the awareness of the multifaceted challenges in special education and increase the wellbeing for leaders and their followers in this challenging field. Additionally, the study may contribute information that may help to mitigate the abnormal attrition rates of special education teachers by potentially allowing burnt out teachers to experience more meaning at work. Most importantly, the current study has significant importance as our administrators, teachers, and our children deserve to have meaning in their lives.

RISKS, INCONVENIENCES, AND DISCOMFORTS: There are no known major risks to your participation in this research study. The interview will be at a time and place convenient for you. Some interview questions however, may cause you mild emotional discomfort if sharing your experiences involved significant personal involvement.

ANONYMITY: Records of information that you provide for the research study and any personal information you provide will not be linked to you in any way. It will not be possible to identify you as the person who provided any specific information for the study. You are encouraged to ask any questions, at any time, that will help you understand how this study will be performed and/or how it will affect you. For any questions please contact the researcher at the information below. If you have any questions about this study or your rights as a study participant, you may call or write the **Office of Executive Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, 949.7641.**

I would love to discuss my topic further and encourage you to ask any questions you may have that may help you understand how this study will be performed and/or how it may affect you.

The researcher, Julia VanderVennet, is available anytime to answer any questions, clarify any information or discuss the study further. My contact information is below. Your participation would be so greatly valued and appreciated.

Sincerely,

Julia VanderVennet, M.S.
Doctoral Candidate, Ed.D.
415-250-7774
jvanderv@mail.brandman.edu
juliaschnack@gmail.com

Appendix V- Qualitative Interview Script

Interview

“My name is Julia VanderVennet and I am a doctoral candidate at Brandman University in the area of Organizational Leadership. It may seem a bit awkward, but I will be reading most of what I say. The reason for this is to guarantee, as much as possible, that my interviews with all participating exemplary leaders will be conducted in the most similar manner possible.

I am conducting research to determine what behaviors are used by exemplary leaders to create effective organizations. I am seeking to find what is it that you do to create a positive work environment, a healthy culture, and to bring meaning to your organization?

I am conducting approximately 3 interviews with leaders like yourself. The information you provide, along with historical and archival data, hopefully will provide a clear picture of the thoughts and strategies that exemplary leaders use to create effective organizations and will add to the body of research currently available. I am also inquiring from a sample of your followers using a survey instrument to obtain their impressions as well.

Informed Consent (required for Dissertation Research)

I would like to remind you any information that is obtained in connection to this study will remain confidential. All of the data will be reported without reference to any individual(s) or any institution(s). After I record and transcribe the data, I will send it to you via electronic mail so that you can check to make sure that I have accurately captured your thoughts and ideas.

You received the Informed Consent and Brandman Bill of Rights in an email and responded with your approval to participate in the interview. Before we start, do you have any questions or need clarification about either document?

We have scheduled an hour for the interview. At any point during the interview you may ask that I skip a particular question or stop the interview altogether. For ease of our discussion and accuracy I will record our conversation as indicated in the Informed Consent.

As I ask you these questions about special education, you can reflect upon the overall climate in special education I your district. Do you have any questions before we begin? Okay, let's get started, and thanks so much for your time.

1. “Here are five leadership behaviors that research suggests are necessary in an exemplary leader. Looking at these through your lens as a leader in special education, would you agree that these are all important?” (the researcher places the following card in front of participant for remainder of the interview)

VISION: The leader exhibits foresight with a compelling outlook of the future.

RELATIONSHIPS: The leader communicates a common purpose through listening, respect, trust, and acknowledgement of one another.

CHARACTER: The leader displays a moral compass of ethics and integrity while being reliable, transparent, and authentic.

INSPIRATION: The leader empowers followers by exuding enthusiasm, encouragement, and hope.

WISDOM: The leader accurately interprets and responds to complex, ambiguous, and often unclear situations

<p>If “Yes” “Realizing that they are all important, do any jump out as being absolutely essential?”</p> <p style="text-align: center;">V R C I W</p> <p>If any selected: “What is about those you selected that would place them a bit above the others?”</p>	<p>If “No”... “not really”... or they hedge, ask: “Which of them do you believe do not fit into the group of important behaviors?”</p> <p style="text-align: center;">V R C I W</p> <p>“Why do you think it/they do not belong in this group of important behaviors?”</p>
---	---

2. “The first behavior on the list is Vision (pointing to the Vision on the card). Vision involves the leaders using foresight with a compelling outlook of the future. Are there things in role as special education administrator that you recall having done or can you give me specific examples of how you developed your vision for yourself and your followers.”

- “Are there some that seemed to work better than others?”
- “Why do you think they (it) worked as well as they (it) did?”

- “Were there any unintended outcomes, positive or negative, from the use of that particular strategy?”
 - “How do you ensure that your team buys into your vision?”
3. “The second item on the card is establishing Relationships. This involves being a good listener and establishing trust among your team members Can you give me examples or tell me some things you have done in special education to develop relationships among your followers.”
 - “Are there some that seemed to work better than others?”
 - “Why do you think they (it) worked as well as they (it) did?”
 - “Were there any unintended outcomes, positive or negative, from the use of that particular strategy?”
 4. “If you take a look at the card, one of the five most important leadership behaviors is character and leading with a moral compass. This includes integrity... reliability.... Authenticity. What kinds of things do you do or can you give me specific examples to demonstrate character as the special education leader of your organization?”
 - “What behaviors do you look for in your peers or employees that demonstrate their character?”
 - “How do you communicate the importance of these behaviors to your staff members?”
 - “Are there challenges that you face as you deal with these issues on a daily basis?”
 - “Are there any unintended outcomes, positive or negative, from the use of a particular strategy?”
 5. “As stated on the card, an Inspirational leader empowers staff by exuding enthusiasm, encouragement, and hope. Please tell me about some of the things you do for specific examples of how you inspire your special education staff to be all they can be.”
 - “Are there some things that seemed to work better than others?”
 - “Why do you think they (it) worked as well as they (it) did?”
 - “Were there any unintended outcomes, positive or negative, from the use of any particular strategy?”
 6. “The fifth item on the card is Wisdom. As the card states, responding effectively to unclear, complex issues is called for here. Can you describe a time or give a specific example when your organization faced a very complex or unclear situation?”

If yes:

“What did you do or what strategies did you put in place to clarify the situation so that progress was possible?”

If no:

“If a situation like this did arise in the future, how do you think you would you go about clarifying the situation to put your staff’s mind at ease and feel ready to go?”

- “Are there some strategies that seemed to (or you think would) work better than others?”
- “Why do you think they (it) worked (would work) well?”
- “Were there any unintended outcomes, positive or negative, from the use of that particular strategy?”

7. “Of all the things we have spoken about today – vision, relationships, character, inspiration and wisdom - are there absolute ‘musts!’ that you believe are essential behaviors for an exemplary special education leader to have?”

If yes: “What are those behaviors and why do you believe they are so critical?”

“Thank you very much for your time. If you like, when the results of our research are known, we will send you a copy of our findings.”

GENERIC PROBES THAT CAN BE ADDED TO ANY QUESTION TO PRODUCE MORE CONVERSATION:

1. “Would you expand upon that a bit?”
2. “Do you have more to add?”
3. “What did you mean by”
4. “Why do think that was the case?”
5. “Could you please tell me more about.... “
6. “Can you give me an example of”
7. “How did you feel about that?”
8. “Things in the district that might challenge special education...”

Generic probes can be used to encourage an interviewee to say more about a question you have asked.

Appendix VI



BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Research Participant's Bill of Rights

Any person who is requested to consent to participate as a subject in an experiment, or who is requested to consent on behalf of another, has the following rights:

1. To be told what the study is attempting to discover.
2. To be told what will happen in the study and whether any of the procedures, drugs or devices are different from what would be used in standard practice.
3. To be told about the risks, side effects or discomforts of the things that may happen to him/her.
4. To be told if he/she can expect any benefit from participating and, if so, what the benefits might be.
5. To be told what other choices he/she has and how they may be better or worse than being in the study.
6. To be allowed to ask any questions concerning the study both before agreeing to be involved and during the course of the study.
7. To be told what sort of medical treatment is available if any complications arise.
8. To refuse to participate at all before or after the study is started without any adverse effects.
9. To receive a copy of the signed and dated consent form.
10. To be free of pressures when considering whether he/she wishes to agree to be in the study.

If at any time you have questions regarding a research study, you should ask the researchers to answer them. You also may contact the Brandman University Institutional Review Board, which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. The Brandman University Institutional Review Board may be contacted either by telephoning the Office of Academic Affairs at (949) 341-9937 or by writing to the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA, 92618.

Appendix VII- Audio Release

AUDIO RECORDING RELEASE & CONSENT FORM

INFORMATION ABOUT: Exemplary Leadership: A Mixed-Methods Case Study Discovering How Special Education Leaders Create and Maintain Personal and Organizational Meaning for Themselves and their Followers

RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR: Julia S. VanderVennet, M.S., Doctoral Candidate

RELEASE: I understand that as part of this study, I am participating in an interview which will be audio recorded as a digital file, per the granting of my permission.

I do not have to agree to have the interview audio recorded.

In the event that I do agree to have myself audio recorded, the sole purpose will be to support data collection as part of this study.

The digital audio recording will only be used for this research. Only the researcher and the professional transcriptionist will have access to the audio file. The digital audio file will be destroyed at the end of the study. The written transcription of the audio file will be stored in a locked file drawer and destroyed three years following completion of this study.

I understand that I may refuse to participate in or I may withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences. Also, the investigator may stop the study at any time. I also understand that no information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent and that all identifiable information will be protected to the limits allowed by law. If the study design or the use of the data is to be changed I will be so informed and my consent obtained. I understand that if I have any questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may write or call the Office of the Vice Chancellor Academic Affairs, Brandman University, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618 Telephone (949) 341-7641. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this form and the Research participant's Bill of Rights

CONSENT: I hereby give my permission to Julia VanderVennet to use audio recorded material taken of me during the interview. As with all research consent, I may at any time withdraw permission for audio recording of me to be used in this research study.

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Principal Investigator: _____ Date: _____

Appendix VIII- Participant Follower Letter, Quantitative Data

DATE

Dear _____,

I am a graduate student in the Doctorate of Education in Organizational Leadership Program in the School of Education at Brandman University. I am conducting a study on how exemplary special education leaders create meaning for themselves and their followers through the use of the leadership skills of character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration. As such, I am asking for assistance in the Research Study by participating in a survey via SurveyMonkey which will take about 15-20 minutes. You are being surveyed on perceptions of how leaders (not necessarily your leader) creates meaning through character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and, inspiration for followers in the organization.

If you agree to participate in an interview, you may be assured that it will be completely confidential. No names will be attached to any notes or records from the survey. All information will remain in locked files accessible only to the researcher. No employer, supervisor, or agency will have access to the survey information. You also have the freedom to stop the survey and withdraw from the study at any time. Further, you may be assured that the researchers are not in any way affiliated with _____ school district (leader's organization). I will be contacting you via email to ensure that the survey will be completed in the window of the time specified.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this mixed-methods case study was to identify and describe the behaviors that exemplary Special Education administrators use to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers through character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration. In addition, it is the purpose of this study to determine the degree of importance to which special education teachers perceive the behaviors related to character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration help to create personal and organizational meaning.

PROCEDURES: If you decide to participate, you will take a 30-question online survey via SurveyMonkey that is estimated to take 10-15 minutes total. There are a series of questions on a scale of 1-5 asking for the degree of importance of the leadership behaviors (character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration) in developing meaning in your organization. The survey is confidential and your responses will be coded to create patterns and themes for the study.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS: Your participation in this study education may bring the potential benefits of adding additional knowledge of best practices for current and future special education administrators, teachers, and school district administration/personnel by potentially giving leaders

more fundamental tools to effectively lead. Furthermore, this study may raise the awareness of the multifaceted challenges in special education and increase the wellbeing for leaders and their followers in this challenging field. Additionally, the study may contribute information that may help to mitigate the abnormal attrition rates of special education teachers by potentially allowing burnt out teachers to experience more meaning at work. Most importantly, the current study has significant importance as our administrators, teachers, and our children deserve to have meaning in their lives.

RISKS, INCONVENIENCES, AND DISCOMFORTS: There are no known major risks to your participation in this research study. The survey will be at a time and place convenient for you where you have online access with a computer. Some survey questions however, may cause you mild emotional discomfort if sharing your experiences involved significant personal involvement.

ANONYMITY: Records of information that you provide for the research study and any personal information you provide will not be linked to you in any way. It will not be possible to identify you as the person who provided any specific information for the study. You are encouraged to ask any questions, at any time, that will help you understand how this study will be performed and/or how it will affect you. For any questions please contact the researcher at the information below. If you have any questions about this study or your rights as a study participant, you may call or write the **Office of Executive Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, 949.7641.**

I would love to discuss my topic further and encourage you to ask any questions you may have that may help you understand how this study will be performed and/or how it may affect you.

The researcher, Julia VanderVennet, is available anytime to answer any questions, clarify any information or discuss the study further. My contact information is below. Your participation would be so greatly valued and appreciated.

Sincerely,

Julia VanderVennet, M.S.
Doctoral Candidate, Ed.D.
415-250-7774
jvanderv@mail.brandman.edu

Appendix IX- Quantitative Survey

Larick/Petersen Leadership Behaviors 2.0

Informed Consent

It is important to read the following consent information carefully and click the agree box to continue. The survey will not open until you agree.

In the informed Consent language below, "student" refers to the researcher who requested you complete the survey.

INFORMATION ABOUT: The degree of importance regarding a leaders' behaviors related to character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration help to create personal and organizational meaning.

RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR: Student

THE FOLLOWING WILL BE INCLUDED IN THE ELECTRONIC SURVEY:

You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by the student, a doctoral student from the School of Education at Brandman University. The purpose of the study is to identify and describe the behaviors that leaders use to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers through character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration.

Your participation in this survey is voluntary. You may choose not to participate. If you decide to participate in this electronic survey, you can withdraw at any time.

The survey will take approximately 5-10 minutes to complete. Your responses will be confidential. The survey questions will pertain to your perceptions.

The results of this study will be used for scholarly purposes only.

No information that identifies you will be released without your separate consent and all identifiable information will be protected to the limits allowed by law. If the study design or the use of the data is to be changed, you will be so informed and consent re-obtained. There are minimal risks associated with participating in this research.

I understand that the investigator will protect my confidentiality by keeping the research materials in a locked file drawer that is available only to the researcher. I understand that I may refuse to participate in or I may withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences. Also, the investigator may stop the study at any time. I understand that if I have any questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may write or call the Office of the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, at 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-7641.

In you have any questions about completing this survey or any aspects of this research, please

contact the student at email or phone number provided or the faculty advisor, Dr Tim McCarty at (916) 769-2453.

ELECTRONIC CONSENT: Please select your choice below:

Clicking on the "agree" button indicates that you have read the informed consent form and the information in this document and that you voluntarily agree to participate.

I you do not wish to participate in this electronic survey, you may decline participation by clicking on the "disagree" button.

* 1. The survey will not open for responses unless you agree to participate.

AGREE: I acknowledge receipt of the complete informed consent packet and "Bill of Rights". I have read the materials and give my consent to participate in this study.

DISAGREE: I do not wish to participate in this electronic survey.

Larick/Petersen Leadership Behaviors 2.0

Part 1. Directions: For purposes of this study and survey, meaning is defined as the result of leaders and followers coming together for the purposes of gathering information from experience and integrating it into a process which creates significance, value, and identity within themselves and the organization.

Listed below are behaviors that research suggest that leaders use to create personal and organizational meaning. Using the following descriptions, which one comes the closest to your feelings about the importance of the leadership behavior in developing meaning in your organization. **PLEASE NOTE: This is not an evaluation of the current leader in your organization.**

1= Not Important in our organization; its absence would have no effect upon the leader's overall effectiveness nor our organization's culture.

2= Marginally important to have but not necessary in our organization; its absence would have little effect upon the leader's effectiveness of the cultural health of our organization.

3= Somewhat important for a leader in our organization; this is a leadership behavior that would have a positive effect upon how we function and would contribute in some positive ways to our organizational culture.

4 = Important for a leader in our organization; this is a leadership behavior that is good for the organization and its absence in the leader would be a definite deterrent in the organization's overall effectiveness as well as culture.

5= Very Important for a leader in our organization; would contribute significantly to our overall

effectiveness and enhance our organizational culture in some very positive ways.

6= Critically important in our organization; an absolute must; its absence would severely inhibit the leader's effectiveness and the overall health of our organizational culture.

* 1. Continuously promotes our team's moving together as one unit to serve a common purpose.

1	2	3	4	5	6
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

* 2. Creates an environment of trust among leaders and team members in the organization.

1	2	3	4	5	6
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

* 3. Behaves in a way that shows she/he cares about the team members.

1	2	3	4	5	6
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

* 4. Communicates in a clear meaningful way.

1	2	3	4	5	6
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

* 5. Encourages team members to share leadership when performing tasks.

1	2	3	4	5	6
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

* 6. Behaves in an ethical manner when dealing with others.

1	2	3	4	5	6
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

* 7. Actively listens when communicating with others.

1	2	3	4	5	6
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

* 8. Responds to challenging situation with optimism.

1	2	3	4	5	6
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

* 9. Actions with others shows that he/she can be trusted.

1	2	3	4	5	6
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

* 10. Actions show concern for the well-being of others.

1	2	3	4	5	6
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

* 11. Works with team members in a way that generates enthusiasm within teams.

1	2	3	4	5	6
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

* 12. Recognizes and honors achievements of teams and team members.

1	2	3	4	5	6
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

* 13. Encourages team members to innovate in order to advance the organization's leading edge.

1	2	3	4	5	6
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

* 14. Engages in activities that build confidence among team members.

1	2	3	4	5	6
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

* 15. Empowers team members to take reasonable risks when problem solving.

1	2	3	4	5	6
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

* 16. Demonstrates thinking toward the future through conversations and actions.

1	2	3	4	5	6
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

* 17. Communicates the organization's vision in a way in which team member's support it.

1	2	3	4	5	6
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

* 18. Engages team members in creating a vision when making decisions.

1	2	3	4	5	6
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

* 19. Behavior reflects organizational vision when making decisions.

1	2	3	4	5	6
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

* 20. Promotes innovation that aligns with the organization's vision.

1	2	3	4	5	6
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

* 21. Elevates the quality of decision making by discussing similarities of past situations with team members.

1	2	3	4	5	6
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

* 22. Demonstrates compassion with team members.

1	2	3	4	5	6
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

* 23. Behavior reflects an understanding of life's complexities.

1	2	3	4	5	6
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

* 24. Integrates personal values with organizational values in decision making.

1	2	3	4	5	6
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

* 25. Brings personal knowledge to the table when responding to complex situations within the organization.

1	2	3	4	5	6
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

* 26. Considers past experiences when responding to complex situations within the organization.

1	2	3	4	5	6
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

* 27. Displays expertise when working in a variety of situations within the organization.

1 2 3 4 5 6

* 28. Shows concern for others in a variety of organizational settings.

1 2 3 4 5 6

* 29. When working with teams and team members, continuously keeps the overall goals of the organization as part of conversations.

1 2 3 4 5 6

* 30. Takes action by doing the "right thing" in a variety of organizational settings.

1 2 3 4 5 6

Larick/Petersen Leadership Behaviors 2.0

Demographics

Part 2 Directions: Please supply the following information. The information will be used only to assist in understanding the results of this inquiry.

* 1. Your Gender

- Male
- Female
- Other

* 2. Your Age Category

- 20-30
- 31-40
- 41-50
- 51-60
- 60 or older

* 3. Your time in the organization:

- 0-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11-20 years
- 21 years or more

* 4. Your time with the current leader:

- 0-2 years
- 3-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11 years or more

* 5. What type of special education teacher are you?

- Special Day Class
- Resource Specialist/Ed Specialist

* 6. What grade level(s) do you teach?

- Elementary School
- Middle School
- High School
- Post Secondary

Larick/Petersen Leadership Behaviors 2.0

Introduction

The success of any organization depends in large part on the quality of interactions among the leader (special education administrator) and the team members and associates (special education teacher). What determines the quality of these interactions is tied closely to the perception that these people have leader behaviors in five areas: Vision for the organization; relationships between the leader and team members; character of the leader; inspiration the leader provides; wisdom of the leader.

Completing this survey will take approximately 5-10 minutes Please choose to become a part of this deep and important understanding in our field.

Appendix X- Alignment Table

Leadership Domains	Quantitative Survey Items	Qualitative Interview Questions
Vision	16, 17, 18, 19, 20	2
Relationships	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	3
Character	6, 7, 8, 9, 10	4
Wisdom	21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30	6
Inspiration	11, 12, 13, 14, 15	5

Appendix XI- Synthesis Matrix

Author	Work Cited	Char acter	Wis dom	Relatio nships	Vis ion	Inspir ation	Leade rship	Mea ning	Sped Direc tors	Sped Teac hers	Rese arch Desi gn
Ackerson Anderson & Anderson	Ackerman Anderson, L., & Anderson, D. (2010). <i>The change leader's roadmap: How to navigate Your organization's transformation (2nd ed.)</i> . San Francisco, CA: Pfeiffer.						X				
Aronica & Robinson	Aronica, L., & Robinson, K. <i>The element: How finding your passion changes everything</i> . In: Viking.						X	X			
Bakken, O'Brian & Sheldon	Bakken, Jeffrey P. and O'Brian, M., Sheldon, D.L. (2006). Changing roles of special education administrators: Impact on multicultural learners. <i>Educational Considerations</i> , 34, 1, 3-8.						X		X		
Bartles	Bartels, B. E. (2017). <i>Meaning makers: A mixed-methods case study of exemplary university presidents and the behaviors they use to create personal and organizational meaning</i> . (10260006 Ed.D.), Brandman University, Ann Arbor. Retrieved from https://search.proquest.com/docview/1881827308?accountid=10051 ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global database.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			
Beals	Beals, J. (1993). <i>Special education: Expenditures and obligations</i> . Los Angeles: Reason Foundation. Retrieved from: http://www.reason.org/ps161.html						X		X		
Bennis	Bennis, W. (1999). The leadership advantage. <i>Leader to Leader</i> , 1999(12), 18-23. http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/ltl.40619991205				X		X	X			
Bennis	Bennis, W. (2003). <i>On becoming a leader: The leadership classic</i> . New York, NY: Basic Books.				X		X	X			
Billingsley	Billingsley, B. (2002). Special education teacher retention and attrition. <i>Journal of Special Education</i> , 20(1), 29-45.									X	
Billingsley	Billingsley, Bonnie S. (2005). <i>Cultivating and keeping committed special education teachers: What principals and district leaders can do</i> . Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press and Council for Exceptional Children.									X	
Billingsley	Billingsley, Bonnie S. (2007). Recognizing and supporting the critical roles of teachers in special education leadership. <i>Exceptionality</i> , 15, 3, 163- 176.									X	
Boscardin	Boscardin, Mary L. (2007). What is special about special education administration? Considerations for school leadership. <i>Exceptionality</i> , 15, 3, 189-200.								X		
CDE	California Department of Education. (2018).						X		X	X	
CTA	California Teachers Association. (2009). Retrieved from: https://www.cta.org/Issues-and-Action/Ongoing-Issues/Special-Education.aspx								X	X	
CCL	Center for Creative Leadership. (2015).						X				
Conley	Conley, C. (2007). <i>Peak: How great companies get their mojo from Maslow</i> . San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.			X			X	X		X	
CCSSO	Council of Chief State School Officers. (2014)								X	X	
Cox & Cox	Cox, J. B., & Cox, K. B. (2008). <i>Your opinion please: How to build the best questionnaires in the field of education (2nd ed.)</i> . Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.										X
Covey	Covey, S. R. (1991). <i>Principle-centered leadership</i> . New York, NY: Free Press.	X		X			X	X			
Covey	Covey, S. R. (2004). <i>The 7 habits of highly effective people: Powerful lessons in personal change</i> . New York, NY: Free Press.	X		X			X	X			
Covey	Covey, S. (1990). <i>Seven habits of highly effective people: Powerful lessons in personal challenges</i> . New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.	X		X			X	X			
Cranston	Cranston, S., & Keller, S. (2013, January). Increasing the "meaning quotient" of work. McKinsey Quarterly. Retrieved from http://www.mckinsey.com/businessfunctions/organization/our-insights/increasing-the-meaning-quotient-of-work									X	

	doi:10.1111/desc.12373																		
Herrera	Herrera, S. A. (2018). <i>Exemplary leadership: A mixed-methods case study discovering how female chief executive officers create meaning</i> . ProQuest Information & Learning, 78.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X										
Hodge	Hodge, S. K. (2017). <i>Meaning makers: A mixed-methods case study of exemplary chief executive officers of engineering technology organizations and the behaviors they use to create personal and organizational meaning</i> . (10271689 Ed.D.), Brandman University, Ann. Arbor. Retrieved from https://search.proquest.com/docview/1891735353?accountid=10051	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X										
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendment of 2004. http://idea.ed.gov/ . <i>Journal of Special Education Leadership</i> . (2001). 14(1).															X	X		
Kaufmann	Kaufman, S. B. (2011). Why inspiration matters. <i>Harvard Business Review</i> . Retrieved from https://hbr.org/2011/11/why/inspiration/matters							X	X	X									
Keenoy	Keenoy, Patrick. (2012). <i>Principal preparation and support for special education</i> . St. Louis, MO: Saint Louis University.															X	X		
Koltko-Rivera	Koltko-Rivera, M. E. (2006). Rediscovering the later version of Maslow's hierarchy of needs: Self-transcendence and opportunities for theory, research, and unification. <i>Review of General Psychology</i> 10(4): 302-317.									X	X								
Kouzes & Posner	Kouzes, J. M., & Posner, B. Z. (1987). <i>The leadership challenge</i> . San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.	X		X	X	X	X	X	X										
Kouzes & Posner	Kouzes, J. M., & Posner, B. Z. (2006). <i>A leader's legacy</i> . Hoboken, NJ: Jossey-Bass.	X		X	X	X	X	X	X										
Kouzes & Posner	Kouzes, J. M., & Posner, B. Z. (2007). <i>The leadership challenge</i> (4th ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.	X		X	X	X	X	X	X										
Kouzes & Posner	Kouzes, J. M., & Posner, B. Z. (2009, January). To lead, create a shared vision. <i>Harvard Business Review</i> , 87(1), 20-21.	X		X	X	X	X	X	X										
Kouzes & Posner	Kouzes, J. M., & Posner, B. Z. (2012). <i>The leadership challenge: How to make extraordinary things happen in organizations</i> (5th ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.	X		X	X	X	X	X	X										
Kouzes & Posner	Kouzes, J. M., & Posner, B. Z. (2016). <i>Learning leadership: The five fundamentals of becoming an exemplary leader</i> . San Francisco, CA: Wiley.	X		X	X	X	X	X	X										
Küçüksüleymanolu,	Küçüksüleymanolu, R. (2011). Burnout syndrome levels of teachers in special education schools in Turkey. <i>International Journal of Special Education</i> , 26(1), 53-63. Retrieved from http://www.eric.ed.gov/contentdelivery/servlet/ERICServlet?accno=EJ921186															X	X		
Larick & Peterson	Larick, K., & Petersen, C. (2015, November). Taking people with you: Leading as a meaning maker. Presentation at the annual ACSA State Leadership Summit, Sacramento, California. Presentation retrieved from http://2015leadershipsummitsched.org/event/0575d9afe7d6bbb1f6f6137f35ec3877#.VkPuQvnF_y0	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X										
Larick & Peterson	Larick, K., & Petersen, C. (2016, September). Taking people with you: Leading as a meaning maker. Presentation at Brandman University Doctoral Immersion, Irvine, California. Presentation retrieved from https://my.brandman.edu/faculty/Faculty_Support/edd/Fall%202016%20Sept%2035%202016/Immersion%20PPTs%20and%20Related%20Documents/Miniversities/Petersen.Larick_BU2016_TakingPeopleWithYou_pdf.pdf	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X										
LAO	Legislative Analyst Office. (2018).															X	X		
Liborius	Liborius, P. (2014). Who is worthy of being followed? The impact of leaders' character and the moderating role of followers' personality. <i>The Journal of Psychology</i> , 148(3), 347-385. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00223980.2013.801335																		
Litchka	Litchka, Peter R. (2007). No leader left behind: Planning to prepare effective educational leaders in this era of accountability. <i>Educational Planning</i> , 16, 2, 44-52.									X	X	X							
Maslow	Maslow, A. (1968). <i>Toward a psychology of being</i> . New York, NY: Van Nostrand.				X											X			
Maslow	Maslow, A. (1971). <i>The farther reaches of human nature</i> . New York, NY: The Viking Press.				X											X			
Maslow	Maslow, A. H. (1999). <i>Toward a psychology of being</i> (3rd ed.). New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons.				X											X			
Maslow	Maslow, A. H. (2000). A theory of human motivation. Retrieved from http://psychclassics.yorku.ca/Maslow/motivation.htm (Original work published 1943)				X											X			

Mautz	Mautz, S. (2015). <i>Make it matter: How managers can motivate by creating meaning</i> . New York, NY: AMACOM.	X		X		X	X	X			
Mautz	Mautz, S. (2018). <i>Find the fire: Ignite your inspiration and make work exciting again</i> . New York, NY: AMACOM.	X		X		X	X	X			
McHatton	McHatton, P. A., Glenn, T. L., & Gordon, K. D. (2012). <i>Troubling special education leadership: Finding purpose, potential, and possibility in challenging contexts</i> . <i>Journal of Special Education Leadership</i> , 25(1), 38-47. Retrieved from http://www.casecec.org/resources/jsel.asp								X	X	
McKee	McKee, A. (2011). <i>Management: A focus on leaders</i> . Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education.				X	X	X	X			
McKee	McKee, A., Boyatzis, R., & Johnston, F. (2008). <i>Becoming a resonant leader: Develop your emotional intelligence, renew your relationships, sustain your effectiveness</i> . Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business Press.				X	X	X	X			
Miller, Brownell & Smith	Miller, M., M. Brownell, and S. Smith. 1999. Factors that predict teachers staying in, leaving, or transferring from the special education classroom. <i>Exceptional Children</i> 65 (2): 201–18.								X	X	
Moore	Moore, T. (2008). <i>A life at work: The joy of discovering what you were born to do</i> . New York, NY: Broadway Books.	X					X	X			
Moore	Moore, W. (2014). <i>The work: My search for a life that matters</i> . New York, NY: Spiegel & Grau.	X					X	X			
Mueller	Mueller, T. G. (2009). Alternative dispute resolution: A new agenda for special education policy. <i>Journal of Disability Policy Studies</i> , 20(1), 4-13. doi:10.1177/1044207308315285								X		
Nance	Nance, E. (2007). <i>A case study of the impact of special education law on the retention of tenured special education teachers</i> . (3311797 Ed.D.), Wichita State University, Ann Arbor. Retrieved from https://search.proquest.com/docview/304816004?accountid=10051								X	X	
Nance	Nance, E., & Calabrese, R. L. (2009). Special education teacher retention and attrition: The impact of increased legal requirements. <i>International Journal of Educational Management</i> , 23(5), 431-440.								X	X	
NCD	National Council on Disability. (2018). Broken promises: the underfunding of IDEA. Retrieved from https://ncd.gov/sites/default/files/NCD_BrokenPromises_508.pdf								X	X	
Nayak	Nayak, A. (2016). Wisdom and the tragic question: Moral learning and emotional perception in Leadership and organisations. <i>Journal of Business Ethics</i> , 137(1), 1-13. doi:10.1007/s10551-015-2540-5		X				X	X			
NCLB	No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (2002), 20 USC 6301 1-9601.								X	X	
Nohr Schultz	Nohr Schulz, C. D. (2003). <i>Personal perceptions and organizational factors influencing stress and burnout among Minnesota directors of special education</i> (Order No. 3080112). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (288037573).						X		X	X	
Nanus	Nanus, B. (1992). <i>Visionary leadership: Creating a compelling sense of direction for your organization</i> . San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.				X		X	X			
Neuendorf	Neuendorf, K. A. (2002). <i>The content analysis guidebook</i> . Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.										X
Normore	Normore, Anthony H. (2006). Leadership recruitment and selection in school districts: Trends and issues. <i>Journal of Educational Thought</i> , 40, 1, 41-73.						X		X	X	
Patten	Patten, M. L. (2012). <i>Understanding research methods: An overview of the essentials</i> . Glendale, CA: Pyczak Publishing.										X
Patten	Patton, M. Q. (2015). <i>Qualitative research & evaluation methods (4th ed.)</i> . Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.										X
Peterson & Seligman	Peterson, C., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2004). <i>Character, strengths, and virtues: A handbook and classification</i> . Washington, DC: Oxford University Press.	X					X	X			
Phupheli	Phupheli, V. (2005). <i>The relationship between the expressed meaning of work and job satisfaction in a group of school educators</i> . Thesis (M.Soc.Sc.)-University of KwaZulu Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 2005.						X	X	X	X	
Prince, Yell & Katsiyannis	Prince, A. M. T., Yell, M. L., & Katsiyannis, A. (2018). <i>Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District</i> (2017): The U.S. Supreme Court and special education. <i>Intervention in School and Clinic</i> , 53(5), 321-324.								X	X	

Russell	Russell, F. (2003). The expectations of parents of disabled children. <i>British Journal of Special Education</i> , 50(3), 44-149.									X	X	
Salkind	Salkind, N. (2017). <i>Statistics for people who think they hate statistics</i> . Los Angeles: Sage Publishing.											X
Sarcam & Sakiz	Sarçam, H., & Sakız, H. (2014). Burnout and teacher self-efficacy among teachers working in special education institutions in Turkey. <i>Educational Studies</i> , 40(4), 423-437. doi:10.1080/03055698.2014.930340										X	
Schischka	Schischka, J. M. (2011). Partnerships with parents: Children with special education needs starting primary school. <i>Research Information for Teachers</i> (Wellington), 2, 19.									X	X	
Seligmann	Seligmann, T. J. (2012). Sliding doors: The Rowley decision, interpretation of special education law, and what might have been. In (pp. 71).									X	X	
Senge	Senge, P. M. (2006). <i>The fifth discipline: The art and practice of the learning organization</i> . New York, NY: Doubleday. 187				X				X			
Senge	Senge, P. M., Scharmer, C. O., Jaworski, J., & Flowers, B. S. (2005). <i>Presence: An exploration of profound change in people, organizations and society</i> . New York, NY: Doubleday.				X				X			
Singh	Singh, S. (2015). <i>Knowledge of Special Education Law Among Administrators in a Southern California Special Education Local Plan Area</i> . (3685704 Ed.D.), Brandman University, Ann Arbor. Retrieved from https://search.proquest.com/docview/1664843416?accountid=10051									X		
Sjostrom	Sjostrom, Cheryl. (2009). <i>The future view of special education administration: A Delphi study</i> . University of La Verne.									X		
Soni & Soni	Soni, B. & Soni, R. (2016). Enhancing Maslow's hierarchy of needs for effective leadership. <i>Competition Forum; Indiana</i> , 14(2).	X		X				X	X			
Stone, Russell, & Patterson	Stone, A. G., Russell, R. F., & Patterson, K. (2004). Transformational versus servant leadership: A difference in leader focus. <i>Leadership & Organization Development</i> , 25(4), 349-361.	X						X	X			
Schwartz	Schwartz, B. (2009). <i>Barry Schwartz: Our loss of wisdom</i> [Video file]. Retrieved from: https://www.ted.com/talks/barry_schwartz_on_our_loss_of_wisdom (Summey, 2018)		X					X	X			
Summey	Summey, E. F. (2018). <i>Special education administration: What does it take?</i> (78), ProQuest Information & Learning, Retrieved from http://libproxy_chapman.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip.&b=psyh&AN=2017-36662-064&site=eds-live Available from EBSCOhost psyh database.									X	X	
Thomson	Thompson, J. (2018). <i>Meaning makers: A mixed-methods case study of exemplary K-12 superintendents and the behaviors they use to create personal and organizational meaning</i> . (10788086 Ed.D.), Brandman University, Ann Arbor.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			
Thomson	Thompson, Karl (2016). <i>What percentage of your life will you spend at work?</i> Retrieved from https://revisesociology.com/2016/08/16/percentage-life-work/							X				
Toups	Toups, Deborah M. (2006). <i>Mentoring of special education administrators</i> . San Diego, CA: University of San Diego Press.									X		
Tyler & Brunner	Tyler, T. A., & Brunner, C. C. (2014). The case for increasing workplace decision-making: Proposing a model for special educator attrition research. <i>Teacher Education and Special Education</i> , 1(1), 1-26. doi:10.1177/0888406414527118							X		X	X	
USDE	United States Department of Education. (2010).									X	X	
Ulrich & Ulrich	Ulrich, D., & Ulrich, W. (2010). <i>The why of work: How great leaders build abundant organizations that win</i> . New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.			X				X	X			
Ulrich & Ulrich	Ulrich, D., & Ulrich, W. (2015). <i>The leadership capital index: Realizing the market value of leadership</i> . New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.			X				X	X			
Villanueva	Villanueva, R. N. (2017). <i>Meaning makers: A mixed-method case study of exemplary police chiefs and the behaviors they use to create personal and organizational meaning</i> . (10273845 Ed.D.), Brandman University.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			

Wagner & Katsiyannis	Wagner, Jennifer Y. and Katsiyannis, A. (2010). Special education litigation update: Implications for school administrators. <i>NASSP Bulletin</i> , 94, 1, 40-52.									X		
Wall	Wall, P. (2014). <i>Teacher complaints expose tensions as special-ed overhaul continues</i> . Chalkbeat. Retrieved from https://www.chalkbeat.org/posts/ny/2014/10/15/teachers-complaints-reveal-tensions-sparked-by-special-ed-overhaul/										X	
Wang, Hall & Rahimi	Wang, H., Hall, N. C., & Rahimi, S. (2015). Self-efficacy and causal attributions in teachers: Effects On burnout, job satisfaction, illness, and quitting intentions. <i>Teaching and Teacher Education</i> , 120. doi:10.1016/j.tate.2014.12.005										X	
Wei & Yip	Wei, R. R., & Yip, J. (2008). <i>Leadership wisdom : Discovering the lessons of experience</i> . Greensboro, NC: Center for Creative Leadership.					X			X			
Wheeler & LaRocco	Wheeler, Deborah S. and LaRocco, D.J. (2009). Special education administrators: Who and what helps buffer job-related stress? <i>Journal of Special Education Leadership</i> , 22, 2, 85-92.								X		X	
White	White, Deborah. (2005). Superintendent's commentary: The challenge for general education administrators in supporting students with disabilities under No Child Left Behind and the Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Act. <i>Journal of Special Education Leadership</i> , 18, 2, 43-44										X	X