
Dissertations

Spring 1-24-2023

How Exemplary Directors of Special Education Use the Five Principles Associated with Grit to Accomplish Extraordinary Results: A Phenomenological Study

Maria L. Moore

University of Massachusetts Global, mmoore3@mail.umassglobal.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.umassglobal.edu/edd_dissertations



Part of the [Special Education Administration Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Moore, Maria L., "How Exemplary Directors of Special Education Use the Five Principles Associated with Grit to Accomplish Extraordinary Results: A Phenomenological Study" (2023). *Dissertations*. 483.
https://digitalcommons.umassglobal.edu/edd_dissertations/483

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by UMass Global ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations by an authorized administrator of UMass Global ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact christine.bombaro@umassglobal.edu.

How Exemplary Directors of Special Education Use the Five Principles Associated with
Grit to Accomplish Extraordinary Results: A Phenomenological Study

A Dissertation by

Maria Moore

University of Massachusetts Global

A Private Nonprofit Affiliate of the University of Massachusetts

Irvine, California

School of Education

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

January 2023

Committee in charge:


Dr. Jonathan Greenberg, Ed.D., Committee Chair

Dr. Philip Pendley, Ed.D., Committee Member

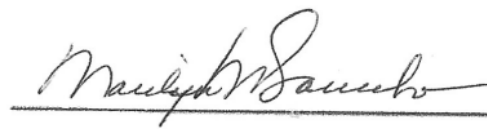
Dr. Marilyn Saucedo, Ed.D., Committee Member

University of Massachusetts Global
A Private Nonprofit Affiliate of the University of Massachusetts
Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

The dissertation of Maria Moore is approved.


_____, Dissertation Chair
Dr. Jonathan Greenberg, Ed.D.


_____, Committee Member
Dr. Philip Pendley, Ed.D.


_____, Committee Member
Dr. Marilyn Saucedo, Ed.D.


_____, Associate Dean

January 2023

How Exemplary Directors of Special Education Use the Five Principles Associated with
Grit to Accomplish Extraordinary Results: A Phenomenological Study

Copyright © 2023

by Maria Moore

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There is no way that I could have completed this dissertation on my own. It takes a village to succeed, and this dissertation would not be possible without the support of my family, my committee, and my cohort. It was their encouragement and belief in me that made this goal become a reality.

To my father: you have always been my greatest advocate. Throughout this doctoral journey, you were selfless, positive, and understanding. You not only celebrated my wins but always pushed me to persevere when things got tough. You never once doubted that I could succeed. I love you and thank you.

To my committee: Dr. Greenberg, Dr. Pendley, and Dr. Saucedo, thank you. Dr. Greenberg, you have not only been my chair but my cohort mentor as well, helping me to grow into the leader I am today. You have guided me, supported me, and pushed me to reach my goal, never once losing faith in me. Dr. Pendley, your kindness and thoughtful feedback made this dissertation process better than I ever anticipated it could be. Thank you for the time you took to read my work and the feedback you provided. Dr. Saucedo, you were the perfect fit and I thank Dr. Greenberg for introducing us. From the start until my defense, your support, kind words, and positive feedback made the dissertation process enjoyable.

To my cohort family: “IEOTAS”! None of this would be possible without you. Michelle, Adam, and Denise, you have always been there when I need advice, support, clarification, or just a laugh. The three of you played such an amazing role in this journey and I could not have picked better people to accompany me along the way.

Thank you to all those that participated in the interviews; I have learned so much from you. You truly are the embodiment of grit.

Finally, I want to thank and dedicate this dissertation to my daughter Hannah. Words cannot express my gratitude for your love, support, kindness, and selflessness throughout this process. When I was down, you picked me up. When I had good news to share, you were there to celebrate with me. You have always given me purpose, motivation, and inspiration to be the best. I am who I am because of you. I love you.

ABSTRACT

How Exemplary Directors of Special Education use the Five Principles Associated with Grit to Accomplish Extraordinary Results: A Phenomenological Study

by Maria Moore

Purpose: The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify and describe how exemplary directors of special education use the five principles associated with grit (courage, conscientiousness, long-term goals, resilience, and excellence versus perfection) to accomplish extraordinary results in their organizations.

Methodology: This qualitative study was part of a larger thematic research study conducted by nine peer researchers under the guidance of three University of Massachusetts Global faculty chairs. The qualitative research design encompassed a phenomenological model. Data for this study were gathered through a combination of eight semistructured interviews of exemplary directors of special education who met the predetermined criteria for study participation and through a review of artifacts and literature. Transcripts of each interview were coded, allowing me to identify themes that emerged among the responses. Data gathered from artifacts and literature were used to triangulate the research results.

Findings: Examination from the qualitative data from the eight exemplary directors of special education in this study indicated various findings. Analysis of the data resulted in 15 major themes and 446 frequency mentions. From those 15 major themes, six major findings emerged.

Conclusions: The study examined the lived experiences of eight exemplary directors of special education and how they use the five principles associated with grit to accomplish extraordinary results in their organization. Based on the data and supporting literature,

four conclusions were drawn: (a) courage makes it possible to stand up and advocate for what is best for students, (b) conscientiousness is enhanced by engaging in goals-focused leadership, (c) optimism and work-life balance builds resilient leaders, and (d) growth-minded leaders believe in the power of continuous improvement.

Recommendations: Based on the findings of this study, six recommendations emerged. Some of the recommendations include research to target a larger population of directors of special education across the United States, research to analyze the role prior experience plays in the development of grit, and a mixed method study investigating the effects of different self-care strategies on the success of directors of special education.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE.....	XIV
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Background.....	4
History of Special Education	4
Special Education Administrator	5
Organizational Leadership.....	6
Theoretical Foundation	7
Grit	7
Growing Grit.....	8
Grit and Leadership.....	8
Theoretical Framework.....	8
Statement of the Research Problem	9
Purpose Statement.....	11
Research Questions.....	11
Significance of the Study	11
Operational Definitions.....	13
Delimitations.....	14
Organization of the Study	14
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW	16
History of Special Education	16
Social Advocacy Movement.....	17
Brown v. Board of Education	20
Special Education Court Cases	20
Special Education Legislation.....	21
Special Education in California	22
Special Education in K-12 Public Schools	24
Challenges of Special Education in the 21st Century.....	26
Special Education Administrator	28
Director of Special Education.....	29
Roles and Responsibilities	29
Challenges.....	30
Leadership.....	31
Leadership in K-12 Public Education	33
Instructional Leadership.....	34
Situational Leadership	35
Distributed Leadership.....	36
Transformational Leadership.....	38
Theoretical Foundation	39
Growing Grit.....	40
Interest.....	41
Practice.....	41
Purpose.....	42

Hope	42
Grit and Leadership.....	43
Theoretical Framework.....	44
Courage.....	45
Conscientiousness.....	47
Long-Term Goals.....	48
Resilience.....	51
Excellence Versus Perfection	53
Summary.....	55
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY	57
Overview.....	57
Purpose Statement.....	57
Research Questions.....	58
Research Design.....	58
Rationale for Methodology.....	59
Population	60
Target Population.....	60
Sampling Frame	61
Sample.....	62
Sample Selection.....	63
Instrumentation	64
Interview Questions	65
Interview Protocol.....	66
Validity and Reliability.....	67
Reliability.....	68
Intercoder Reliability of Data	68
Validity	68
Triangulation of Data.....	69
Artifacts.....	70
Field Testing	70
Data Collection	70
Data Analysis	72
Limitations	73
Researcher as an Instrument	73
Virtual Interviews	74
Sample Size.....	75
Time and Location	75
Summary.....	75
CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS.....	76
Overview.....	76
Purpose Statement.....	77
Research Questions.....	77
Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures	77
Interrater Reliability.....	79
Population	79

Sampling Frame	80
Sampling Procedure	81
Presentation and Analysis of Data	82
Data Analysis	82
Validity	83
Reliability.....	84
General Findings.....	85
Data by Research Question.....	86
Research Question 1: Courage.....	86
Theme 1a: Knowing the Why.....	88
Theme 1b: Engaging in Strategic Leadership.....	90
Theme 1c: Listening to and Learning From Others.....	91
Research Question 2: Conscientiousness.....	93
Theme 2a: Doing Whatever it Takes	94
Theme 2b: Delegating Tasks to Others.....	95
Theme 2c: Scheduling Priorities.....	97
Research Question 3: Long-Term Goals.....	98
Theme 3a: Aligning Department Goals With District Goals.....	99
Theme 3b: Engaging in Backwards Mapping.....	101
Theme 3c: Achieving Goals Together	102
Research Question 4: Resilience.....	103
Theme 4a: Being a Reflective Practitioner	104
Theme 4b: Demonstrating Hardiness During Stressful Situations	105
Research Question 5: Excellence Versus Perfection	108
Theme 5a: Valuing a Growth Mindset.....	108
Theme 5b: Seeking Feedback From Others.....	110
Theme 5c: Pausing to Reevaluate the Current Reality	112
Key Findings.....	113
Key Finding: Courage.....	113
Key Finding: Conscientiousness.....	115
Key Finding: Long-Term Goals.....	115
Key Finding: Resilience.....	115
Key Finding: Excellence Versus Perfection	116
Summary.....	116
CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS	117
Overview.....	117
Purpose Statement.....	117
Research Questions.....	117
Methodology	118
Population	120
Sample.....	120
Sampling Procedure	120
Major Findings.....	121
Research Question 1	122
Major Finding 1: Knowing One’s Purpose Helps Leaders Do What is Right for Students.....	122

Research Question 2	123
Major Finding 2: Prioritizing Is Critical to Staying Organized, Meeting Deadlines, and Building Relationships	123
Research Question 3	124
Major Finding 3: Goal-Focused Leadership Increases Goal Attainment	124
Research Question 4	124
Major Finding 4: Importance of Reflective Leadership In the Face of Challenge or Adversity	125
Major Finding 5: Making Time for Self-Care and Disconnecting Helps Leaders Balance the Demands of Work and Personal Life	125
Research Question 5	126
Major Finding 6: A Growth Mindset Helps Leaders Achieve Excellence in Their Organizations	126
Unexpected Findings	127
Conclusions.....	127
Conclusion 1: Courage Makes it Possible to Stand Up and Advocate for What Is Best for Students and the Organization.....	127
Conclusion 2: Conscientiousness is Enhanced by Engaging in Goal-focused Leadership.....	129
Conclusion 3: Optimism and Work-Life Balance Builds Resilient Leaders	130
Conclusion 4: Growth Minded Leaders Believe In the Power of Continuous Improvement	131
Implications for Action	132
Implication for Action 1: Professional Development Training Targeting the Development of Grit	132
Implication for Action 2: Professional Development and Training for Directors of Special Education with a Focus on Advocating for Students	133
Implication for Action 3: Course Work on Stress and Time Management That Is Built Into Leadership Preparation Programs.....	134
Implication for Action 4: Publication of Findings	135
Recommendations for Further Research.....	135
Recommendation 1	136
Recommendation 2	136
Recommendation 3	136
Recommendation 4	137
Recommendation 5	137
Recommendation 6	137
Recommendation 7	137
Concluding Remarks and Reflection	138
REFERENCES	141
APPENDICES	164

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 Type and Number of California School Districts: 2021-2022.....	61
Table 2 Interview Question Alignment with Study Variables.....	66
Table 3 Strategies Used to Enhance Validity	69
Table 4 Study Participant Criteria.....	82
.....	121
Table 5 Research Question 1 Frequency of Themes in Interviews and Artifacts.....	87
Table 6 Research Question 2 Frequency of Themes in Interviews and Artifacts.....	93
Table 7 Research Question 3 Frequency of Themes in Interviews and Artifacts.....	99
Table 8 Research Question 4 Frequency of Themes in Interviews and Artifacts.....	104
Table 9 Research Question 5 Frequency of Themes in Interviews and Artifacts.....	109
Table 10 Key Findings.....	114

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Population, Sampling Frame, and Sample	63
Figure 2. Frequency of Responses to Each Principle	86
Figure 3. Frequency of Each Theme as Spoken by the Participants.....	87

PREFACE

A significant body of research is emerging in support of the belief that grit is key to obtaining extraordinary results (Schimschal & Lomas, 2009). Three faculty and nine doctoral students from the University of Massachusetts Global identified a common interest in studying the relationship between grit and power of passion and perseverance in professionals who accomplish extraordinary results. Through their shared interest, a thematic study was conducted by the nine doctoral students to identify and describe how exemplary leaders utilize the five principles associated with grit seen through personal courage, personal conscientiousness, long-term goals, personal resilience, and excellence versus perfection, to accomplish these extraordinary results within their areas of expertise. A phenomenological study design was utilized based on the framework of the five theoretical principles of grit. Specifically, the researchers sought to understand how study participants were able to persevere through adversity and achieve personal and professional goals, thus demonstrating grit (Duckworth, et al., 2007). The concept of grit as a predictor of success has continued to gain attention from the research community since its wide release in 2007 (Perlis, 2013). More research is needed to explore the relationship between an exemplary leader's passion to persevere, the five principles of grit and how they deliver extraordinary results (Mueller et al., 2017). Findings from this study will contribute to the emerging body of knowledge.

To develop consistency and reliability, the nine doctoral students worked in collaboration with the three faculty leads to develop the purpose statement and research questions. The term *peer researcher* was used throughout the dissertation to refer to the thematic researchers involved in conducting this study. The peer researchers studied

exemplary leaders in the following fields: Gabriela Aldana, middle school principals in Los Angeles and Orange County, Nicholas Barron, Directors of Special Education working in districts with less than 5000 ADA, Arah Broadnax, African American female entrepreneurs, Gurprit Dhillon, elementary school principals, Cache Hapner, senior Navy female leaders (commissioned and NCO), Denise Jaramillo, public school superintendents, Maria Moore, directors of special education, Julie Pettitt, women who hold chief executive roles in higher education , and Michelle Stoker, elementary school principals.

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Educational leadership has undergone significant change over the last decade (Fullan, 2020a). Since their inception, school districts have faced increasing challenges that go beyond the initial reasons for which they were developed. Along with preparing individuals for citizenship, today's school districts must unify an increasingly diverse population, promote equity, operate in the face of financial uncertainty, and set high standards for accountability to improve student achievement for all (Kober & Rentner, 2020; Thompson & France, 2015). Given these increased responsibilities, school leadership plays an important role in producing results for school districts.

In today's public schools, district and school leaders must engage in complex relationships focused on helping schools meet accountability targets by increasing the performance of students in both general and special education (Bakken et al., 2006; Crockett, 2019; Thurlow et al., 2019). According to the Wallace Foundation (n.d.), improving school and student performance requires the participation of central office administration and school site leaders to ensure all students are successful. Therefore, leaders are tasked with the responsibility to ensure students with disabilities are no longer placed in silos but rather have access to the general education curriculum (Thurlow et al., 2019). Thus, increased accountability for student achievement, coupled with the need to develop effective learning environments that serve students with and without disabilities, requires strong leadership skills and a desire to set and achieve long-term goals (M. Anderson, 2017; Fullan, 2014).

In the midst of the challenges K-12 public schools face, the United States has seen an increase in the number of students with disabilities enrolled in public education. In

2019-2020, there were 7.3 million students, or 14% of the total public school enrollment, who received special education services in the United States (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). In 2018–2019, California served 795,047 individuals from birth through 22 years of age in public school settings (California Department of Education [CDE], 2021). Of these students, 60% spent more than 80% of their time in general education classes (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). Given these statistics, there is little argument that California contributes significantly to the education of students with disabilities in preschool through adult transition classes within public school settings. Therefore, educational leaders, specifically those in special education, have an opportunity to contribute to the development of effective learning environments to ensure students with special needs have access to high quality instruction (Isaac et al., 2016; Lemons et al., 2019; Thurlow et al., 2019).

Each California public school has a special education department that is overseen by a special education administrator, also known as the special education director (CDE, 2021). Over the years, the responsibilities of the special education administrator have expanded and evolved (Isaac et al., 2016; Pazy & Yates, 2018). Special education directors are no longer solely responsible for ensuring schools stay in compliance with special education laws, policies, and procedures. Rather, today’s special education directors must also serve students and families from diverse backgrounds by communicating the educational goals for special education programs while working collaboratively with general education administration to ensure students with special needs receive a free and appropriate public education (Pazy & Yates, 2019; Tudyryn et al., 2016). This multifaceted role demands good communication skills, the clear articulation

of program goals, the ability to work with a variety of individuals, knowledge of special education law, and familiarity with current special education instructional practices (Bakken et al., 2006).

Despite the need for highly qualified special education administrators, Boscardin et al. (2010) reported a shortage in personnel willing to take on this position, and several states allow the director of special education to be filled with an administrator with little training in special education. According to Crockett (2019), since 2010 there has been a change in the system that prepares aspiring general and special education administrators; individuals interested in special education administration are prepared in the same program as other leadership positions that encompass different responsibilities. Despite the lack of adequate preparation, the complex and continually changing roles and responsibilities directors of special education hold calls for effective leadership from individuals who are highly qualified and fully licensed to provide students with disabilities access to a free and appropriate public education (Boscardin et al., 2010; Fan et al., 2019; Hussey et al. 2019).

Duckworth, a psychologist and educational researcher, proposed a theory of grit, which combines the facets of passion and perseverance to achieve success (Duckworth, 2016; Duckworth et al., 2007). Much of the research on grit has examined closely why individuals of comparable talent and intelligence succeed, and some do not. It has been documented that gritty individuals set and work toward long-term goals despite setbacks and in the absence of feedback (Duckworth et al., 2007; Schimschal & Lomas, 2018). T. H. Lee and Duckworth (2018) reported that grit is believed to be what propels individuals to higher levels of leadership in demanding fields such as education and medicine.

Furthermore, additional bodies of research have begun to look closely at the relationship between other personality attributes associated with grit and the success of leaders in the workplace (Eskreis-Winkler et al., 2014, Perlis, 2013; Southwick et al., 2019). When faced with challenges, however, individuals who embody passion and perseverance have been found to demonstrate higher levels of achievement and goal attainment (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009; Schimschal et al., 2018; Southwick et al., 2019).

Background

History of Special Education

The door for special education in the United States was opened in 1954 with *Brown v. Board of Education*, in which the conversation about equal opportunity and access for all began (Esteves & Rao, 2008; Pazey & Yates, 2018). The passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 1965 and its amendment in 1966 continued to pave the way for special education in the United States (Esteves & Rao, 2008). Change continued to take place with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act in 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990. Passage of the Education for all Handicapped Children Act in 1975, also known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), made education in the least restrictive environment (LRE) a right for all students in the United States (Esteves & Rao, 2008; Pazey & Yates, 2018; U.S. Department of Education, 2022).

The provision of special education services to students with disabilities (SWD) in California has evolved since 1860 (Legislative Analyst's Office, 2018). Gradually, California created a patchwork of optional and mandatory special education programs. In 1975, California created the Master Plan for Special Education, expanding the services

provided by California schools, requiring all California school districts to join Special Education Local Plan Areas (SELPA), and introducing a simplified funding system (CDE, 2022; Legislative Analyst's Office, 2018;). Today, California has 132 SELPAs and provides funding for special education through three different sources (Legislative Analyst's Office, 2019).

Federal law requires public schools to provide a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) to SWD in the LRE. With the development of the California Master Plan for Special Education, SELPAs and K-12 public school districts hold several responsibilities to ensure SWD have access to the same educational opportunities as typically developing peers (CDE, 2022). A main role of K-12 public schools is the provision of FAPE in the LRE for SWD. Acknowledging that SWD can be educated with nondisabled peers requires K-12 public schools to share resources among other public schools as well as with nonpublic and noneducational agencies. Therefore, today's K-12 public schools face mounting challenges with respect to the delivery of special education services. These challenges place an additional stress on special education administrators to find ways to build the capacity of special education teachers, meet the unique needs of all students, and improve school and student performance (Thurlow et al., 2019).

Special Education Administrator

Just as the history of special education in the United States is relatively new, so is the history of the special education administrator. It was not until mid-1960 that federal and state authorities began to look closely at the training and preparation needed for administrators to guide and oversee special education programs within public schools (Boscardin et al. 2010; Pazey & Yates, 2018;). Since then, the process of developing

adequate and comprehensive preparation programs for special education administrators has been slow; research in the early to mid-2000s showed that some states still did not have well-defined competencies for special education administrators and often filled the role with individuals with no training in special education (Boscardin et al., 2010).

The highest level of administration within special education departments in public schools is the director of special education (Fan et al., 2019). Effective leadership from the director of special education is critical to the provision of services to SWD (Hussey et al., 2019). The role of the director of special education is multifaceted and includes a focus on compliance with the law, budget, management, implementation of evidence-based practices, and knowledge of special education policies and procedures (Bakken et al., 2006; Hussey et al., 2019).

Organizational Leadership

Effective leadership has been considered one of the most important components of successful organizations (Landis et al., 2014). The study of leadership has an extensive history dating back to the turn of the 20th century (Kovach, 2018). There have been numerous paradigm shifts in leadership theory and a wealth of knowledge gained about what makes a great leader (Day & Antonakis, 2018). Regardless, the concept of effective leadership remains elusive, and no one theory has yet to be universally adopted (Amanchukwu et al., 2015).

Research specifically on leadership in K-12 education has grown over the last decade (Tudryn et al., 2016). According to Fullan (2020a), the goals of K-12 public schools are shifting, becoming more complex, and thus requiring leaders to be more dynamic and interactive. Increased expectations for student and school achievement,

along with a push to develop inclusive classrooms, require strong leadership (McCleskey & Waldron, 2015). Since the 1970s, leadership theories such as servant, distributed, transactional, and transformational theory have influenced the way in which educational leaders guide followers to realize long-term goals.

Theoretical Foundation

In 1907, William James questioned why some individuals of equal ability succeed and others do not (Duckworth et al., 2007). It was this question that led psychologist and educational researcher Duckworth to investigate grit, a trait successful individuals use to achieve results. Duckworth et al. based the idea of grit largely on the seminal works of Galton and Cox. Galton concluded ability alone was not the sole determinant of success, but rather, success was a combination of ability coupled with perseverance and hard work (Duckworth, 2016; Duckworth et al., 2007). Cox supported Galton's findings indicating motive, hard work, confidence, and strong character, along with intelligence, were predictors of achievement (Duckworth et al., 2007).

Grit

To further understand and explain the traits associated with grit, Duckworth et al. (2007) looked closely at intelligence and personality. From this research, Duckworth et al. found that intelligence was positively correlated with achievement, indicating traits other than intelligence also predict success. By looking closely at the big five model, Duckworth et al. explained the relationship between personality and achievement. Finally, based on research and interviews with some of the most successful people in a variety of domains, Duckworth concluded grit was a combination of passion and

perseverance for long-term goals (Disabato et al., 2018; Duckworth, 2016 Duckworth et al., 2007).

Growing Grit

In the book *Grit: Passion and Perseverance*, Duckworth (2016) described four assets that help individuals grow grit: interest, practice, purpose, and hope. According to Duckworth, these four assets do not just exist but develop over time. The development of grit starts with an interest in an endeavor that an individual enjoys leading to a desire to practice the skill as a means of improvement. Next comes the cultivation of a sense of purpose, and finally the development of hope, which helps the individual keep going even in the face of difficulty.

Grit and Leadership

The correlation between leadership and grit has not yet been studied in depth (Caza & Posner, 2018; Danner et al., 2019). Researchers have found that grit may be a predictor of job-related success (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009). Schimschal and Lomas (2018) found a positive relationship between grit and positive leadership capacity, indicating individuals high in grit create a workplace climate focused on relationships, communication, and meaning. Southwick et al. (2019) found gritty individuals outperformed peers of equal ability within the workplace and noted that when individuals expressed a passion for work, grit was more likely to predict success.

Theoretical Framework

A review of the literature on grit found that multiple authors support the principles associated with the theory of grit as outlined by Duckworth (2016). Therefore, the theory of grit served as the theoretical framework for this study. Perlis (2013) noted

that although grit has been defined as passion and perseverance toward long-term goals, it has a number of different anomalies. Five principles of grit that stand out in the literature include courage, conscientiousness, use of long-term goals, resilience, and excellence versus perfection.

Statement of the Research Problem

Following World War II there was a greater acceptance of individuals who deviated from the norm, prompting the expansion of the field of special education (Pazey & Yates, 2018). Although the 1954 case of *Brown v. Board of Education* provided a legal foundation for public schools to provide an education to all students, it was IDEA that made it possible for students with disabilities to be educated in the LRE with typically developing peers (Esteves & Rao, 2008; Pazey & Yates, 2018). Today, 7.3 million students receive special education services in public schools in the United States in a variety of settings (Institute for Educational Services, 2021).

The development of special education programs in public schools, however, requires effective leadership from individuals trained in special education policies and procedures (Crockett, 2019; Hussey et al., 2019). In the public school system, this individual is known as the director of special education (Fan et al., 2019). The role of the director of special education is multifaceted with the goal to work collaboratively with other district personnel to bridge the gap between special and general education (Bakken et al., 2006). Thus, effective leadership by the director of special education is critical to ensuring students with disabilities receive FAPE in the LRE as outlined by IDEA (Fan et al., 2019; Hussey et al., 2019).

Duckworth's theory of grit has been well studied in the literature, and much of the research has focused on the components of passion and perseverance for long-term goals and what makes an individual gritty. Many studies have found a positive association between grit and success in school, sports, military, and marriage (Eskeris-Winkler 2014; Duckworth, 2016; Kelly et al., 2014). The study of grit and its correlation with leadership success, however, is just beginning to emerge (Danner et al., 2019; Southwick et al., 2019). Studies on grit and leadership success have found that successful leaders in a variety of domains use grit to achieve results, create grittier work cultures, and improve employee engagement (Schimschal & Lomas, 2018; Southwick et al., 2019). Additionally, gritty leaders are more likely to engage in positive leadership strategies (Schimschal & Lomas, 2018). Finally, T. H. Lee and Duckworth (2018) stated it is grit that often propels individuals into leadership in a variety of fields.

Although the theory of grit stands on the pillars of passion and perseverance for long-term goals, Perlis (2013) suggested there are a number of different anomalies associated with grit, including the principles of courage, conscientiousness, use of long-term goals, resilience, and excellence versus perfection. Although the relationship between grit and leadership success is beginning to emerge in the literature, the association between the principles associated with grit and the success of directors of special education remains largely unexplored. This research aims to address the literature on grit, looking closely at how directors of special education use the five principles associated with grit to achieve extraordinary results.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify and describe how exemplary directors of special education use five principles associated with grit (courage, conscientiousness, long-term goals, resilience, and excellence versus perfection) to accomplish extraordinary results in their organization.

Research Questions

1. How do exemplary directors of special education use courage to accomplish extraordinary results?
2. How do exemplary directors of special education use conscientiousness to accomplish extraordinary results?
3. How do exemplary directors of special education use long-term goals to accomplish extraordinary results?
4. How do exemplary directors of special education use resilience to accomplish extraordinary results?
5. How do exemplary directors of special education use excellence versus perfection to accomplish extraordinary results?

Significance of the Study

Research has shown effective leadership is vital to the success of teaching and learning and thus critical for improving school and student outcomes (Hussey et al., 2019; Kouzes & Posner, 2016; Leithwood et al., 2019; Pont, 2020). IDEA mandates students with disabilities have the opportunity to access grade-level content standards and the general education setting to the maximum extent possible (Yell et al., 2018). Consequently, today's K-12 special education administrators are tasked with working in

tandem with general education to find innovative ways to educate students of all abilities (Hussey et al., 2019; Reed, 2019).

According to the CDE (2021), California serves 795,047 students with disabilities; therefore, effective leadership from the director of special education is vital to ensure equitable instruction for all (Hussey et al., 2019). Increased accountability for student and school achievement, coupled with the expanding roles and responsibilities placed on directors of special education, present unprecedented challenges for producing extraordinary results (Crockett, 2019; Pazey & Yates, 2018; Reed, 2019). Therefore, the increased demands require grit, a high level of passion and perseverance, to stay focused on meeting long-term goals (Caza & Posner, 2018; Duckworth, 2016).

The study of grit and its relationship to leadership success is in the early stages (Caza & Posner, 2018). Much of the research on grit and education has examined its influence on the success of students (Kearns, 2015) with little focus on how grit influences the success of leaders, specifically directors of special education. Therefore, this area remains largely unexplored, and this research provides an opportunity to identify how directors of special education use the principles associated with grit to achieve extraordinary results.

This research is significant because it adds to the literature on organizational and educational leadership, special education administration, and grit theory. Given the complex demands on directors of special education, Hussey et al. (2019) suggested there will be a shortage of special education administrators within the next 10 years, making school improvement reforms difficult. Research on the principles associated with grit and the success of directors of special education will help to identify ways in which special

education preparation programs can better prepare individuals for the demands of special education administration. Additionally, research on grit and leadership success may help to identify resources that can be used by directors of special education, as well as other school leaders, to achieve results while balancing the complex demands of the job. Finally, this research will help identify professional development opportunities for school leaders focused on strategies aimed at building personal and organizational grit within schools and departments to help improve student and school performance.

Operational Definitions

For this research, this section provides definitions to clarify the terms relevant to the study. Operational definitions were derived from the collaborative work of nine thematic doctoral students and three faculty members.

Conscientiousness: A fundamental personality trait that drives the desire and ability to be diligent, organized, achievement-oriented, self-disciplined, and reliable (Jackson et al., 2010; Perlis, 2013).

Courage: The mental, physical, and moral strength to pursue and accomplish a worthy goal despite the presence of danger or fear (G. Lee & Elliot-Lee, 2006; Schilpzand et al., 2015).

Excellence versus perfection: A mindset toward fulfilling one's purpose and prioritizing improvement over a lofty ideal that may or may not be attainable (Arias, 2017; Duckworth et al., 2007; Perlis, 2013).

Exemplary directors of special education: Meet at least three of the four criteria

- Recognition by peers
- Recommended by one or more recognized executive leaders

- Memberships in professional organizations in their field
- Articles, papers, or published materials presented at conferences

Extraordinary results: Extraordinary results are those accomplishments that are remarkable, surprising, exceptional, and go beyond what is usually expected (O'Reilly & Pfeffer, 2000).

Resilience: An individual's ability to adapt and recover from stress and adversity while maintaining or returning to a positive mental state of wellbeing despite hardship (Grafton et al., 2010; Rice & Liu, 2016).

Use of long-term goals: Utilizing a top-level future outcome that serves as a compass for sustained action, inspiring passion, and consistent focus over long stretches of time (Duckworth, 2007; Jachimowicz et al., 2018).

Delimitations

This phenomenological study was limited to directors of special education in the state of California who are working in public kindergarten through 12th-grade school districts. The study was also limited to directors of special education who have been employed in the position for at least 3 years and meet three of the following criteria: (a) have been recognized by their peers; (b) have been recommended by one or more regional executive leaders; (c) hold membership in professional organizations in their field; and (d) have published articles, papers, or written materials on leadership or have presented on leadership at local or state conferences.

Organization of the Study

This study consists of five chapters. Chapter I introduced the study with a description of the background, problem statement, research questions, significance of the

problem, and limitations. Chapter II gives an extensive review of the literature that has been conducted regarding grit and directors of special education. Chapter III covers the methodological approach that was used to collect and analyze the data required to complete this study. Chapter IV presents the findings of the study. Finally, Chapter V provides findings and conclusions, implications for action, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter II presents a review of the literature related to the five principles associated with grit and how exemplary directors of special education use these principles to achieve extraordinary results within their organization. The five principles of grit consist of courage, long-term goals, conscientiousness, resilience, and excellence versus perfection. These five principles serve as the theoretical framework for this study.

This literature review is organized into five sections beginning with a look at the historical foundations of special education in the United States. The review continues by examining the role of the special education administrator, including the challenges directors of special education face in today's K-12 public school settings. The next section reviews the history of organizational leadership. Specifically, this section examines leadership within K-12 public education and leadership theories used by administrators to achieve results within their organizations. The chapter then explores the concept of grit as defined by Duckworth, which served as the theoretical foundation for the study. This section delves into a definition of grit, how individuals can grow grit, and the relationship between grit and leadership success. The chapter concludes with the theoretical framework by examining in detail the five principles of grit that stand out in the literature.

History of Special Education

The Jewish Talmud, Muslim Koran, and the Christian Bible provide historical documentation that individuals with disabilities have long lived, functioned, and participated in society (Obiakor, 2011). Consequently, the history of special education has been greatly influenced by the societal and philosophical beliefs about individuals

with disabilities. Prior to the 16th and 17th centuries, individuals with disabilities faced unmitigated hardships including isolation, exclusion, inhumane treatment, and sometimes death (Salend & Duhaney, 2011; Spaulding & Pratt, 2015). A century after the Declaration of Independence, individuals with disabilities continued to receive unequal treatment and held few rights as citizens (Ashbaker, 2011). Families were often advised to hide children with disabilities from public view or place them in institutions or hospitals (Ashbaker, 2011; Spaulding & Pratt, 2015). For many years, education and attendance in public schools for individuals with disabilities were not allowed (Ashbaker, 2011). The right to a free and appropriate education for all children in the United States is a relatively new concept, made possible by the passage of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, also known as IDEA.

Social Advocacy Movement

Although reform for individuals with disabilities is new, the development of special education in the United States began much earlier (Spaulding & Pratt, 2015). The French Enlightenment paved the way for medical and scientific advancement and economic reform prompting interest in individuals with disabilities (Spaulding & Keith, 2010; Spaulding & Pratt, 2015). Initial efforts to deliver special education services began with the deaf because this disability was more easily detected than intellectual disability (Salend & Duhaney, 2011; Spaulding & Keith, 2010; Spaulding & Pratt, 2015). The educational success of individuals such as Helen Keller sparked public awareness about disabilities and prompted the beginning of the special education advocacy movement (Ashbaker, 2011). As a result, the development of institutions focused on the training and teaching of individuals with disabilities was established.

The works of Jean-Marc-Gaspard Itard and Edouard Seguin also showed that individuals with disabilities could learn, helping to change societal viewpoints about the disabled and giving rise to laws to educate these individuals in specialized schools (Salend & Duhaney, 2011). Eventually, the successes of European educators began to spread to other countries, including the United States, with a push for more nurturing educational environments along with more individualized learning (Pazey & Yates, 2018). As a result, social advocacy groups began to form, pushing for the inclusion of individuals with disabilities in all facets of society (Salend & Duhaney, 2011). In the 1900s, the development of the Council for Exceptional Children, coupled with the support of the Kennedy family in the 1940s, helped the advocacy movement to gain much needed momentum (Ashbaker, 2011; Spaulding & Pratt, 2015).

Special Education in the United States

The history of special education in the United States has evolved over time, facing many challenges, debates, and successes (Salend & Duhaney, 2015). Despite the Declaration of Independence, which affirmed that all men were created equal, the United States was slow in recognizing the rights of individuals with disabilities (Ashbaker, 2011; Cornett & Knackstedt, 2020). The disabled were often viewed as welfare recipients with few governmental programs aimed at addressing their plight.

The revolution in how people with disabilities were treated in the United States, however, began with Dorothea Dix, a social reformer, who was “appalled by her first observations of ‘criminals, retarded individuals, and the mentally ill’ being housed together” (Spaulding & Pratt, 2015, p. 95). As a result of Dix’s observations, the Massachusetts legislature revisited laws and standards regarding people with disabilities

and provided appropriate funding for institutions (Spaulding & Keith, 2010; Spaulding & Pratt, 2015). During this time, Massachusetts also saw the rise of compulsory education; however, individuals with disabilities were not included (Pazey & Yates, 2018). Rather, specific provisions were made to protect the disabled from the cruelty of society and to protect normal people from the negative effects of association with crippled, feebleminded, and incorrigible children.

The end of the 19th century, however, saw a swift regression in the progress made toward individuals with disabilities (Spaulding & Keith, 2010). The introduction of intelligence testing and the eugenics movement further cultivated the perception that individuals with disabilities were deviant and unfit for reproduction (Salend & Duhaney, 2010; Spaulding & Keith, 2011; Spaulding & Pratt, 2015). Furthermore, this era saw a rise in the institutionalization of individuals with disabilities and the implementation of marriage restrictions (Spaulding & Pratt, 2015). As a result, the special education movement lost much of the momentum it had gained.

The perception of individuals with disabilities, however, changed following World War II. The United States turned toward equality in education, and attention was placed on educating the whole child including children with mental and physical disabilities (Pazey & Yates, 2018). As Americans sought to distance themselves from eugenic practices and new theories in developmental psychology emerged, marginalized individuals began to fight for equal rights (Spaulding & Pratt, 2015). In the 1950s, the United States found itself amid a Civil Rights movement. It was during this time that the rights and education of individuals with disabilities began to receive recognition through

the three landmark court cases and three laws that would change the face of special education in the United States (Cornett & Knackstedt, 2020).

Brown v. Board of Education

The legal and philosophical foundation for special education in the United States was established with the landmark Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education* in 1954, hailed by Blanchett et al. (2005) as “the single most important court decision in American education” (p. 70). While the civil rights movement opened the door for African Americans, it also paved the way for people with disabilities, knocking down the doctrine of separate but equal, the foundation for segregation (Lengyel & Vanberguijk, 2021; Pazez & Yates, 2018). The Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education* also provided parents with the legal footing to challenge discriminatory practices and the ability to petition the courts to allow students with disabilities to have access to public education (Obiakor, 2011). Furthermore, the impact of *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education* paved the way for advocacy groups to establish and promote federal legislation that would mandate a free education for all children (Cornett & Knackstedt, 2020; Spaulding & Pratt, 2015).

Special Education Court Cases

Following *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education*, several court cases challenged school districts and states that denied the rights of children with disabilities to receive a free and appropriate education in the LRE (Ashbaker, 2011). The Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Citizens or *PARC v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* challenged a state law prohibiting children considered unable to profit from attendance in public schools the right to access education. The court decreed the state of Pennsylvania

must provide education to students with intellectual disabilities, stating these children “were entitled to receive free public education” (Ashbaker, 2011, p. 29). Furthermore, the court decreed parents of children with disabilities have the right to be fully informed of any changes made to their child’s educational program.

At the same time as *PARC v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania*, a class action lawsuit was filed on behalf of 18,000 children with exceptionalities in Washington D.C. (Obiakor, 2011). In *Mills v. Board of Education*, the court declared that “lack of funds was no excuse for failing to educate children” (Ashbaker, 2011, p. 29). Furthermore, the court stated that districts must put specific procedures in place to determine whether a student should receive special education services (Obiakor, 2011).

Special Education Legislation

Following the rulings in *PARC v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* and *Mills v. Board of Education*, 36 additional court decisions in 27 states affirmed the right for students with disabilities to have access to public education (Ashbaker, 2011). The movement to change the educational system eventually led to the passage of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Lengyel & Vanbergeijk, 2021). Specifically, section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act made it illegal for any institution receiving federal funds to discriminate against individuals with disabilities.

Following the passage of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act, Public Law 94-142 (PL 94-142), also known as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) of 1975, was signed into law (Lengyel & Vanbergeijk, 2021). With the passage of EAHCA, federal law finally supported the inclusion of individuals with disabilities into school and society (Pazey & Yates, 2018). EAHCA has been reauthorized since 1975,

and in 1990 was renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA), shortened to IDEA in 2004 (Ashbaker, 2011).

In 2001, the United States ushered in the era of standard-based accountability with the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), raising expectations for student and teacher performance (Boscardin & Lashley, 2018). In 2004, IDEA built upon NCLB and included increased qualifications for special education personnel and the use of instructional methods grounded in scientifically based research. In 2009, *Race to the Top* encouraged states to move away from standards-based accountability to progress demonstrated by annual assessments. Finally, the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 2015, today known as the Every Student Succeeds Act, shifted the educational responsibility of students to the states and leaving many of the principles of NCLB for students with disabilities unchanged.

Special Education in California

The concept of state supported education in California was created at the onset of the state's formation and incorporated into the state's constitution (Noel, 2020). At the outset, public education in California promoted Americanization and legalized the segregation of children into separate schools, restricting education to White children only. In the 1860s, schools were established for students of color along with the establishment of a patchwork of special education programs for students with disabilities (Legislative Analyst's Office, 2018; Noel, 2020). Between 1920 and 1975, California created a dozen special categorical programs for students with disabilities, ultimately creating the Master Plan for Special Education in 1980 (CDE, n.d.; Legislative Analyst's Office, 2018). For the first time, students with disabilities living in California were

guaranteed an Individual Education Plan (IEP) and access to a free and appropriate public education in the LRE (CDE, n.d.; Legislative Analyst's Office, 2018).

Today, all school districts in California are required to join a SELPA responsible for organizing special education programs and services among its member districts (Legislative Analyst's Office, 2018). The goal of SELPAs in California is to facilitate high quality special education programming for students along with providing training for parents and educators (CDE, n.d.). Today there are 132 SELPAs in California, each tasked with designing and implementing a plan for the delivery of services to students with disabilities (Legislative Analyst's Office, 2019).

In the 2018-2019 academic year, California provided special education services to 795,047 students, newborn through 22 years of age in a variety of settings (CDE, n.d.). According to the Legislative Analyst's Office (2019), 12.5% of California public school students receive special education services, an increase from the early 2000s. African American and low-income students make up a disproportionate number of children enrolled in special education programs, representing 6% of the student population but 9% of students with disabilities (Legislative Analyst's Office, 2019). Overall, students with disabilities in California are served in mainstream classrooms alongside typical peers; however, students with disabilities have been found to have lower academic outcomes and lower standardized test results compared to students in general education (Legislative Analyst's Office, 2019).

Funding for special education programs in California has also undergone changes since the formation of public education. Between 1860 and 1980, California funded districts to serve students with disabilities locally and provided funds for state residential

schools such as the California School for the Deaf and California School for the Blind (Legislative Analyst's Office, 2018). Distinct funding rates were developed based on eligibility and program requirements. This system of funding posed three weaknesses: (a) it did not cover some disabilities leaving students without access to special education services, (b) it was difficult for administrators to navigate, and (c) it encouraged schools to identify students with the disability that generated the most funding.

With the adoption of the California Master Plan for Special Education, funding for special education was simplified and based on three different types of special education services: special day class, resource, and designated instruction and services (Legislative Analyst's Office, 2018). Although simple, this system of funding resulted in inequities and encouraged school districts to serve students with disabilities in special day classes. In 1998, the funding system for special education in California was revised yet again. The new system funded SELPAs based on overall attendance regardless of the number of students enrolled in special education or the specific disabilities of those students. Although California has made efforts to equalize funding, it continues to remain unequal, and California has made no additional adjustments to its funding system since 2000.

Special Education in K-12 Public Schools

Special education in the United States is provided to students whose disabilities adversely affect their educational performance, specifically academic achievement (Farkas et al., 2020). The delivery of special education services in K-12 public schools is based on a delicate balance between national, state, and local policies (Noel, 2020). In the past, special education services were marked by exclusion and lack of access to

educational opportunities (Dudley-Marling & Burns, 2014). Today, however, 7.3 million students receive special education services in K-12 public school settings (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022).

Overall, special education in public schools is designed to improve the educational outcomes of students with disabilities by reducing the gap between general and special education (Cook et al., 2018; Cook & Schirmer, 2003). Since the inception of EAHCA, now IDEA, the delivery of special education services has shifted to ensure current practices are aligned with social justice, educational equality, and human rights (Francisco et al., 2020). As a result, special education services have moved from focusing on the rights of individuals with disabilities to focusing on the specific learning needs of each student through the provision of a continuum of program options and use of evidence-based practices (Cook et al., 2018; Francisco et al., 2020; Lemons et al., 2018).

The intent of IDEA is to provide students with disabilities a free and appropriate education that meets their unique needs while incorporating high expectations using the general education curriculum and ensuring participation in general education testing (Skrtic & Knackstedt, 2018). The overarching goal is to equip students with the skills necessary to function normally to the maximum extent possible in normal environments (Dudley-Marling & Burns, 2014). Special education instructors have offered several models for effectively achieving this goal including identifying and remediating skill deficits, providing compensatory training, or making necessary modifications and accommodations (Dudley-Marling & Burns, 2014; Lemons et al., 2018). Traditional instructional approaches in special education in public schools have also aimed at

providing extra services to students with disabilities by placing them in separate settings (Lemons et al., 2018).

For students in special education, the IEP is a critical document and serves as the blueprint for ensuring meaningful participation in the LRE with a curriculum that meets each child's specific needs (Francisco et al., 2020; Skrtic & Knackstedt, 2018; Yell et al., 2022). For many children with disabilities in public school today, this means education in the general education setting to help them achieve higher levels of learning and long-term success (Billingsley et al., 2018; Francisco et al., 2020). The move toward inclusion, however, requires the collaboration between general and special education to ensure the use of instructional practices that support a variety of student needs (Billingsley et al., 2018; Cornett & Knackstedt, 2020).

Challenges of Special Education in the 21st Century

The role of special education in K-12 public schools has been greatly influenced by the events of the Civil Rights movement, related legislation, shifting national and community concerns, and federal and state lawsuits that continue to direct its development (Kim et al., 2019; Lemons et al., 2018; Noel, 2020). Special education, however, has continually operated on the periphery of the K-12 educational system (McLaughlin & Burho, 2018). Educational reforms have strived to reduce segregation, eliminate discrimination, and provide all children with specialized services in public school settings; however, the services children with disabilities receive are often determined largely by the resources available to them. Although educational equality has been at the core of the U.S. educational reform movement, equal access to education is

largely determined by where a child lives and attends school (Mason-Williams et al., 2020; McLaughlin & Burho, 2018).

In the United States, children of color have been reported to be disproportionately overrepresented in special education programs (Morgan et al., 2018). As a result, federal legislation mandates school districts monitor for significant disproportionality and those above the risk ratio to take corrective action (Farkas et al., 2020). Studies examining disproportionality in special education have shown that White children are far more likely to receive special education services than children of color, leaving minority children underidentified as having a disability (Farkas et al., 2020; Morgan et al., 2018).

Funding for special education also provides a challenge for school districts. States, individual districts, and schools are mandated by IDEA to ensure students with disabilities receive FAPE and a high-quality education without regard to the cost of delivering such services (Hutchinson, 2021). Consequently, this creates a burden on both federal, state, and local educational entities (Baker et al., 2018; Hutchinson, 2021; McLaughlin & Burho, 2018). According to McLaughlin and Burho, the cost of implementing special education has risen at the state level while federal funding has remained relatively unchanged. This challenge has prompted states to find ways to support special education programs to ensure funds are equitably distributed between both general and special education programs (Baker et al., 2018; McLaughlin & Burho, 2018).

Finally, public schools have seen a significant rise in the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting, sparking increased discourse on diversity (Cook & Schirmer, 2003; Parmar, 2021; Sun & Xin, 2020). Age-graded

curriculum, normative testing, tracking, and ability grouping within the public school system do not reflect the diversity of students that make up public school classrooms (Dudley-Marling & Burns, 2014). Current classroom designs, interpretation of the law relating to the inclusion of students with disabilities, and resistance to change have also provided a challenge to school districts when implementing IDEA and ensuring accountability targets are being met (Skrtic & Knackstedt, 2018; Thurlow et al., 2018).

Special Education Administrator

Like the history of special education in the United States, the history of the special education administrator is also new. For many years, the education of students with disabilities was delegated by principals to separate facilities, challenging special education administrators and instructors to find a way to provide services to students with disabilities (Pazey & Yates, 2018). The Civil Rights movement, subsequent legislation, and the increase in federal funding and policies for students with disabilities, however, brought about the need for a more informed type of leadership with a unique set of skills, abilities, and experience.

Until the passage of PL 94-142 in 1975, the role of the special education administrator was one focused on the diagnosis, identification, and creation of programs that would serve students with disabilities (Pazey & Yates, 2018). With the passage of PL 94-142, that role changed, calling for a more collaborative type of leadership focused on compliance with the law, delivery of equitable, high-quality instruction, and collaboration across district departments to improve instruction and demonstrate program quality and effectiveness (Bettini et al., 2017; Crockett, 2019; Hussey et al., 2019; Pazey & Yates, 2018; Valesky & Hirth, 1992). As a result, the special education administrator was called

upon to have a unique set of knowledge and skills to create systems that improved the teaching and learning of all students (Bettini et al., 2017; Luckner & Movahedazarhouligh, 2019).

Director of Special Education

The highest special education administrator in today's K-12 public school system is often called the director of special education (Fan et al., 2019). The job of the director of special education is multifaceted, complex, and continually changing (Hussey et al., 2019; Luckner & Movahedazarhouligh, 2019). Directors of special education are responsible for a myriad of tasks including leading, supervising, and managing the delivery of special education and its related services to students with disabilities (Tudryn et al., 2016). Therefore, directors of special education must have thorough knowledge of special education law and the ability to implement programs for students with disabilities in a manner consistent with those laws (Yell et al., 2018). Furthermore, directors of special education must work closely with a variety of stakeholders, each with his or her own unique goals and intentions related to the education of students with disabilities (Burello & Zadnik, 1986).

Roles and Responsibilities

The roles and responsibilities of the director of special education have grown in recent years because of increased expectations from the educational system, changing demographics across the country, and shifting requirements of IDEA (Luckner & Movahedazarhouligh, 2019). As a result, the director of special education must hold a unique set of skills and have experience in special education.

Among many of the roles and responsibilities, the director of special education supports school-based special education personnel to ensure the effective implementation of services to students with disabilities using evidence-based practices (Fan et al., 2019; Isaac et al., 2016). Additionally, the director of special education works collaboratively with other educational administrators, such as superintendents, other departmental directors, and school-site principals, to improve instructional outcomes for all students (Hussey et al., 2019). Directors of special education must also make critical decisions about the hiring and retention of special education personnel (Luckner & Movahedazarhouli, 2019). Finally, directors of special education must work closely with educators, families, and community members regarding the academic and social achievement of every student with a disability within their organization.

Challenges

Today, significant changes in the diverse makeup of students receiving special education services have put additional pressure on directors of special education to find creative ways to address the academic achievement of cultural and linguistic minorities (Pazey & Yates, 2018). Consequently, the responsibilities of today's directors of special education have broadened even further to include a deeper understanding of a variety of complimentary educational disciplines and a more enhanced partnership with general education to provide intervention and instruction to a larger number of struggling learners.

Today's directors of special education also face many challenges including decreased funding and resources; shortage of qualified personnel; increased emphasis on student accountability and data-driven decision making; use of inclusive practices;

mounting legal issues and costs; evaluation of special education personnel; implementation of professional development; and collaboration with parents, families and community stakeholders (Isaac et al., 2016; Luckner & Movahedazarhouligh, 2019; Zaretsky et al., 2008). Each of these challenges requires directors of special education to juggle a variety of competing demands that become time-consuming and add to an already emotion-laden field (Luckner & Movahedazarhouligh, 2019). These challenges are further magnified when directors of special education feel ill prepared for special education leadership. Additionally, many of today's reform movements are silent on the expectation of special education leadership when it comes to interpreting and implementing reform efforts for students with disabilities. Thus, when schools do not meet high expectations, special education and special education leadership are often the first to be scrutinized (Boscardian & Lashley, 2018).

Leadership

The concept of leadership dates back thousands of years and can be found in the works of Plato, Caesar, and Plutarch (Marzano et al., 2005). Leadership can be found in all cultures and among all people. Great leadership can shape an organization; therefore, the development of great leaders has received substantial attention for many years (Landis et al., 2014). Effective leadership is crucial to the success of any organization (Day & Antonakis, 2018; Landis et al., 2014; Valldeneu et al., 2021). The theory of leadership, however, is complex and diverse and is one of the most researched and yet least understood phenomena (Amanchukwu et al., 2015; Day & Antonakis, 2018; Stein, 2016; Valldeneu et al., 2021). To date, there is no one leadership theory or style that can

be considered universal, and research on leadership theory continues to grow and evolve (Amanchukwu et al., 2015; Day & Antonakis, 2018; Kovach, 2018; Landis et al., 2014).

There are many different views of leadership that distinguish effective leaders from noneffective leaders (Amanchukwu et al., 2015). Given the complexity of leadership, however, there is still no widely accepted definition of leadership (Day & Antonakis, 2018). Despite the lack of an agreed upon definition, researchers have agreed that leadership can be broadly defined as a process that involves influencing and motivating others toward the realization of common goals (Amanchukwu et al., 2015; Day & Antonakis, 2018; Southwick et al., 2019; Valldeneu et al., 2021; Yukl, 2012). Hence, a leader is responsible for the coordinated functioning of an organization by using available resources to inspire and motivate others to succeed (Amanchukwu et al., 2015; Day & Antonakis, 2018; Hersey et al., 1979; Stein, 2016).

Leadership is also rooted in context because it is the context that affects the type of leadership used and determines whether that leadership will be effective (Connolly et al., 2017; Day & Antonakis, 2018; Leithwood et al., 2019). Therefore, effective leaders must monitor both internal and external environments, develop strategies based on the organization's strengths and weaknesses, and monitor outcomes to ensure the organization's goals are being met (Day & Antonakis, 2018).

Furthermore, today's world brings with it problems that do not prescribe to one leadership theory (Heifetz & Linsky, 2017; Fullan, 2020a). Therefore, organizations must change and develop, and so must leadership (Van Wart, 2013). Consequently, great leaders are consistently searching for the most effective method by which to improve their organization's outcomes and achieve their goals (Valldeneu et al., 2021). According

to Fullan (2020b), change within organizations presents leaders with more opportunities to fail and succeed. Therefore, leadership itself must also change, becoming more adaptive, requiring leaders to develop the skills necessary to lead in unpredictable situations with no one prescribed solution (Fullan, 2020b; Heifetz & Linsky, 2017). When organizations experience change, it is critical that leaders are prepared to meet the challenge, thus making today's leadership more ambiguous and difficult (Brazer et al., 2014; Landis et al. 2014).

Leadership in K-12 Public Education

The concept of leadership in schools is no different than the concept of leadership found in many other institutions (Marzano et al., 2005). Research on leadership in public education has indicated that effective leadership contributes to high-quality learning and better student outcomes (Grissom & Loeb, 2011; Leithwood et al., 2019; Marzano et al., 2005; Pont, 2020). Aspects of effective schools, such as a clear mission and vision, positive climate, the attitudes of teachers, effective instructional practices, and the organization of the curriculum, are linked to effective leadership practices (Marzano et al., 2005). According to Stein (2016), research has not found “a single case of a school improving its student achievement record in the absence of talented leadership” (p. 21).

Over the last 20 years, school leadership has shifted from an administrative and bureaucratic role to one that is more interactive and focused on accountability and results (Pont, 2020). Therefore, school leaders must move beyond management principles and develop a firm understanding of what leadership style works best under which circumstances (Stein, 2016). Today's school leaders often engage in multiple tasks to fulfill an increasing expectation of school and student achievement (Daniëls et al., 2019).

As a result, effective school leaders must bring people together by providing opportunities for collective participation and shared decision making with hands-on leadership (Stein, 2016). Consequently, many theories of leadership have served to guide the actions of effective school leaders. However, the increased expectations for student and school achievement have resulted in a closer examination of the usefulness of classical leadership theories and a deeper exploration of theories that support a more collegial and collaborative approach to leadership in schools. Rather than viewing school leadership through a narrow perspective of a single lens, more attention is being paid to leadership theories pertinent to successful educational leadership such as instructional, situational, distributed, and transformational leadership practices (Daniëls et al., 2019).

Instructional Leadership

The idea of instructional leadership dates back more than 30 years ago when researchers began investigating what made schools effective (Hallinger, 2010; Sebastian et al., 2018). During this time, instructional leaders were seen as culture builders who were goal oriented with a focus on improving instructional outcomes for students (Hallinger, 2010). As such, these school leaders worked directly with teachers to improve instruction and learning.

There are several definitions of instructional leadership in the research. In its most basic form, instructional leadership emphasizes the leader's role in facilitating teaching and learning and is viewed as a collective activity (Billingsley et al., 2018; Grissom & Loeb, 2011). The most common model proposes three functions of instructional leadership: defining the school's mission, managing the instructional program, and

promoting a positive school learning climate (Hallinger, 2010; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Marzano et al., 2005).

Although instructional leadership in general education has been studied, little research has been conducted in the realm of special education. Consequently, knowledge about how instructional leadership can be used to support teachers working with students with disabilities is beginning to emerge (Billingsley et al., 2018). What is known is that today, students with disabilities are expected to have the same opportunities as their peers to meet state standards while being provided instruction in inclusive settings.

Consequently, all educational leaders must find ways to ensure general and special education teachers continue to grow their instructional knowledge, develop a curriculum that meets the learning goals of all students, and receive ongoing constructive feedback about instructional practices (Billingsley et al., 2018). To ensure this is possible, school leaders at all levels must work in concert with one another to set achievable goals and provide the support, resources, structures, and leadership necessary for all students to succeed (Billingsley et al., 2018). When instructional leadership is implemented collectively, research has shown it has a stronger impact on student achievement. As a result, when school-site and district leaders work together to shape the direction of a school or district, relationships are formed which, in turn, strengthen instruction and improve student achievement.

Situational Leadership

The concept of situational leadership was developed by Hersey and Blanchard in 1969 (Marzano et al., 2005). The basic principle behind situational leadership is that successful leaders adapt their behavior to meet the needs of each situation

(Schermerhorn, 1997). Situational leadership is either task or people oriented and, as such, is a behavioral approach to leadership which focuses on the work product or outcome (McClesky, 2014). Situational leadership is based on the interplay among three variables: (a) the amount of direction provided by the leader, (b) the amount of social-emotional support provided by the leader, and (c) the maturity level of the follower regarding specific tasks (Schermerhorn, 1997).

Depending on each unique situation and the maturity of the followers, a leader chooses the best course of action for each circumstance (Amanchukwu et al., 2015). As a result, a leader may choose different styles of leadership for different types of decision-making processes (Amanchukwu et al., 2015; Marzano et al., 2005). The goal for the leader is to provide the appropriate amount of support while helping followers mature and assume more of the leadership role (Ireh & Bailey 1999; Hersey et al., 1979). A literature review conducted by Sari et al. (2022) found that the use of situational leadership in educational settings is positively correlated to teacher performance, commitment to the organization, and motivation, once again raising attention to the importance of school context and leadership effectiveness (Daniëls et al., 2019).

Distributed Leadership

Distributed leadership was introduced by Peter Gronn in the early 2000s as a way of describing leadership from a systemic perspective whereby leadership is viewed as a collective process involving the interactions among individuals (Bolden, 2011).

Distributed leadership is a move away from traditional leadership theories that promote the use of attributes and behaviors. Distributed leadership involves collaboration, knowledge sharing, and the development of relationships each of which promote the idea

that many individuals within the organization will have the opportunity to exercise leadership, both formally and informally (A. Harris, 2008; Tudryn et al., 2016). In other words, leadership is a dynamic process and one that is shared among all members of the organization (A. Harris, 2008). As a process, distributed leadership is thought to emerge within organizations as a means of decision making and problem solving.

Today, schools are pressured to produce results, and Hammershaib (2018) suggested that leadership from a single perspective is no longer effective. Rather, collaborative leadership that engages all stakeholders is needed to adapt to and produce sustainable change within the educational setting. Therefore, the use of distributed leadership in schools is intended to support a variety of leaders and followers to meet the needs of the organization (Tudryn et al., 2016). When school leaders use the principles of distributed leadership, employees lead from a place of passion and experience and show greater investment, resulting in a stronger work community, increased work satisfaction, and increased self-efficacy (Hammershaib, 2018).

Within the field of special education, the use of distributed leadership is gaining interest as an area of research because it allows for more group problem solving that results in effective decision making (Tudryn et al., 2016). Given the multifaceted responsibilities of special education leaders, distributed leadership has been useful in the implementation of inclusive practices. Distributed leadership also offers a framework from which to examine how special education administrators can create educational environments that produce positive outcomes while also promoting a collaborative culture that values all learners.

Transformational Leadership

In an era of high-stakes accountability, schools are undergoing tremendous change. Fullan (2019) argued that the world is becoming more complex and demanding, requiring schools and organizations to develop programs that are relevant, connected, and individualized. In a time of change, transformational leadership helps organizations and leaders make sense of what is needed and create a framework for action through a shift in the organization's culture, behavior, and mindset (L. A. Anderson & Anderson, 2010; Shadraconis, 2013).

In education, leaders who engage in transformational leadership prepare followers to learn new skills, establish a new way of thinking about change, break free from the existing culture, and develop new norms that transform the organization (M. Anderson, 2017). Transformational leadership requires conscious thinking on the part of the leader, viewing the organization as multidimensional, interconnected, and always changing (L. A. Anderson & Anderson, 2010). Transformational leadership requires a collaborative relationship between teachers, administrators, and the wider school community (M. Anderson, 2017). School leaders who use transformational leadership work with employees to identify needed change and create a vision and inspiration to execute the change through "individual consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, and idealized influence" (Marzano et al., 2005, p. 14). Transformational leaders delegate challenging work to followers, increase responsibility to help followers develop their leadership capacity, encourage followers to take risks, support creativity, and serve as a role model (Burns, 1985; Kirby et al., 1992).

M. Anderson (2017) suggested that transformational leadership may be the most appropriate leadership theory for schools today. Marzano et al. (2005) concurred, stating transformational leadership is favored in education as it has been shown to produce credible results. Within the field of special education, transformational leadership has been positively correlated with successful implementation of inclusive programs (Murphy, 2018). Through positivity, passion, and enthusiasm, leaders who use a transformational leadership model can motivate followers, ultimately leading to better performance and effective results (Murphy, 2018; Oronato, 2013).

Theoretical Foundation

The concept of grit has been around for many years; however, it has recently reemerged in the literature among educational researchers because of its role as a predictor of positive outcomes in a variety of arenas (Credé, 2018; Ris, 2015; Salisu et al., 2019). Made popular by Duckworth et al. (2007), the research on grit was propelled by a question posed in 1907 by William James, a psychologist and philosopher. William James wondered why some individuals realize the full limits of their potential, but others make use of only a small part of their resources (Duckworth et al., 2007). It was this unanswered question that led Duckworth et al. to investigate how individuals of equal intelligence differ in their pursuit of goals. Through interviews with high achievers in a variety of fields, Duckworth et al. explored the common traits successful individuals shared including charisma, creativity, self-confidence, and emotional stability. It was hypothesized that some traits were more important for some vocations, but others were essential no matter a person's career. One trait, however, found to be shared by the most successful individuals was grit.

Based on the seminal works of Galton and Cox, Duckworth et al. (2007) defined grit as “perseverance and passion for long-term goals” (p. 1087). Made up of two noncognitive traits, passion and perseverance, grit encompasses the ability to maintain interest in a goal over a long period of time despite the presence of setbacks, adversity, or plateaus in progress (Duckworth et al., 2007; Schimschal & Lomas, 2018). Both variables, passion, and perseverance, are essential to success because perseverance helps individuals achieve a goal and passion helps individuals achieve mastery (Christopoulou et al., 2018).

In the literature, grit has been hailed as a predictor of success above and beyond cognitive functioning in arenas such as education, the military, and the workplace (Duckworth, 2016; Muenks et al., 2016; Southwick et al., 2019). Eskreis-Winkler et al. (2014) found that grit predicted persistence across a variety of life events such as marriage, military, workplace, and school commitments. Additionally, Kelly et al. (2014) conducted research on West Point cadets and found that grit, coupled with hardiness, was a predictor of success in the military. Finally, grit was found to improve the retention of novice teachers and contribute to engagement and goal achievement in students (Robertson-Kraft & Duckworth, 2014; Tang et al., 2019).

Growing Grit

Since 2007, research on the construct of grit has grown tremendously with studies confirming its validity and adding to the list of ways in which grit contributes to the achievement of individuals. In 2016, Duckworth wrote a book titled *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance*, based on research about what drives success. In the book, Duckworth shared that grit is not a fixed construct, but rather, individuals can grow grit

over time. By looking at examples of people who embody grit, Duckworth noted four traits each gritty person had in common: interest, practice, purpose, and hope.

Interest

Interest is the beginning of passion (Duckworth, 2016). Passion, defined in the literature, is a strong feeling toward a preference or activity that is important leading to a consistent desire to engage or interact with the preference or activity to achieve a long-term goal (Jachimowicz et al., 2018; Salisu et al., 2019). Christopoulou et al. (2018) suggested consistency of interest in a goal is associated with meaning, and it is this meaning that becomes passion. Duckworth (2016) noted that passion starts from within when individuals enjoy what they do. When employees expressed passion for their work and engaged in a job that fit their personal interests, their job became more than just a job and their performance improved (Duckworth, 2016; Jachimowicz et al., 2018). Finally, interest has been found to develop when individuals feel supported by those around them and receive positive feedback (Duckworth, 2016).

Practice

Interest, Duckworth (2016) stated, leads to practice. Once an individual has developed an interest in an activity, mastery only occurs with ongoing and deliberate practice. Individuals who engage in deliberate practice seek to improve their skill set. Some researchers have connected deliberate practice with the personality trait of mindset. Specifically, research has shown that mindset affects individuals' view of their abilities therefore affecting their responses to learning and achievement (Liu, 2021). Furthermore, research on mindset and success found that individuals who embody a growth mindset view abilities as something that can be improved upon and obstacles as opportunities for

growth (Buchanan & Kern, 2017; Dweck, 2016; McClendon et al., 2017). Finally, growth-minded leaders who were found to focus more on continual learning increased confidence in their leadership capacity (Dweck, 2016). Duckworth (2016) noted that individuals who are gritty seek to improve their skills through practice no matter how excellent their skills already are.

Purpose

Purpose is the trait that grows passion and is the belief that one's work matters to more than just oneself (Duckworth, 2016). According to Hill et al. (2014), having a purpose drives interest and commitment toward long-term goals. For some, purpose develops early, but for others purpose may not develop until later in life (Duckworth, 2016). Hill et al. (2014) stated that adults who have purpose have been found to be more conscientious and hardworking. Kempster et al. (2011) suggested purpose is inextricably linked to leadership because leadership is "more than a person; it is a sense of purpose, a force that gives people a common direction" (p. 323). When individuals have a purpose, the desire to help others increases (Duckworth, 2016).

Hope

The final trait found among gritty individuals is hope. Hope can be viewed as an extension of perseverance, and Duckworth (2016) stated that hope is a trait that defines each stage of grit. Hope is a belief that one's efforts can create a better future (Dixson, 2020; Duckworth, 2016). Gritty individuals live life with optimism, believing they can attain goals, continually rising in the face of adversity while experiencing growth (Duckworth, 2016; Ledesma, 2014). Helland and Winston (2005) stated that hope is a dynamic cognitive process, and it plays an important role in leadership, particularly in

times of change. Leadership is about creating relationships, engaging in ongoing communication, setting goals, and directing the actions to meet those goals. According to Helland and Winston, each of these components of leadership match the components of hope, and thus, hope lives within leadership.

Grit and Leadership

Leadership in any field comes with a myriad of responsibilities. In today's changing world, those responsibilities are becoming increasingly complex and difficult (Seguin, 2019). Although grit, and its role in leadership success, has not yet been thoroughly studied, there is evidence in the literature to suspect its importance. Caza and Posner (2018) surveyed 3,702 leaders from a wide range of fields and found that grit propelled leaders to engage in a range of behaviors that led to exceptional leadership. Schimschal and Lomas (2018) also investigated the role grit plays in leadership success, surveying 100 leaders in education and manufacturing to explore the connection between a leader's level of grit and capacity for positive leadership. Results showed that positive leadership capacity was strongly related to a leader's level of grit, suggesting leadership programs focus on developing gritty leaders. Grit was also found to be a predictor of workplace outcomes, specifically, employee retention, work engagement, and job performance when specific organizational structures (e.g., strong leadership, opportunities for advancement, and employee autonomy) were in place (Southwick et al., 2019). Additionally, Eskreis-Winkler et al. (2014) found that among 677 participants studied, grittier individuals showed higher levels of persistence across a range of life contexts, including the workplace. Finally, Seguin (2019) conducted a study looking at the relationship between grit and nurse leaders and found that grit increases with

longevity in leadership positions, ultimately leading to an increased sense of personal accomplishment and decreased job burnout.

Taken together, studies on the relationship between grit and leadership have indicated grit plays an important role in leadership success. One of the most important challenges facing leaders today, however, is how to motivate followers to exhibit the characteristics of passion and perseverance for the long-term goals of the organization (Southwick et al., 2019). Therefore, a leader's ability to maintain a forward-looking perspective while developing personal relationships suggests that the embodiment of grit is important for success in leadership (Caza & Posner, 2018).

Theoretical Framework

The theory of grit has been explored by many scholars and researchers since its introduction in the literature. Since that time, researchers have investigated the relationship between grit and traits such as hardiness, motivation for long-term goals, success in variety of life commitments, well-being, and leadership (Caza & Posner, 2018; Eskreis-Winkler et al., 2014; Kelly et al., 2014; Schimschal & Lomas, 2018; Seguin, 2019; Southwick et al., 2019; Von Culin et al., 2014). Therefore, the theory of grit served as the theoretical framework for this study. Perlis (2013) noted that although Duckworth et al. (2007) defined grit as passion and perseverance for long-term goals, grit encompasses a number of different anomalies that suggest it is more about an individual's attitude than achieving a long-held goal. The five principles of grit that stand out in the literature include courage, conscientiousness, long-term goals, resilience, and excellence versus perfection. Perlis (2013) suggested that individuals' level of grit depends largely on their expression of each of these principles and the extent to which

individuals can access and use the five principles to achieve extraordinary results in their organizations.

Courage

In the book *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance*, Duckworth (2016) compared courage to the Finnish word *sisu*. To have a *sisu* spirit means to get up repeatedly when knocked down, an inner strength, tenacity, bravado. The word courage stems from the Latin word for heart (G. Lee & Elliott-Lee, 2016). The importance of courage during times of adversity has been celebrated throughout history and in the works of philosophers such as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, authors such as Hemmingway, and in religious writings (Howard & Cogswell, 2018; Schilpzand et al., 2015; Rate et al., 2007). The action of courage is often deemed as admirable, a trait most admired in others, and “integrity at its highest” (G. Lee & Elliott-Lee, 2016, p. 35). Courage calls for individuals to show up in the face of fear and to persevere (Arias, 2017; G. Lee & Elliott-Lee, 2016).

Courage, temperance, justice, and wisdom serve as ethical principles and guideposts to help individuals make the right choice (H. Harris, 1999; White et al., 2016). The virtue of courage appears in many books, articles, and respected journals. Topics of courage range from courage in history, leadership, and management to courage in medicine, sports, and psychology. Cognition has also been connected to courageous actions, and there is agreement among philosophers that courage is often “thoughtful and well-reasoned” (Schilpzand et al., 2014, p. 72). Courageous individuals survive great hardships in the face of adversity and rise victorious in their endeavors (Arias, 2017). Rather than giving up, courageous individuals pull from resources within themselves and

find the strength to push forward and succeed. Research has hypothesized that the foundation of courage is the belief that one does or does not have the ability to do what is morally right (Palanski et al., 2014).

Although the virtues of courage have been studied extensively, and while courage has been cited as being a critical aspect of leadership, research examining the relationship between courage and effective leadership is just beginning. Studies on the character traits of effective leaders suggest both integrity and courage are the two most virtuous predictors of performance because leaders who exhibit courage benefit not only themselves but the whole organization as well (Palanski et al., 2014). Furthermore, studies on leaders who show courage in the face of adversity have found that courageous leaders are more capable of achieving long-term success both individually and for their organizations.

Courageous individuals are not afraid of failure but rather view failure as part of the process of improvement (Perlis, 2013). G. Lee and Elliott-Lee (2016) outlined three types of power that leaders use to motivate followers: authority, reward, and courage. According to G. Lee & Elliott-Lee, courageous leaders ethically inspire followers to do what is right by accessing power and rewards appropriately to model high core values while expecting the same from others. The findings of G. Lee and Elliott-Lee support the findings of a study conducted by Palanski et al. (2014) wherein courage was found to drive the performance of leaders to model the expected behaviors of the organization in the face of challenges. Finally, the results of three exploratory studies conducted by Howard and Cogswell (2018) investigating five categories of courage antecedents (grit,

social support, humane orientation, and gender) revealed that certain organizational factors such as leadership style influence courage in the workplace.

Conscientiousness

The big five model provides a framework to explain the core traits of human personalities that predict success (Duckworth et al., 2007; Perlis, 2013). Of the five traits in the big five model, conscientiousness has been found to be the most closely associated with grit (Duckworth et al., 2007; Perlis, 2013; Schmidt et al., 2018). Conscientious individuals have been found to be hardworking, dependable, organized, responsible, industrious, and achievement oriented (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Roberts et al., 2012).

Historically, the construct associated with conscientiousness within the field of psychology dates back to Freud and his research on the superego, ego, and conscience (Roberts et al., 2012). Conscientiousness has been found to be partly heritable, and linkages between conscientiousness and brain networks are believed to be responsible for the prioritization of goals (Wilmot & Ones, 2019). Conscientious people are better able to plan future actions and persevere for long periods of time (Samfira & Paloş, 2021). Conscientiousness also includes a social and organizational component that has been found to regulate impulses and discipline for achievement in the workplace (Wilmot & Ones, 2019). Of the five traits that comprise the big five model, conscientiousness has been consistently found to be the one most associated with positive outcomes (Trautwein et al., 2009).

Research on grit has shown that conscientiousness is more closely related to the facet of perseverance as opposed to the facet of passion or consistency of interest (Duckworth et al., 2007; Ponnock et al., 2020; Schmidt et al., 2018; Southwick et al.,

2019). Barrick and Mount (1991) found that individuals who exhibited the traits of purpose, obligation, and persistence performed better than those who did not.

Conscientiousness was also found to be a better predictor of job satisfaction, high occupational attainment, and career success, lower mortality rate, and lower divorce rates (Trautwein et al., 2009).

Conscientious individuals show a higher propensity to engage in deliberate practice over a long period of time as a means of mastering a skill (Arias, 2017; Duckworth, 2007). Furthermore, Duckworth et al. (2007) indicated conscientiousness is more nuanced than originally thought, particularly when it comes to dependability versus achievement. In a study conducted by Hugh (1992), achievement was found to be the best overall predictor of all life outcomes and success. Individuals who set long-term goals that are neither too easy nor too hard are more conscientious than individuals who exhibit only higher levels of self-control (Duckworth et al., 2007). Thus, goal-focused leadership may trigger conscientiousness in employees, resulting in a higher level of job performance (Colbert & Witt, 2009). Conscientiousness has also been positively linked to ethical leadership behavior and leadership inspiration (Babalola et al., 2017). When leaders engage in ethical behavior, they model the principle of courage and inspire followers to also act ethically and courageously (G. Lee & Elliot-Lee, 2016).

Long-Term Goals

Long-term goals are representations of future states and provide the context that drives passion and meaning, guiding the behavior of individuals (Duckworth, 2016; Perlis, 2013; Southwick et al., 2019). Grit, Duckworth (2016) shared, is about holding the same long-term goal for an extended period of time despite setbacks and in the absence

of feedback. Successful individuals set audacious goals and return to them time and again, maintaining the willpower to keep going regardless of the challenges that may exist (Georgoulas-Sherry & Kelly, 2019; Southwick et al., 2019). Duckworth et al. (2007) noted that gritty individuals endure and keep going on the path to achievement, always seeking opportunities to learn and improve.

Essential to the ability to keep pursuing long-term goals in the face of setbacks or challenges is hardiness. Hardiness includes the dimensions of challenge, commitment, and control, all of which act as personal resources for individuals in the face of difficult situations (Arias, 2017; Georgoulas-Sherry & Kelly, 2019; Mazzetti et al., 2019). Hardiness is believed to develop early in life, remain relatively stable over time, and has been viewed as an offshoot of courage (Kelly et al., 2014). Hardy individuals can adapt to stress by adopting a mindset that allows them to remain courageous and steadfast, turning a difficult situation into a learning experience (Georgoulas-Sherry & Kelly, 2019; Mazzetti et al., 2019).

Research on long-term goals has indicated most goals can be viewed as part of hierarchical structure, with the higher order, long-term goal being the why and the lower order, short-term goals being the how (Southwick et al., 2019). Individuals who pursue goals receive two benefits: immediate or intrinsic reward while pursuing short term goals, and delayed or extrinsic reward as a result of achieving a long-term goal (Woolley & Fishbach, 2016). Therefore, self-control plays a critical role in the pursuit of long-term goals because self-control serves as a motivating factor in the pursuit of activities required to reach the end state (Duckworth & Kern, 2011; Woolley & Fishbach, 2016). Research has found that increasing attention on immediate rewards of achieving short

term goals increases the persistence for long-term goal pursuit (Woolley & Fishbach, 2016).

Intensity, duration, and direction of deliberate, ongoing practice are also critical to the achievement of long-term goals (Duckworth, 2016; Duckworth et al., 2007; Perlis, 2013). Gladwell (2008) indicated individuals require 10,000 hr of deliberate practice to achieve mastery of a goal, which in turn drives high performance (Schimschal & Lomas 2018). Deliberate practice, Duckworth and Gross (2014) noted, predicts skill improvement, which leads to higher levels of achievement. Gladwell's (2008) 10,000-hr rule, therefore, aligns with Duckworth's findings that deliberate practice sets apart experts from those less proficient (Duckworth et al., 2007; Perlis, 2013). Southwick et al. (2019) suggested that individuals who can sustain interest and passion for a long-term goal for years do so because the goal is a calling, a part of their identity, and taps into "their deepest interests and values" (p. 5).

Furthermore, research has suggested that self-concept is related to grit and plays a role in goal pursuit. An individual's self-knowledge and ability to remain organized enhances goal prioritization and long-term goal pursuit (Wong & Vallacher, 2018). When individuals pursue goals that are relevant to themselves, those goals become integrated with the individuals' identity and thus are more meaningful. As a result, individuals with a high self-concept are better able to persevere through setbacks and adversity to achieve long-term goals because progress toward mastery enhances self-confidence.

The ability to set high-level goals has been shown to be a feature of gritty individuals. Gritty leaders are believed to elicit perseverance for long-term goals not only within themselves but within their organization as well, often serving as role models for

sustained passion and perseverance (Southwick et al., 2019). Therefore, when leaders set high goals that are both meaningful and obtainable for their organizations, followers are better able to persevere for longer periods of time to achieve success (Schimschal & Lomas, 2018). Additionally, Caza and Posner (2018) found that leaders with higher levels of grit were more likely to model the way for followers, leading by example and supporting followers to take risks, resulting in exceptional outcomes.

Resilience

The concept of resilience has been studied in varied contexts, and many definitions of resilience exist in the literature (Georgoulas-Sherry & Kelly, 2019). Resilience is considered a noncognitive trait and is associated with success and wellbeing. Resilience has been shown to protect individuals from adversity and assist them in maintaining equilibrium during challenging times (Georgoulas-Sherry & Kelly, 2019; Rice & Liu, 2016). Grafton et al. (2010) noted that resilience is about an individual's response to stress that ultimately affects a person's wellbeing because prolonged stress can have a negative impact on physical and mental health.

According to Duckworth (2016), resiliency is about getting up and moving forward with a sense of purpose and direction despite failure or adversity. Mindset and optimistic self-talk, Duckworth noted, are essential to changing the way in which individuals think, feel, and act. Individuals with a growth mindset see challenges as learning opportunities that ultimately lead to perseverance through difficult times. Additionally, research has found that children who engaged in resilience training were found to have lower levels of pessimism and depression in future years (Duckworth, 2016). These findings support research that has shown when individuals demonstrate

higher levels of optimism, hope, and a belief in their ability to attain their goals, they experience growth in response to stress (Ledesma, 2014).

The emotional and mental health of individuals in the workplace is important. When confronted with adversity, individuals respond by either surviving the adversity, recovering from the adversity, or thriving because of living through the adversity (Ledesma, 2014). According to Ledesma (2014), individuals who survive adversity may continue to live and function in an impaired state, those who recover often return to their previous state of functioning, and those who thrive because of enduring adversity change the way in which they respond to challenges.

Related to thriving is the concept of hardiness. Resilience is believed to be a combination of hardiness, optimism, adaptability, self-efficacy, and grit (Grafton et al., 2010; Perlis, 2013). Hardiness is an inner source of strength used by individuals to buffer the exposure to difficult situations and minimize levels of stress (Ledesma, 2014; Samfira & Paloş, 2021). Hardy individuals can assess stressful situations and trust their ability to respond accordingly through the use of coping mechanisms and providing themselves with a sense of control (Ledesma, 2014; Samfira & Paloş, 2021). Teachers with high levels of self-efficacy have been found to be confident in their ability to use coping strategies to respond to stress (Samfira & Paloş, 2021). Research on executives experiencing stressful situations showed hardiness as a predictor of a leader's ability to persevere through adversity (Ledesma, 2014; Perlis, 2013).

Mindfulness has also been found to play a role in resilience. Within sports medicine and organizational effectiveness, mindfulness has been used to help decrease pain, increase life satisfaction, decrease depression and anxiety, and lower workplace

stress (Ihme & Sundstrom, 2021). Leaders who use mindfulness techniques have been found to exhibit greater levels of self-control, flexibility, and improved decision making and are deemed to be more effective leaders by their followers. Over time, the use of mindfulness techniques has been shown to improve resilience, providing a protective barrier against prolonged stress.

Finally, leaders spend a great deal of time at work, and their engagement is positively related to job satisfaction and mental and physical health (Wang et al., 2017). Healthy and resilient leaders are more effective and positively influence the work environment (Ihme & Sundstrom, 2020). Workers who are positively engaged have been found to be better able to cope with challenges within the workplace such as conflict, failure, change, and increased responsibility (Wang et al., 2017). Continual exposure to adversity in the workplace, however, can debilitate leaders (Ledesma, 2014). Therefore, adaptability is critical to a leader's success, not only personally but also for the organization. Rice and Liu (2016) stated that resilient individuals are thought to be more adaptive within an ever-changing work environment, and this ability to adapt may be a contributor to more resilient organizations.

Excellence Versus Perfection

Many individuals strive to be hard working to achieve excellence, but others strive to achieve flawlessness by aiming for perfection (Gaudreau et al., 2022). Despite excellence and perfection representing two different constructs, to date, researchers have yet to formally establish a difference between the two. Excellence can be described using words such as very competent, high-quality, and skillful, and are the foundation for the pursuit of excellence, or "excellencism." Perfection, on the other hand, can be described

using words such as extreme, exaggerated, flawless, faultless, demanding, and ideal. As with excellencism, these words set the foundation for the pursuit of perfection also known as perfectionism.

According to Perlis (2013), individuals high in grit do not seek perfection because striving to be perfect is often inflexible and unforgiving. Perfectionism has been found to predispose individuals to a host of physical, psychological, and achievement problems such as anxiety, depression, suicide, substance abuse, and low self-esteem (Gaudreau et al., 2022; Hewitt et al., 2022; Perlis, 2013). When leaders strive for perfection, vulnerability and the quest for improvement are often forgotten and replaced by an unrealistic standard of performance and disappointment when success is not achieved (Osenk et al., 2020; Perlis, 2013). Rather, individuals high in grit tend to focus on improving weakness through the process of deliberate practice while embracing failure on the quest for excellence (Duckworth, 2016; Perlis, 2013).

According to Duckworth (2016), experts strive to improve weaknesses by seeking challenges and engaging in deliberate, ongoing practice with the aim of reaching their goal. Furthermore, Duckworth noted, individuals striving for excellence look for immediate feedback from those around them so they can fix what they have done wrong. Leaders in pursuit of excellence often have high standards and lead in ways that make improvement a habit for themselves and others (Kiral, 2020). Gaudreau et al. (2022) stated that the pursuit of excellence has been found to lead to improved measures of work performance and is associated with opportunities that bring about success, which in turn lead to more positive and healthy outcomes.

Summary

Special education in the United States is a relatively new concept and one that has faced many challenges and success over the years (Salend & Duhaney, 2015). Not until the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s did the door open for individuals with disabilities, granting them access to public education (Lengyel & Vanberguijk, 2021; Obiakor, 2011; Pazez & Yates, 2018). Since that time, several important court cases and critical legislation have sought to protect the rights of individuals with disabilities to receive a free and appropriate public education in the LRE (Ashbaker, 2011; Pazez & Yates, 2018).

Today, special education services to students with disabilities are offered in all public school systems in the United States. The delivery of special education services in the public-school setting, however, is not without its challenges, including where and how to provide such services in accordance with changing reform movements, decreased funding, increased disproportionality, and a call for a more collaborative style of leadership (Bettini et al., 2017; Boscardian & Lashley, 2018; Hussey et al., 2019; Pazez & Yates, 2018; Valesky & Hirth, 1992). As a result, the job of the special education director was formed to address the complex and continually changing nature of special education in public schools (Tudryn et al., 2016).

Effective leadership is critical to the success of any organization, and directors of special education are critical to the success of special education programs and the delivery of services to students with disabilities. Consequently, they engage in multiple tasks to fulfill an increasing expectation of student and school performance by bringing people together to engage in collective decision making (Dániels et al., 2019; Stein,

2016). Such leadership requires the ability to set long-term goals and motivate and encourage followers to meet them.

In 2007, Duckworth and colleagues brought the concept of grit to the forefront of research, investigating why some individuals succeed and others of comparable talent and intelligence do not. Gritty individuals, Duckworth (2016) noted, embody the traits of purpose, interest, practice, and hope, which serve to help an individual grow grit. Perlis (2013) suggested the concept of grit encompasses a number of different anomalies that suggest it is more about an individual's attitude than achieving a long-held goal. According to Perlis, gritty individuals embody the principles of courage, conscientiousness, long-term goals, resilience, and excellence versus perfection, and it is the interaction among these variables that determines an individual's ability to succeed.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Overview

Chapter III details the research methodology and procedures used in this study, which examines how exemplary directors of special education used the five principles associated with grit to achieve extraordinary results in their organization. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), methodology describes the research design, participants, and instruments used in the study to answer the research questions. A research design sets the direction for collecting, analyzing, and reporting the data of a study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Patton, 2015). This chapter begins with a review of the purpose statement, research questions, and research design. The chapter then provides an overview of the population, sample, instrumentation, sources of data and how they were collected, data analysis procedures, and limitations. This research is part of a thematic study. Throughout the study, the term peer researchers refers to the nine University of Massachusetts Global doctoral candidates who operated under the guidance of three faculty chairs collaborating on the design and implementation of this thematic study.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify and describe how exemplary directors of special education use five principles associated with grit (courage, conscientiousness, long-term goals, resilience, and excellence versus perfection) to accomplish extraordinary results in their organization.

Research Questions

1. How do exemplary directors of special education use courage to accomplish extraordinary results?
2. How do exemplary directors of special education use conscientiousness to accomplish extraordinary results?
3. How do exemplary directors of special education use long-term goals to accomplish extraordinary results?
4. How do exemplary directors of special education use resilience to accomplish extraordinary results?
5. How do exemplary directors of special education use excellence versus perfection to accomplish extraordinary results?

Research Design

Research designs are built around the questions asked and set the stage for how those questions are answered (Maxwell, 2013; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015). This study employed a qualitative research design. This research design was appropriate because it allowed me to ascribe meaning to the lived experiences of exemplary directors of special education and the principles of grit they use to achieve extraordinary results in their organizations. Qualitative research designs gather data on naturally occurring phenomena through the use of observations, interviews, field notes, and artifacts to gain a deeper understanding of the experience being studied (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patten & Newhart, 2018). Therefore, the data collected are in the form of words rather than numbers.

The qualitative research design used in this study encompassed a phenomenological model. Phenomenology is the study of how individuals make sense of a particular experience, including how they perceive and understand the experience (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Neubauer et al., 2019). According to Neubauer et al. (2019), the goal of phenomenology is to ascribe meaning to what individuals experience and how they experience it. Similarly, Patton (2015) indicated a phenomenological study “aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature of the meaning of our everyday experience” (p. 115). Phenomenology was chosen because I wanted to study individuals and the meaning they ascribe to shared experiences.

Results gathered from qualitative research are presented through words collected from in-depth interviews with individuals, field notes, and the collection of artifacts. Maxwell (2013) stated data gathered in qualitative research can include anything that is seen, heard, or otherwise communicated during the study. The intent of qualitative research is to make sense of the data collected by identifying common themes and concepts that explain the phenomena being studied. Additionally, qualitative research relies on the interpersonal skills of the researcher, the building of trusting relationships with participants, remaining nonjudgemental, and respecting the norms of the situation (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

Rationale for Methodology

The phenomena of the study included the five principles of grit (courage, long-term goals, conscientiousness, excellence versus perfection, resilience) outlined by Perlis (2013) to achieve extraordinary results in their organizations. I used the phenomenological approach to highlight the five principles and how directors of special

education use them to bring about success within their organizations. As described by Patton (2015), a phenomenological study strives to explore and describe how individuals experience a phenomenon, describe it, remember it, perceive it, judge it, and make sense of it.

The phenomenological approach allowed me to capture the lived experiences of a sample of exemplary directors of special education. Creswell and Creswell (2018) indicated a qualitative research design includes the collection of data from observation, interviews, documents, and visual materials. Therefore, the use of a phenomenological approach was the most suitable, allowing me to focus on understanding how the participants made sense of the five principles of grit.

Population

The population is a larger group of individuals meeting specific criteria and to whom the researcher intends to generalize the results (Casteel & Bridier, 2021; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). A population can be any size and can come from any geographic area. The population for this phenomenological study was exemplary directors of special education. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (n.d.), there are 98,507 operating school districts in the United States, each of which employs a director of special education.

Target Population

Patten and Newhart (2018) indicated that a population may be too large and thus impractical to study; therefore, it is necessary to identify a subset of the population accessible to the researcher. The target population is a subset of the population of interest from whom the researcher wishes to draw conclusions and learn more about. According

to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), the target population is the group of participants from whom the researcher collects data. The target population for this study is directors of special education in California. According to the CDE (2022), there are approximately 940 school districts in the state of California, each with a director of special education who oversees the special education department (see Table 1).

Table 1

Type and Number of California School Districts: 2021-2022

District type	Number of districts
Elementary	519
High school	66
High school with junior high program	10
Unified	345
Total	940

Sampling Frame

According to Casteel and Bridier (2021), the sampling frame is a representation of the target population and is a group of units, in this case individuals, who are invited to participate in the study. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) further defined the sampling frame as a subset of the population of the study, emphasizing that researchers need to “carefully and completely define both the target population and the sampling frame” (p. 129). McMillan and Schumacher stated that these elements are often referred to as delimiting variables.

This study’s sample frame included directors of special education in California school districts who have been employed in the position for at least 3 years and also met

three of the following criteria: (a) have been recognized by their peers; (b) have been recommended by one or more regional executive leaders; (c) hold membership in professional organizations in their field; and (d) have published articles, papers, or written materials on leadership, or have presented on leadership at local or state conferences. In 2021, there were 940 school districts in California. The total number of school districts is represented by 345 unified school districts, 519 elementary school districts, 66 high school districts, and 10 high school districts with a junior high school program (CDE, 2022). Therefore, the target population for this study was directors of special education from 940 school districts within California.

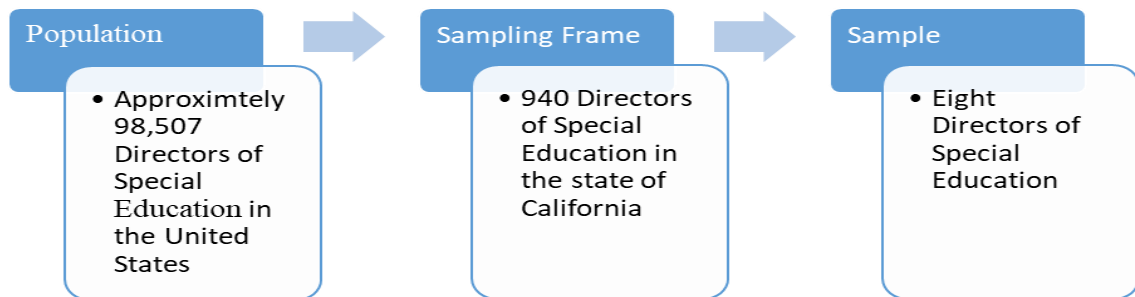
Sample

Populations are often too large to sample every person; therefore, it is more efficient to study a subset of the population of interest (Patten & Newhart, 2018). A sample is the subset of the population from whom the data are collected and the researcher wishes to generalize the results (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). According to Patten and Newhart (2018), when determining the sample of a study, researchers infer the characteristics of the sample are, most likely, the same characteristics of the population (see Figure 1). Qualitative research approaches typically require a smaller sample size and depend more on the richness of the information collected (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). According to Patton (2015), there are no rules on sample size in qualitative research. Rather, sample size depends on the purpose of the research and what the researcher wishes to learn. Patton stated, “In-depth information from a small number of people can be very valuable, especially if the cases are information rich” (p. 311). The

sample for this study included eight exemplary directors of special education within the state of California.

Figure 1

Population, Sampling Frame, and Sample



Sample Selection

Based on the sampling frame, I implemented criterion sampling for this study. According to Patton (2015), criterion sampling is chosen when a researcher wishes to study all cases that meet a specific criterion of importance. The criteria for the population of this study were individuals who:

1. Are directors of special education
2. Are located in California
3. Have at least 3 years in the current position
4. Meet at least three of the four criteria:
 - a. Recognition by peers
 - b. Recommended by one or more recognized regional executive leaders

- c. Have memberships in professional organizations in their field
- d. Have presented articles, papers, or published materials at conferences

In addition, purposive selection was used to select interview participants. I worked with my committee to identify candidates and secure their participation in the study.

Instrumentation

When conducting qualitative research, the researcher acts as the instrument.

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), qualitative research data are collected on a naturally occurring phenomenon. The results of the data are conveyed in narrative format as respondents provide answers in their own words and can provide insight into topics on which little is known, few theories exist, or the population is hard to reach (Patten & Newhart, 2018). In qualitative research, there are five major methods for gathering data: interview, observations, questionnaires, document reviews, and the use of audio-visual materials. Interviews in qualitative research may take several forms: informal conversational interviews, an interview guide approach, and the standardized open-ended interview (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

For this phenomenological study, semistructured interview questions were used to investigate how directors of special education use the five principles associated with grit (courage, long-term goals, conscientiousness, excellence versus perfection, and resilience) to achieve extraordinary results in their organizations. Patten and Newhart (2018) suggested interviews and observations are the most common form of data collection in qualitative research. Interviews are conducted to find out more about what cannot be directly observed and to help understand what has been observed as a means of entering another's perspective (Patton, 2015)

Interview Questions

According to Patton (2015), interview questions should be derived in a manner that does not indicate bias or lead a participant to deliver a specific response. Rather, the development of interview questions should be completed in a manner that allows the participants to answer the questions so the objective of the study can be reached (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

I collaborated with nine peer researchers and three faculty members to develop interview questions intended to answer the team's five research questions. Each member of the thematic team played a role in researching the five principles of grit. The interview questions developed were open-ended to allow the researcher to gather data on how exemplary leaders use the five principles of grit to achieve extraordinary results in their organizations. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), qualitative interviewing begins with asking open-ended questions followed by probing questions to elicit detail or further explanation or to clarify responses.

Ten questions were developed for this study. Each member of the thematic team interviewed eight participants within the members' chosen leadership field. The interview questions were designed to include two questions for each of the five principles of grit (see Table 2). For each question, an optional probe was developed to ensure the collection of sufficient data in regard to the five principles of grit. I used a synthesis matrix (see Appendix A) to organize and review the key variables of grit as found in the literature.

Table 2*Interview Question Alignment with Study Variables*

Variables	Interview questions
Courage (G. Lee & Elliot-Lee, 2006; Schilpzand et al., 2015)	Describe a situation in your organization that required courage in the face of danger or fear to achieve and extraordinary result. Leaders often have to choose which challenges to pursue. What causes you, as a leader, to take courageous actions, and what makes you decide not to take action?
Conscientiousness (Jackson et al., 2010; Perlis, 2013)	All of us are confronted by a variety of competing demands in our jobs. When faced with competing demands, how do you stay organized? There are times when we must make sure the job gets done. Please tell me how you stay self-disciplined to ensure you meet your deadlines.
Use of long-term goals (Duckworth et al., 2007; Jachimowicz et al., 2018)	How have you used long-term goal setting to achieve extraordinary results in your organization? Can you share an example of when you faced challenges while working toward a long-term goal?
Resilience (Grafton et al., 2010; Rice & Liu, 2016).	Can you share a story of a time when you had to overcome a stressful work situation; how were you able to return to a positive mental state of wellbeing? How do you continue to cultivate resiliency in your professional journey?
Excellence versus perfection (Arias, 2017; Duckworth et al., 2007; Perlis, 2013)	Can you share an example of a time when you prioritized improvement over a lofty ideal? What steps or strategies do you take that help to prioritize continuous improvement?

Interview Protocol

An interview protocol was piloted through a collaborative thematic approach with the nine peer researchers and three faculty members (see Appendix B). The protocol consisted of five sections: general information, informed consent, an overview of the study's purpose, definitions, and interview questions. According to McMillan and

Schumacher (2010), qualitative research questions are noted more for their probes and pauses than for the specific questions asked. Using a semistructured interview format guaranteed that each participant was asked questions for which I had little control over the response.

The thematic team first developed definitions for each variable. Two questions and one probe were constructed for each variable based on the definitions. The interview questions were evaluated several times with the nine peer researchers and three faculty members. Once the thematic team reached consensus on the interview questions, a written script was drafted (see Appendix C) by the peer researchers and faculty to initiate field-testing with participants who met the criteria. Once the script was finalized, the nine peer researchers conducted field tests with the participants who were not part of the final study. According to Patten and Newhart (2018), interview questions should be pilot tested with a few individuals who will not be a part of the final study, and questions revised if necessary.

Validity and Reliability

The creation of a research design that seeks honest, meaningful, and empirically supported findings delivers credible results (Patton, 2015). According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), a credible research design is one that delivers accurate, trustworthy, and reasonable findings that approximate reality. Careful consideration of the research design can eliminate or reduce error and thus enhance a study's credibility. Creswell and Creswell (2018) suggested that researchers convey the steps in the research process as a means of checking for the accuracy and credibility of the findings. To ensure the data for

this study were accurate and unbiased, the nine peer researchers used several approaches to address the threats to validity and reliability.

Reliability

Creswell (2014) stated that in qualitative research, reliability refers to the consistency of the researcher's approach and instrumentation tool among different people and settings. For this study, nine peer researchers field-tested the same interview script, protocol, and questions to ensure consistency with the variables. Consequently, the instrument used in this study is reliable because it was designed with interview questions that align to the five principles of grit as identified by Perlis (2013).

Intercoder Reliability of Data

Intercoder is the agreement between more than one researcher regarding how the same data are coded, and it provides confidence that the analysis of the data is credible (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020). To establish intercoder reliability in this study, an independent third-party evaluator coded a transcription of the interview with one of the nine participants. To maintain the reliability, the third-party evaluator with doctoral level research experience completed intercoder reliability for 10% of the data with the requirement of 80% minimum agreement. The interdependent coding results were analyzed for the percentage of agreement.

Validity

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), validity in qualitative research refers to the degree to which the data collected are in agreement with the realities of the world. Creswell and Creswell (2018) stated validity in qualitative research is based on how accurate the findings are in relation to the viewpoint of the researcher, the

participants, and the readers, and validity is one of the strengths of qualitative research. Patten and Newhart (2018) stated, “Researchers call a measure valid to the extent that it measures what it is designed to measure” (p. 123). For this study, I used multiple validity procedures to check the accuracy of the findings as well as convince the reader of that accuracy. The combination of strategies used to assess the validity of the study’s findings are shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Strategies Used to Enhance Validity

Strategy	Description
Participant language; verbatim accounts	Researcher collected transcripts from recorded interviews.
Participant review	Researcher asked the participant to review synthesis of interviews for accuracy of representation.
Multimethod strategies	This strategy allows for triangulation in data collection and data analysis.

Triangulation of Data

Triangulation strengthens a study by using two or more data sources or methods to provide cross-data validity checks (Patton, 2015). The purpose of triangulation is to reduce researcher bias and increase the comprehensiveness of a study to achieve a richer and more thorough understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Jonsen & Jehn, 2009). According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), the use of multimethod strategies may yield different insights about the topic being studied and increase the credibility of the study’s findings. For this study, triangulation of data included the use of interviews, artifacts, and literature. For this phenomenological study, I recorded the interviews with

participants for an in-depth review of participant responses. To ensure the validity of the data collected, I used as many strategies as possible including the triangulation of interviews and artifacts.

Artifacts

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), artifacts are tangible items that describe the experiences of the participants in a researcher's study. Artifacts collected must align with the purpose statement, research questions, and interview protocol. Artifacts can take the form of personal documents, official documents, or objects.

Field Testing

Creswell and Creswell (2018) indicated that field testing is important to establish credibility. Field-testing allows researchers to improve interview questions, protocol, and directions. For this study, nine peers researchers in the thematic team tested the interview protocol and questions to evaluate the process and determine any changes that needed to be made. Each field test was observed by a researcher experienced in qualitative research and recorded. A field-test participant feedback questionnaire (see Appendix D) and field-test observer feedback questionnaire (see Appendix E) were completed after each interview. The completed questionnaires were reviewed by the nine peer researchers and three faculty members during a virtual meeting to adjust the interview questions based on the feedback provided by the researchers, participants, and observers.

Data Collection

Data collection in qualitative research provides evidence for the experience being studied and serves as the foundation from which the findings are based (Polkinghorne, 2005). Creswell and Creswell (2018) stated data collection consists of several steps

including setting the boundary for the study, collecting information, and establishing protocols for recording information. Prior to collecting data, I completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) training on social-behavioral-educational research to protect the privacy of human subjects (see Appendix F). Next, approval was received from the University of Massachusetts Global Institutional Review Board to conduct the study (see Appendix G). All data collection practices were carefully reviewed and followed during the data collection process.

To protect participant privacy, identification numbers were assigned to all participants. All interviews were conducted, recorded, and transcribed via Google Meet. Transcriptions were stored electronically and password protected. Following the interview, participants were provided with a draft transcript to confirm the accuracy, provide feedback, make edits, or provide elaboration. Once verified, corrected, and finalized, the transcripts, recordings, and hardcopies were kept for 3 years from the conclusion of the study and then permanently shredded and destroyed.

The nine peer researchers and three faculty members developed the qualitative interview questions and interview protocol. Interviews were conducted via Google Meet. The interviews were semistructured and open-ended, which enabled me to probe for clarification and deeper understanding. The steps for data collection were as follows:

1. The participants who agreed to interview were contacted via email to schedule a date and time for the interview. Participants were also sent a copy of the interview questions, informed consent and bill of rights, and a statement about artifact collection for each question and example.

2. At the beginning of the interview, verbal consent was requested verifying participation in the study.
3. Each participant was asked permission to record the interview through an informed consent and during the introduction.
4. Individual interviews were conducted via Google Meet.
5. Throughout the interview, I asked each participant the same questions in the same order, using probing questions as needed to gain a deeper understanding and ensure rich, detailed responses.
6. During the interview, I made observations and took notes in addition to recording the interview.
7. Following the interview, the recording was transcribed and sent to each participant for review, feedback, and elaboration before finalizing the transcript and beginning the coding process.
8. I also collected artifacts that supported and aligned with the research purpose and questions.

Data Analysis

Analysis of data transforms the information gathered into findings that align with the research purpose and questions (Patton, 2015). In qualitative research, data analysis involves making sense of the data collected by categorizing, coding, and identifying patterns to communicate the essence of the data gathered. A researcher must provide a retrospective account of how data are gathered and the analytical strategies used (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). For this study, I used Google Meet to conduct the

interviews and record them. Following the interviews, participants were sent the transcripts to verify their responses for accuracy.

The study used authentic narratives to capture the participants' lived experiences. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) stated that authentic narratives "contain thick description in the narrative, interspersed with brief quotations representing participants' language" (p. 337). Technology-based software, such as NVivo, was used to input transcribed interviews that were then coded to look for themes and patterns among the participants' responses. Coding is the process of analyzing the narrative data gathered, breaking the data apart, and then putting it back together in meaningful ways (Elliot, 2018). Once major themes and patterns were identified, they were linked back to the research questions. The themes and patterns were then represented in narrative form to convey the findings and alignment with the research questions.

Limitations

Limitations in research are the biases that the researcher could or could not control that may affect the results (Price & Murnan, 2004). The limitations of this study included only a few data triangulation strategies to ensure validity. A second limitation was the use of virtual interviews as participants may have responded differently if interviewed in person. Finally, the study was conducted with a small sample size, which may not reflect the overall beliefs of all directors of special education in California.

Researcher as an Instrument

The researcher serves as the data collection instrument in qualitative studies through the process of examining behaviors or documents and interviews with participants (Patton, 2015). Researchers can bring biased views to a study, such as

background and personal views, which may affect the research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Therefore, the researcher should document how the interpretation of the study's findings is shaped by any bias.

I have over 9 years of experience in organizational leadership. Six of these years have been spent as a leader of a school site working closely with directors of special education. I have provided training and coaching in special education instruction and IEP compliance under the direction of the director of special education for staff in both general and special education. As a result, I have developed insight into, and potential bias toward, the role of special education directors. The nine thematic peer researchers and three faculty members worked collaboratively to develop the interview protocol and rehearsed a standardized interview method as means of mitigating bias.

For this phenomenological study, I conducted all interviews, including a field test, to collect data. I provided each participant with an interview guide that outlined the purpose of the study and the definition of the variables (see Appendix H) before conducting the scheduled interviews. All interviews were conducted via Google Meet, which allowed me to record each meeting.

Virtual Interviews

All interviews were conducted via Google Meet, which may have influenced how participants responded to the interview questions compared to in-person interviews. Conducting the study using virtual interviews also allowed participants to participate in a setting of their choosing, which could create a limitation if the setting were distracting. Furthermore, because the interviews were recorded, participants could feel vulnerable and reluctant to share important information.

Sample Size

The sample size was another limitation of this study. The nine peer researchers and three faculty members established a sample size of eight exemplary directors of special education. As such, this small sample size limits the generalization of the study's findings to a larger population.

Time and Location

Time and location can also be considered a limitation. Participants were interviewed for an hour, which may have limited the amount of information shared. Additionally, the study's focus was on directors of special education in California and thus excluded participants from across the United States whose information could be relevant to the study.

Summary

This chapter provided a review of the phenomenological research design used for this study examining how exemplary directors of special education use the principles of grit (courage, long-term goals, conscientiousness, excellence versus perfection, and resilience) to achieve extraordinary results in their organizations. This chapter contained an overview, purpose statement, and research questions. Furthermore, this chapter discussed the population and sample, instrumentation, and procedures for data collection and analysis.

CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

Overview

Grit is defined as passion and perseverance for long-term goals and serves as the theoretical framework for this study. According to Perlis (2013), grit encompasses a number of different anomalies including courage, conscientiousness, long-term goals, resilience, and excellence versus perfection that assist individuals in achieving long held goals. It is these principles that gritty individuals are believed to access and use to achieve success. Prior research on grit has examined the role that talent coupled with persistence of effort plays in the success of individuals in both personal and career arenas including military, marriage, education, and the workplace (Duckworth, 2016; Eskreis-Winkler et al., 2014; Muenks et al., 2016; Southwick et al., 2019). Less frequently found, however, are studies examining how school leaders, specifically directors of special education, embody the principles associated with grit to achieve extraordinary results in their organizations. Therefore, this study aimed to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on grit by exploring how directors of special education use courage, conscientiousness, long-term goals, resilience, and excellence versus perfection to achieve results.

Chapter IV presents a review of the study's purpose statement, research questions, population, sample, and methodology. Chapter IV also details the population, sampling frame, sample, and demographic data used for the study. Next, the chapter describes the qualitative data collected and the analysis of the data, which considers the research questions, and a summary of the chapter.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify and describe how exemplary directors of special education use five principles associated with grit (courage, conscientiousness, long-term goals, resilience, and excellence versus perfection) to accomplish extraordinary results in their organization.

Research Questions

1. How do exemplary directors of special education use courage to accomplish extraordinary results?
2. How do exemplary directors of special education use conscientiousness to accomplish extraordinary results?
3. How do exemplary directors of special education use long-term goals to accomplish extraordinary results?
4. How do exemplary directors of special education use resilience to accomplish extraordinary results?
5. How do exemplary directors of special education use excellence versus perfection to accomplish extraordinary results?

Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures

The researcher used a qualitative research design with a phenomenological model to study the lived experiences of exemplary directors of special education and how they use the principles of grit to achieve extraordinary results in their organization. Data for this study were collected through the use of one-on-one interviews with eight district-level directors of special education.

The interview protocol consisted of 10 semistructured interview questions, which were designed by the peer researchers with the support of three faculty members. Participants were provided with a copy of the research questions and definitions of the grit principles prior to the interview along with the UMIRB Participant's Bill of Rights (see Appendix I) and informed consent notifying each participant that the interview would be recorded (see Appendix B). At the start of each interview, the participant was asked to verbally consent to the recording of the interview.

Prior to conducting the interviews and collecting data, I completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) training on social-behavioral educational research to protect the privacy of human subjects (see Appendix F). Additionally, all guidelines to protect participant confidentiality, as set forth by the university, were adhered to by me.

I scheduled interviews via the use of Google Calendar, and each participant was emailed the preinterview information that included the interview questions and definitions of each grit principle, the informed consent form (see Appendix B), and the Research Participants Bill of Rights (see Appendix I). Interviews were conducted through Google Meet, which included video and audio recording. Interviews were transcribed by me following the interview and were used for data analysis and coding for themes. Participants were provided copies of their transcribed interview.

The interview protocol was used to conduct the interviews, and probing questions were used as needed to elicit further information from each participant. Each interview lasted between 40 and 60 min. Following each interview, I transcribed each audio recording and provided each participant with a transcript of the interview to review for

accuracy. To support the data collected through interviews, participants were asked for artifacts that would demonstrate their use of the five variables discussed in the interviews. For this study, personal documents included calendars and photos. Professional documents included district and department goals, local control accountability plans, staff communication, copies of board presentations, board agendas, email correspondence, copies of organizational systems, and checklists.

Interrater Reliability

Initial reliability of the study was established by the team of nine peer researchers through the development of one instrument and the reading of the interview script to each participant. According to Patton (2015), it is appropriate to check for reliability through the use of interrater reliability. O'Connor and Joffe (2020) noted that intercoder agreement provides confidence that the analysis of the data is credible. For this study, a peer researcher reviewed the coding of one interview, which was equal to 13% of the interview data, and this yielded the standard requirement of 80% minimum agreement.

Population

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) indicated the population of a study is the larger group of individuals who meet the specific criteria and to whom the researcher intends to generalize the results. The population for this study was exemplary directors of special education. Based on the data from the National Center for Education Statistics (n.d.), there are 98,507 operating school districts in the United States, each of which employs a director of special education.

Sampling Frame

Casteel and Brideir (2021) noted the sampling frame is a representation of the target population and is a group of individuals who are invited to participate in the study. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) further defined the sampling frame as a subset of the population of the study, emphasizing that researchers need to “carefully and completely define both the target population and the sampling frame” (p. 129). The sampling frame for this study was directors of special education in California school districts who have been employed in the position for at least 3 years and also met three of the following criteria: (a) have been recognized by their peers; (b) have been recommended by one or more regional executive leaders; (c) hold membership in professional organizations in their field; and (d) have published articles, papers, or written materials. During the 2021-2022 academic year, there were 940 school districts in California (CDE, 2022). The total number of school districts was represented by 345 unified school districts, 519 elementary school districts, 66 high school districts, and 10 high school districts with a junior high school program. Therefore, the target population for this study was directors of special education from 940 school districts within California.

According to Patten and Newhart (2018), when determining the sample of a study, researchers infer the characteristics of the sample are, most likely, the same characteristics of the population. Although there are no rules on sample size in qualitative research, sample size depends on the purpose of the research and what the researcher wishes to learn (Patton, 2015). The purpose of this research study was to identify and describe how exemplary directors of special education use the five principles associated with grit (courage, conscientiousness, long-term goals, resilience, and excellence versus

perfection) to achieve extraordinary results in their organization. For the purpose of this study, the peer researchers and three faculty members determined a sample size of eight participants.

Sampling Procedure

I implemented criterion sampling for this study. Patton (2015) noted that criterion sampling is chosen when a researcher wishes to study all cases that meet a specific criterion of importance. The criteria for the population of this study were individuals who:

1. Are directors of special education
2. Are located in California
3. Have at least 3 years in the current position
4. Meet at least three of the four criteria:
 - a. Recognition by peers
 - b. Recommended by one or more recognized regional executive leaders
 - c. Have memberships in professional organizations in their field
 - d. Have presented articles, papers, or published materials at conferences

Furthermore, purposive sampling was used to select the interview participants. I worked with my committee to identify candidates and secure their participation in the study. Table 4 delineates how the participants met the established criteria for participation.

Table 4*Study Participant Criteria*

Criteria	Participant							
	D1	D2	D3	D4	D5	D6	D7	D8
Director of special education	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Located in California	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Has at least 3 years in the current position	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Recognized by peers	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Recommended by one or more recognized regional executive leaders	x		x	x	x		x	x
Membership in professional organizations in their field	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Articles, papers, or published materials presented at conferences		x				x	x	x

Presentation and Analysis of Data

My notes and participants' responses were included in the analysis of the data along with key data from the interview transcripts. The data were coded, and the analysis and findings are presented in this chapter. Interviews were transcribed using the Google application Scribbl and reviewed and edited by me. All interview participants were provided a copy of their interview transcript to review for accuracy prior to conducting the coding process.

Data Analysis

According to Patton (2015), the analysis of the data transforms the information gathered into findings that align with the research purpose and questions. In qualitative research, the researcher strives to make sense of the information collected by categorizing the data and identifying patterns. The researcher then identifies codes and themes to

interpret the data. Elliot (2018) noted that coding is the process of analyzing the narrative data gathered, breaking the data apart, and putting it back together in meaningful ways. For the purpose of this study, I first read the eight interview transcripts multiple times and reviewed the artifacts collected. I also read the notes taken during the interviews to help gain a more in-depth understanding of the information shared by each participant. Categories were developed for each research question leading to the development of codes.

The qualitative software NVivo was used to complete the coding process. At the end of the coding process, themes were developed based on the frequency they were mentioned across the eight participants as well as the number of times they were mentioned by each participant. Themes were identified for each research question and major themes were identified that were present within each of the five grit principles.

The research and interview questions were aligned to the five principles of grit as identified by Perlis (2013). Data were categorized based on the grit principles of each research question. I first coded the data by participant and then by each research question to address each of the five research questions. The data were then placed into frequency tables so I could identify the frequency of each code based on the participant's responses. The artifacts collected served as an additional form of data and were coded into the frequency tables.

Validity

Validity in qualitative research refers to the degree to which the data collected are in agreement with the realities of the world (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Creswell and Creswell (2018) noted that validity in qualitative research is based on how accurate

the findings are in relation to the viewpoint of the research, participants, and the readers. For this study, the research used multiple validity procedures including the collection of transcripts from the recorded interviews, asking participants to review the interview transcripts for accuracy, and the use of observations and collection of artifacts. In addition, the nine thematic group members and three faculty advisors collaborated to develop the instrument, complete field studies, and review the field study outcomes to improve the research tool, each of which served to strengthen the validity of the study.

Reliability

Reliability refers to the consistency of the researcher's approach and instrumentation tool among different people and settings (Creswell, 2014). The nine peer researchers field-tested the interview script, protocol, and questions to ensure consistency with the variables and to ensure the interview questions were in alignment with the five principles of grit as identified by Perlis (2013). Furthermore, to establish reliability, all interview participants were asked the same interview questions, which were presented in the same order.

Intercoder is the agreement between one or more researchers regarding how the data are coded, providing confidence that the analysis of the data is credible (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020). To establish intercoder reliability for this study, a third-party evaluator with doctoral level research experience reviewed 13% of the data to compare the coding and themes developed by me. Creswell and Creswell (2018) noted that "consistency of the coding be in agreement at least 80% of the time for good qualitative reliability" (p. 202). For this study, the intercoder process yielded the required 80% minimum agreement among researchers coding the data.

General Findings

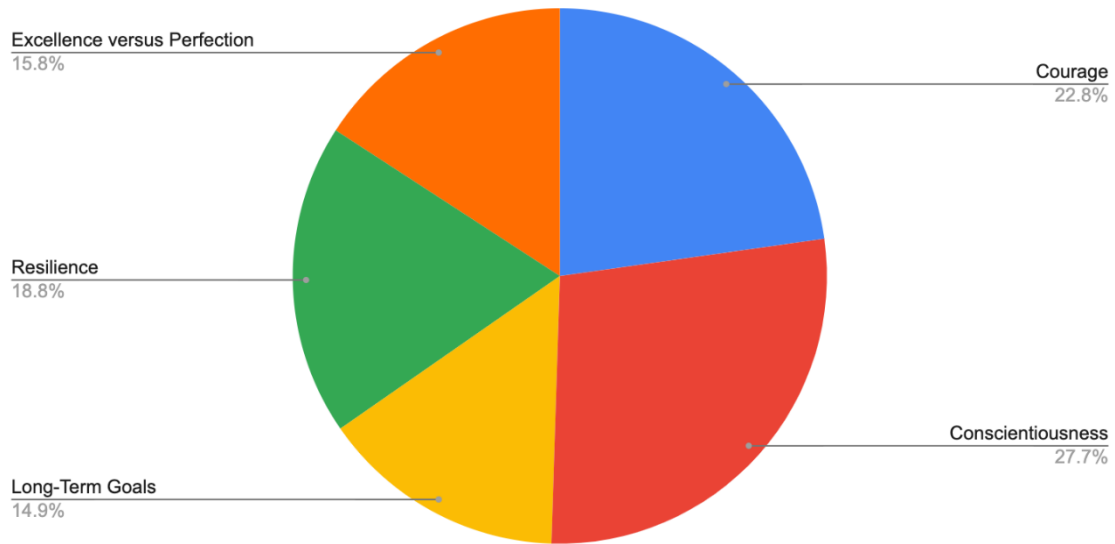
To ensure consistency in the data collection, all eight directors of special education were asked the same 10 questions in the same order. Using the qualitative software NVivo, I developed a frequency analysis aligned with the research questions. For a theme to be included in the findings of the study, the major themes needed to have been mentioned by a minimum of six of the eight participants and have a frequency of mention of 15 or higher.

The data were analyzed and reported by research questions. Each research question was aligned to the five principles of grit. From the analysis, a total of 15 themes emerged with three themes for each research question. Figure 2 demonstrates the frequency of participants mentioning specific practices as they aligned to the five principles of grit and the five research questions.

As Figure 2 demonstrates, the principles of conscientiousness and courage were the most frequently mentioned principles representing 27.7% and 22.8% of the total responses respectively from all participants. Resilience was the third most frequently mentioned principle with 18.8% of the responses from all participants. The remaining principles of long-term goals and excellence versus perfection were mentioned equally with 14.9% and 15.8% respectively. Figure 3 demonstrates the frequency of each theme as spoken by the participants.

Figure 2

Frequency of Responses to Each Principle



Data by Research Question

Research Question 1: Courage

The first research question asked, “How do exemplary directors of special education use courage to accomplish extraordinary results in their organization?”

Courage is the mental, physical, and moral strength to pursue and accomplish a worthy goal despite the presence of danger or fear (G. Lee & Elliot-Lee, 2006; Schilpzand et al., 2015).

Three themes emerged in the area of courage: knowing the why, engaging in strategic leadership, and listening to and learning from others. The theme of knowing the why represented 10% frequency for the study and 42% frequency for Research Question 1, engaging in strategic leadership represented 6% frequency for the study and 24% for Research Question 1, and listening to and learning from others represented 8% frequency

for the study and 34% of Research Question 1. Table 5 shows the frequency of these themes in the interviews and in the artifacts collected.

Figure 3

Frequency of Each Theme as Spoken by the Participants

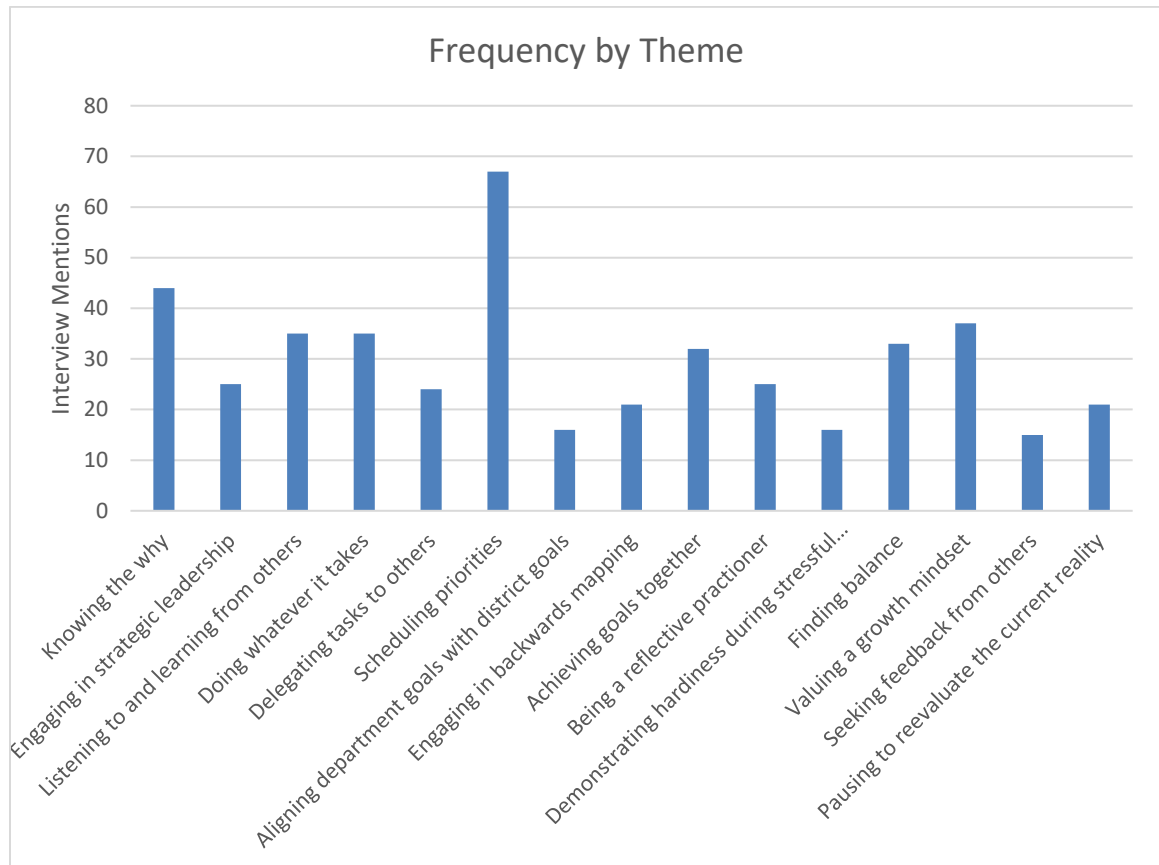


Table 5

Research Question 1 Frequency of Themes in Interviews and Artifacts

Theme	Interview mentions	Artifact references	Number of sources	% of respondents	Total references
1a. Knowing the why	44	8	8	100	48
1b. Engaging in strategic leadership	25	3	7	88	28
1c. Listening to and learning from others	35	10	6	75	45

Theme 1a: Knowing the Why

This theme was represented in all eight participants with 44 frequency mentions and found in eight artifacts. Knowing the why, emphasized that exemplary directors of special education use courage to make moral and ethical decisions about what is right for students and staff. Leaders who have the courage to solve moral problems act in the best interest of their organizations (G. Lee & Elliott-Lee, 2006). Kouzes and Posner (2016) noted that courageous individuals find meaning in the hard work that is required to enact change to move forward. Furthermore, Palanski et al. (2014) stated that effective leaders who exhibit courage benefit not only themselves but also their organizations. Participant 4 shared, “It takes courage to stay committed to that work which you believe is the right work. You get challenged and you just have to stay the course because you believe that’s the right thing to do for students.” Participant 3 said, “It’s really about, is this good for kids? It may not be good for adults, it may not be pleasant for me to take, like I could have an easier path for not doing something, but if it’s something that makes sense for kids, I have to take that step or I need to not do this job.

Finally, Participant 6 stated,

If you have your true north, and you know what drives you, and you know what your core values are, even if you don’t want to do it, you wake up and you get up and you do it anyway because you know it’s the right thing to do.

During the interviews, participants noted the importance of advocating for kids. Palanski et al. (2014) suggested it takes courage to act in a morally upright way when facing adversity, by speaking or standing up for what is right in the face of opposition or when the idea is unpopular. Participant 7 shared,

I bring the voice of students with disabilities, as well as staff of students with disabilities who work with parents and those who are related to students with disabilities. In representing those voices, I speak about a group that is protected but at the time is very needy, expensive, difficult, and has a lot of negative connotations. I feel that my feedback or input often comes with these types of attributes. It takes a courageous person to be guided by your values and make the moral decision of not using the comfortable position of silence, but overcome the potential views that people may have of my input or my role. Yet again, here is D7 bringing up these expensive issues. I just have to overcome that, and be courageous and speak up on behalf of the goals, the causes, and the community that I represent.

When sharing the courage it took to decide to return to in-person learning following the pandemic, Participant 8 said,

I think I landed back on what the purpose of my job is, and that is to advocate for kids. When I kept coming back to that, and my belief that we could do it safely with the PPE we had, that's what really gave me the courage to pursue, even in the face of a lot of the backlash that I got from teachers and paraeducators.

Several other participants also shared this same belief. Participant 3 stated, "It's not about necessarily making people happy, it's about doing what's good for kids."

Participant 6 said, "Sometimes it may not be the popular decision, but you make a decision because it's the best and right decision for the child, not the best and right decision for everyone else." Participant 1 stated, "I like to think I am always going to take the courageous action. I really pride myself on saying, how does this benefit kids?"

Theme 1b: Engaging in Strategic Leadership

This theme was mentioned by seven interview participants, had 25 frequency mentions, and was found in three of the artifacts. Participants indicated it took courage to know when to enact change to ensure it would be both successful for all and sustainable. White et al. (2016) stated that creating a political vision that focuses not only on what is happening currently but also in the future is critical to leadership effectiveness. When asked what causes leaders to take courageous action, Participant 1 stated,

I think timing's everything. I think you got to read the situation, read the room. I got to get people on board. I've got to get people that want to pursue these challenges with me not just because they have been told they have to.

Participant 2 shared,

In the beginning of anything I am pursuing, if I want it to be successful, I need to set it up to be successful. There's a lot of closeness, a lot of time, energy, leadership, all of that given to something in the beginning, with also the idea of I'm not creating a system that's dependent on one person like myself, or anyone for that matter. That it's going to be something, that in the future, should I not hold closely, it can sustain itself.

Participant 3 said,

Even if I start small, I want to make sure that if I'm doing it with this group of kids I am doing it for all. Will they be in middle school and still get the support? Will they be in high school and get the support? I don't want something where kids start to experience something and have it be really successful, but we didn't plan far enough ahead with our resources, with our budget, with whatever it is to

say, “Oh we can only do that until this period of time.” So, I also need to make sure it has some longevity to it.

When asked if there was ever a time when there was regret as a result of not taking action, participants noted that timing was important to ensure that change was successful.

Participant 1 shared,

I don’t think I ever regretted not taking an action. I might have reflected and said, “hmm, I did that too soon or I should have done that a little bit later.” Ultimately, as you know, there’s got to be somebody willing to make the decision and live by it.

Participant 6 said,

If I don’t take action, it’s because, I map it out, I do an initiative piece, I look and see what needs to happen. I say “okay, right now we’re not there yet.” Sometimes delaying is the best thing to do.

When sharing about the process of developing an inclusive preschool program, Participant 2 noted the importance of slowing down, communicating better, and frontloading the right people when enacting change and setting others up for success: “I should have gone slower and communicated better in order to avoid some pitfalls. If I am ever going to do something like that again, I am going to take that approach of frontloading the right people up front.”

Theme 1c: Listening to and Learning From Others

This theme was mentioned by six participants and had 35 frequency mentions and 10 artifact references. White et al. (2016) shared that effective and politically intelligent leaders spend time cultivating networks before they need them. Additionally, effective

and politically intelligent leaders convey messages in a straightforward way to ensure they are understood by all. Participant 7 shared the value in listening to others and working as a team when taking courageous action, stating,

I do like to work with my team. I do think we are in such complex times and not one a person is an expert. This job is so complex it requires team expertise, the wisdom of the team. So I do like to bring my team together whenever I can. There can be different experts for different areas that need to be discussed or resolved. I do bounce ideas off of them and I like to hear different perspectives.

Participant 1 reiterated the importance of building a network of people when faced with taking courageous action stating, “I think it’s developing the relationships with all the people in the organization. The relationship with the parents, the relationship with the teachers or the students in that case. I think creating an environment that has trust built in.” Finally, Participant 5 shared, “I think as leaders having the courage to be able to stand there, support the families, hear them out, and then work through the problems.”

When asked about which challenges to pursue, Participant 5 noted the importance of never wasting a good crisis as a means of building relationships and clearing up processes stating,

Everybody freaks out and says “Oh my gosh, they are calling the union.” It’s okay. Yes, we’re in a crisis mode, maybe it’s a staffing issue, but I’m going to leverage this to build relationships with the union and with the staff.

Finally, Participant 2 highlighted the importance of effective communication when taking courageous action by sharing,

I learned that I would need to communicate differently. I should have gone a little slower and communicated better in order to avoid some pitfalls. You have to be really proactive when setting up systems of communication, systems of organization.

Research Question 2: Conscientiousness

The second research question asked was “How do exemplary directors of special education use conscientiousness to accomplish extraordinary results in their organization?” Conscientiousness is defined as a fundamental personality trait that drives the desire and ability to be diligent, organized, achievement-oriented, self-disciplined, and reliable (Jackson et al., 2010; Perlis, 2013).

Three themes emerged in the area of conscientiousness: doing whatever it takes, delegating tasks to others, and scheduling priorities. The theme of doing whatever it takes represented 8% frequency for the study and 28% frequency for Research Question 2, delegating tasks to others represented 5% frequency for the study and 19% for Research Question 2, and scheduling priorities represented 15% frequency for the study and 53% of Research Question 2. Table 6 shows the frequency of these themes in the interviews and in the artifacts collected.

Table 6

Research Question 2 Frequency of Themes in Interviews and Artifacts

Theme	Interview mentions	Artifact references	Number of sources	% of respondents	Total references
2a. Doing whatever it takes	35	10	7	88	45
2b. Delegating tasks to others	24	3	7	88	27

2c. Scheduling priorities	67	11	8	100	78
---------------------------	----	----	---	-----	----

Theme 2a: Doing Whatever it Takes

This theme was mentioned by seven interview participants, had 35 frequency mentions, and was found in 10 artifacts. Conscientiousness is associated with the ability to regulate impulse and discipline to achieve in the workplace (Wilmot & Ones, 2019). Trautwein et al., (2009) stated conscientiousness has been consistently linked to positive outcomes. Furthermore, Schmidt et al. (2018) noted that industriousness, a facet of conscientiousness, has been shown to be closely related to perseverance and the ability to be hardworking. Participants noted that although being diligent to ensure the job gets done, balancing work and personal life commitments is important as well. Participant 4 shared,

If I think back on my university experience, whether it was life, or I was too busy, or I procrastinated, or whatever it was, at the end of the day, the reason we completed our journey in higher education was we did what it took to get it done. Whether it was pulling an all-nighter or whatever it was. I think the same holds true for successful leaders.

Participant 4 also stated,

At the same time though, you need to balance your personal life with work, because the other side of that is that you're not going to do a good job if you're not a healthy person, whether that is physically, mentally, or emotionally. You need to balance those times where you do have to spend some of your personal

time getting something done by a certain deadline, and those times when you make decisions to shut it down at a certain point in time and take care of yourself. Participant 2 stated, “It’s doing whatever it takes. I mean I don’t leave at 4:00 every day. I sometimes, and a lot of the time, I work on weekends. I’m willing to sacrifice my own personal time to get the job done.” Participant 8 stated, “I do a lot of work at home too. I just have to bring stuff home.” Participant 2 said, “It’s doing whatever it takes. I mean I don’t leave at 4:00 every day. I sometimes, and a lot of the time, I work on weekends. I’m willing to sacrifice my own personal time to get the job done.” Participant 2 also shared,

I still have to hold my meetings. I still keep calendaring to go check in on folks.

It’s not my favorite part of my job, it’s not anybody’s. It’s a very tedious task.

This has to be done and I have to honor those moments that are scheduled to make it happen in order to have it done and have it done well. It’s like a must do. It’s not something I give myself the freedom to say, “it’s not a priority.”

Finally, Participant 3 shared, “I try to demonstrate or model some boundaries with staff because I do want them to have some life work balance, Otherwise, I just don’t think they’ll have the longevity.”

Theme 2b: Delegating Tasks to Others

This theme was mentioned by seven interview participants and had 24 frequency mentions. According to Colbert and Witt (2009), conscientiousness is the best personality predictor of job performance. Schmidt et al. (2018) stated that conscientious individuals who score high in the area of industriousness have been found to be “hardworking, ambitious, confident, resourceful, and persistent in the face of challenges” (p. 707). When

faced with competing demands, Participant 8 shared, “I have learned over the years that it’s okay to delegate. Like I don’t have to do everything.” Participant 4 shared,

I am not in isolation, I am not managing myself, so that’s what I’ve found over the years that I need to let go of. I am the idea person, I am the thinker, and I need to allow my administrative assistant to manage me, and allow a lot of the work that I used to take on to be delegated to others that I supervise. That is what I have really found to be the most effective to stay on track.

Participant 3 stated,

I also ask for help and I delegate more. When I was a beginning director, I did feel like I had to be the one with the answers. I had to be the one to put out all the fires or respond all the time, and I found that people probably got worse information that way. I don’t know everything. So, over time, I shifted my thinking into hiring and building a team who was smarter than me and better than me and could answer those things really well.

Participant 5 also shared that delegation was important to remaining organized and meeting deadlines stating, “I am not afraid to say ‘I need help.’ It’s better that I am monitoring 20 people doing 20 things than 10 people doing 10 things, and me doing 10 things.”

When faced with competing demands, participants shared the importance of knowing when to say no. Participant 3 said, “Over the years, I have learned to make sure I only promise to do what I can do. Not to overpromise. I want to be seen as reliable, and so that means I can’t say yes to everything.” Furthermore, Participant 3 shared,

It takes time to figure out which things you are saying yes to and which ones

you're saying, "Well let me see what I can do about that." But not, you know, guaranteeing anything so that I can follow through on what I say. So that people see me as reliable.

Participant 8 also shared the importance of saying no, stating, "Because of all the distractions, I have learned over the years not to overextend myself. I know right now what my rhythm and my pace is."

Theme 2c: Scheduling Priorities

This theme was mentioned by eight of the interview participants, had 67 frequency mentions, and was found in 11 artifacts. Duckworth et al. (2007) stated individuals high in conscientiousness are "characteristically thorough, careful, reliable, organized, industrious, and self-controlled" (p. 1089). When asked how participants stay organized to meet deadlines, participants answered that calendaring events was a critical skill. Participant 5 shared, "My calendar drives me, and time is precious. It's got to be in my calendar." Participant 7 stated, "Calendaring things. Anytime I promise something to somebody, I will calendar it. If I don't calendar it I will forget about that promise and people will think that I never follow through." Finally, Participant 2 said, "So in order to stay organized I calendar at the end of each year my department meetings for the following year."

Participants also shared that prioritizing was critical to staying organized. Participant 4 stated, "You have to be able to prioritize, and obviously whatever organizational system you utilize, whether it's electronic, paper, you have somewhere you have a list of all the things that need to be done. You have to prioritize." Participant 5 shared, "I think you just have to know your priorities." Participant 1 said, "You have to

be able to prioritize. I try to prioritize what needs to be done.” Finally, Participant 6 shared, “I think it’s a matter of triage. What’s most important on your calendar on that day.”

Finally, interview participants shared when prioritizing, putting people at the forefront was the most important. Participant 6 stated, “I will tell you for me, people are the most important. During the day, people are prioritized, kid situations are prioritized, and what’s going on in that classroom takes precedence over everything else.” Participant 8 shared,

I feel a very real sense of responsibility to get back to people quickly. As a teacher, one of the most frustrating things to me was when I was seeking information and I didn’t get it and I had parents like, “What are you going to do, what are you going to do?” So, I do sometimes shift my priorities based on that.

Finally Participant 1 said,

Well, this is a good question because organization is good, however, I think we can’t forget that we are dealing with people and people aren’t programs, you know, especially in our special education world, right. I do people, problems, and then paper. I spend a lot of time on the people piece, more than I should, but when I need to get something done I pretty much can because I’ve already developed relationships with folks.

Research Question 3: Long-Term Goals

The third research question asked, “How do exemplary directors of special education use long-term goals to accomplish extraordinary results in their organization?” Use of long-term goals is defined as using a top-level future outcome that serves as a

compass for sustained action, inspiring passion, and consistent focus over long stretches of time (Duckworth, 2007; Jachimowicz et al., 2008).

Three themes emerged in the area of use of long-term goals: aligning department goals with district goals, engaging in backwards mapping, and achieving goals together. The theme of aligning department goals with district goals represented 4% frequency for the study and 23% frequency for Research Question 3, engaging in backwards mapping represented 5% frequency for the study and 30% for Research Question 3, and achieving goals together represented 7% frequency for the study and 46% of Research Question 3. Table 7 shows the frequency of these themes in the interviews and in the artifacts collected.

Theme 3a: Aligning Department Goals With District Goals

This theme was mentioned by six of the interview participants, had 16 frequency mentions, and was found in 13 artifacts. Colbert and Witt (2009) stated leaders who align the organization’s goals with department goals trigger the effort needed in employees to accomplish those goals. Interview participants noted the importance of engaging in unified messaging and reviewing progress on goals as important to their organizations.

Table 7

Research Question 3 Frequency of Themes in Interviews and Artifacts

Theme	Interview mentions	Artifact references	Number of sources	% of respondents	Total references
3a. Aligning department goals with district goals	16	13	6	75	29
3b. Engaging in backwards mapping	21	13	7	75	34

3c. Achieving goals together	32	14	8	88	46
------------------------------	----	----	---	----	----

Participant 2 shared,

At the end of every school year, I have probably attended 10-15 workshops where I am working with school site staff or district wide staff on those goals and taking those goals back at the start of the new school year and developing department goals for special education. I do separate goal setting for special education and separate goal setting for pupil services with my teams there. We look at the beginning of the year, what the school board's goals are, which are typically aligned to the LCAP goals, and then we create those department goals and align them with the board and LCAP goals.

Participant 1 said,

The long-term goals for us, I think, have been articulated fairly well. We take the board, to the district, to the schools, then to the principals, it's kind of a vertical, if you will, articulation or scaffolding of what needs to happen and where and everything kind of leads together.

Participant 5 said, "So your goals, when people are not aligned, your compass is not aligned, there is a misalignment between the two. It's important that everybody's aligned so we all know where we are going." Finally, Participant 4 stated, "If we are truly an organization that exists for the reasons that we state, we select that vision that we developed and connect that to everything we do."

Theme 3b: Engaging in Backwards Mapping

This theme was mentioned by seven of the interview participants, had 21 frequency mentions, and was found in 13 artifacts. According to Southwick et al. (2019), creating backward plans for how individuals will act on the long-term goal has a positive effect on goal attainment. Participant 4 shared, “If you are working toward your vision, all your short-term goals, your long-term goals are backwards planned from the end in mind to where you want to end up.” Participant 6 emphasized the importance of backwards mapping by stating, “You backwards map where you want to get and use that long-term goal planning to get you where you want to be.” Participant 7 said,

The plan that we have, the 6-year plan is probably a great tool for that. What it is, is backwards planning where we will describe a desired state for our district in certain areas. In the past we have written 1-, 2-, or 3-year plans for LCAP and now that we design it backwards. We imagine the desired state in 6 years and we go backwards. I have become a fan of backwards design and I started to use it in almost every area.

Finally, Participant 8 shared the importance of backwards mapping to meet the long-term goal of improving CAASPP scores stating,

One of the long-term goals I set this year was improving our CAASPP scores. It involves training. Long term, we decided we were going to mandate the CAASPP practice test so that we could get the kids familiar with the format and possibly the vocabulary. So we are setting those mini project-based goals along the way to see if long term it makes any difference.

Theme 3c: Achieving Goals Together

This theme was mentioned by eight of the interview participants, had 32 frequency mentions, and was found in 14 artifacts. Colbert and Witt (2009) found that when leaders engaged in goal-focused leadership by providing strategic direction for followers such as aligning goals, defining roles and responsibilities, and highlighting priorities, followers responded with higher levels of performance. Participant 1 said, “You can’t just jump right in and say ‘I’m gonna have goals and say I’m going there come hell or high water.’ You gotta build that culture, and that safety, and that security within teachers, administrators, parents, kids.” Participant 2 shared,

My team members meet weekly. We are constantly reviewing those goals. We have them on our agendas. We are looking at how we are monitoring implementation and we have robust conversations on that and related systems of support to make sure the goals are met.

Participant 5 said, “I work together with the staff to determine what our long-term goals are. I put them in my own evaluation. They embedded it in their goals so everyone is working on it and its part of their evaluation.”

When participants were asked about what they did when faced with challenges while working toward a long-term goal, Participant 3 stated, “At some point I said, ‘Let’s stop talking about moving that number up and let’s go back and look at a qualitative review.’ We shifted how we measured success.” Participant 6 shared, “It’s knowing you have to have the courage sometimes to just go a different direction to get those goals done. The goal stays the same, improving student achievement, but how you obtain that goal, that’s what you change.” Finally, Participant 7 said, “We have effective

measurements. Some of the challenges are difficult but they do kind of refine the process and you end up having better outcomes. That happens almost all the time.”

Research Question 4: Resilience

The fourth research question asked, “How do exemplary directors of special education use resilience to accomplish extraordinary results in their organization?”

Resilience is defined as an individual’s ability to adapt and recover from stress and adversity while maintaining or returning to a positive mental state of wellbeing despite hardship (Grafton, et al., 2010; Rice & Liu, 2016).

Three themes emerged in the area of resilience: being a reflective practitioner, demonstrating hardiness during stressful situations, and making time for self-care. The theme of being a reflective practitioner represented 6% frequency for the study and 34% frequency for Research Question 4, demonstrating hardiness during stressful situations represented .08% frequency for the study and 9% for Research Question 4, and making time for self-care represented 7% frequency for the study and 45% of Research Question 4. Table 8 shows the frequency of these themes in the interviews and in the artifacts collected.

Table 8*Research Question 4 Frequency of Themes in Interviews and Artifacts*

Theme	Interview mentions	Artifact references	Number of sources	% of respondents	Total references
4a. Being a reflective practitioner	25	1	8	100	45
4b. Demonstrating hardiness during stressful situations	16	0	7	88	27
4c. Finding balance	33	15	8	100	78

Theme 4a: Being a Reflective Practitioner

This theme was mentioned by eight of the interview participants and had 25 frequency mentions. Duckworth (2016) stated that mindfulness and optimistic self-talk are essential to changing the way in which individuals think, feel, and act. Individuals who have higher levels of optimism have been found to experience growth in response to stress (Ledesma, 2021). When asked how participants overcome stressful work situations and cultivate their own resiliency in their professional journey, participants shared the importance of gratefulness and positive self-talk. Participant 3 said,

I think for me being resilient means I have to stop and reflect back on how lucky I am and how great my team is, and how I couldn't do this without pretty much just amazing people who almost can think about things before I think about them.

Participant 2 stated, "I think also, my own personal reflection as a leader, seeing where my strengths are, where my weaknesses are, and where I need to grow, and giving myself that grace." Participant 8 said, "I always come back to that center of, it's not about me.

That helps me get that center of saying calm, staying professional." Participant 7 stated,

So, in yoga we have a principle. You know you are supposed to accept reality as it comes. But, it's not really what people think. You don't just accept it. You just take it in and you pause, you breathe, and you go "Now what? What do I do now?" So I think it's just really the same thing. Every time a challenge comes in or something doesn't go as planned you just stop and you assess the different aspects of the barrier and proceed with the next steps.

Participant 6 stated, "Always checking my ego at the door. I need to remember that I am always learning and maybe I don't know everything, and I just keep checking that ego at the door." Finally Participant 5 said, "I am not perfect and my wife reminds me of that when I am not keeping balance. I have to listen and make changes."

Theme 4b: Demonstrating Hardiness During Stressful Situations

This theme was mentioned by seven of the interview participants, had 16 frequency mentions, and was found in zero artifacts. Resilience is believed to be a combination of hardiness, optimism, adaptability, and self-efficacy (Grafton et al., 2010; Perlis, 2013). Hardy individuals have the ability to assess stressful situations and trust their ability to respond accordingly and with a sense of self-control (Ledesma, 2014; Samfira & Paloş, 2021). Additionally, hardiness has been found to be a predictor of a leader's ability to persevere through adversity (Ledesma, 2021; Perlis, 2013). Participant 5 shared, "You have to take care of yourself. You have to have balance in your life. You have to trust the process." Participant 3 said, "Knowing that kids have better outcomes having left our system, or even where they are now, is really rewarding and makes me persist through things that are difficult." Participant 1 shared,

Taking care of yourself. Trying to alleviate those stressors or when you feel that stress, what am I going to do to counteract that? I think you have to be able to identify it and be able to make some changes so that you can continue to recover from that or become more resilient.

Participant 2 shared,

I feel very sure that we can still accomplish a fully inclusive preschool program across the board. I'm okay now knowing that might take longer. It doesn't mean you give up or you don't fight the fight, or you don't advocate. I don't feel like the window of opportunity or the doorway into it has quite opened yet. Until then I have to step back and accept the lessons that have been learned, understand that timing is everything.

Participant 7 shared,

Facing that group was really painful, difficult, embarrassing, shameful. Shame, to me, is one of the most difficult things to recover from. It just sits in the back of my mind for days on end. When you wake up in the morning, it's like a bad haircut, it's still there, you know, that type of feeling. I think recovering from it, for me, was just going through the deed of being courageous, sitting down with the team, and facing the challenge of admitting, and being vulnerable in front of them.

Finally, Participant 4 stated, "I think the resilience piece comes from acceptance while things are not in the place you want, or didn't go the way you want, but acceptance of what can be."

Theme 4c: Finding Balance

This theme was mentioned by eight of the interview participants and had 33 frequency mentions. According to Wang et al. (2017), individuals high in resilience are able to pull from more personal resources and thus are more likely to be engaged at work. Rice and Liu (2016) stated resilient individuals are thought to be more adaptive within an ever-changing work environment and the ability to adapt may contribute to more resilient organizations. Participants noted that taking time for self-care and taking time to disconnect were critical to finding balance and being resilient. Participant 2 shared,

Just taking time away from work is important. I think it's a struggle for anyone who wants to make an impact and change in their role. It's being willing to say this can't consume me at all times either. So finding ways to step away from it makes it a little so you can appreciate it when you come back to it.

Participant 7 stated, "I have to take care of myself. Physically, I exercise." Participant 8 said,

I shut off. My husband works in the district also. He's a special ed teacher. We have made it a policy that when we come home, we don't talk shop. We don't. And we don't. Like we never talk shop. I do shut off and that's been super helpful for me mentally.

Participant 4 stated, "Being self-aware so that you can engage with others in a healthy way and keep yourself healthy while you are doing that." Participant 1 shared,

I think you have to acknowledge what's hard. I think you have to acknowledge what's difficult in the work that we do. I think you have to find the balance in

self-care. I try to find those moments of, I don't know, pleasure, walk on the beach, get a massage. Somewhat disconnect.

Finally, Participant 5 said, "I make sure I take vacations and I make sure I connect with friends and family and go to my son's games and my daughter's theater performance."

Research Question 5: Excellence Versus Perfection

The fifth research question asked, "How do exemplary directors of special education use excellence versus perfection to accomplish extraordinary results in their organization?" Excellence versus perfection is defined as a mindset toward fulfilling one's purpose and prioritizing improvement over a lofty ideal that may or may not be attainable (Arias, 207; Duckworth et al., 2007; Perlis, 2013).

Three themes emerged in the area of excellence versus perfection: valuing a growth mindset, seeking feedback from others, and pausing to reevaluate the current reality. Valuing growth represented 9% frequency for the study and 51% frequency for Research Question 5, seeking feedback from others represented .03% frequency for the study and 21% for Research Question 5, and making time for self-care represented 5% frequency for the study and 29% of Research Question 5. Table 9 shows the frequency of these themes in the interviews and in the artifacts collected.

Theme 5a: Valuing a Growth Mindset

This theme was mentioned by seven interview participants, had 37 frequency mentions, and was found in 14 artifacts. According to Perlis (2013), individuals who are high in grit do not seek perfection but rather focus on improving weaknesses. Southwick et al. (2019) stated organizations that value the idea of a growth mindset believe that people can develop their skill sets. Participants noted that improving their skills and the

skills of their staff through professional development was important. Additionally, participants shared that perfection was not something they personally believed in.

Table 9

Research Question 5 Frequency of Themes in Interviews and Artifacts

Theme	Interview mentions	Artifact references	Number of sources	% of respondents	Total references
5a. Valuing a growth mindset	37	14	7	88	51
5b. Seeking feedback from others	15	5	7	88	20
5c. Pausing to reevaluate the current reality	21	1	7	88	22

When asked to share an example of when continuous improvement was prioritized over a lofty ideal, Participant 8 stated,

Looking at individual teacher’s and setting individual goals for them. So last year, you had 15% of your IEPs out of compliance. What can we do, what support can we have, to reduce that and then monitoring that. So if they drop it to 5%, that’s great. They’ve learned something.

Participant 5 said,

I went through an advanced level of the FRISK process and they said that the standard is not perfection, the standard is not exceptional. The standard is that they are doing a basic level job. I was like, ‘Huh’? When I lowered my bar a little bit to that standard, it was hard to do, I am not going to lie, evaluating them,

allowing them to improve, still giving them coaching, they actually were able to rise to the standard, and then I was able to push them from there.

Participant 7 shared, “I don’t really believe in perfection. I always believe that you can meet somebody who knows more. I always think you can learn more.” Participant 1 said,

I don’t think there’s ever true perfection to where you will never go back to it. I think we want to be excellent at what we do, the programs we offer, the teachers we put in front of kids, the organization in which we lead, but I don’t think anything’s perfect.

Participant 2 shared,

It’s really about that growth each month and how are they going to keep increasing? If we take a step back that’s okay. Where do we need to keep growing, where are we not hitting the mark so that we can keep moving forward?

Finally, Participant 1 said,

I don’t think I am wired to everything has to be perfect, I don’t really identify with that. I want to take people where they are, know where they want to go, and help them along the way. To me that’s like not so that they’re going to be perfect, or they are going to be the best at what they do, but they’re going to be better than where they started.

Theme 5b: Seeking Feedback From Others

This theme was mentioned by seven interview participants, had 15 frequency mentions, and was found in five artifacts. Individuals striving for excellence seek immediate feedback from those around them so they can make changes (Duckworth, 2016). Interview participants shared the importance of getting different perspectives from

others and using the knowledge of their team to help move their organizations forward, particularly when facing barriers to improvement. Participant 5 shared, “Barriers are embarrassing or sometimes they are so challenging that I just freeze and won’t do anything about it. So being vulnerable and sharing the barrier with other teams, district wide, sharing it out, and getting support with it.” Participant 2 said, “I think you have to look at the strengths of people and leaders and you have to build your team around the strengths that people give.” Participant 8 stated,

I do a work around. If I see a barrier that is going to prevent us from getting somewhere, what’s another way to get it done? Maybe there is a better goal? Like, you know, bringing in a team. I am all about getting different perspectives. I can look at other people’s perspectives and say all right, it’s not my idea but it’s just as good and I can live with that.

Participant 6 said,

I always meet with the teams. I will talk with the teams. I ask open-ended questions, I try to feel what they are feeling at that time, and I confer with my department. When we meet, I go around that table, have everyone tell me how they are feeling, what do you have on your plate that I need to tend to, how can I help you, how can I support you, what can we do together for improvement, how can we get our tasks done, all of that. How can we support each other? I think our biggest resource and asset is our people.

Finally, Participant 7 shared,

We have to talk about learning and improvement as part of our organization, which is usually through a lot of mistakes or new things we have seen. Then in

my department, we have a weekly department agenda, and we actually start with what we have learned. I feel like we are in the business of learning so we need to model that everywhere we go.

Theme 5c: Pausing to Reevaluate the Current Reality

This theme was mentioned by seven interview participants, had 21 frequency mentions, and was found in one artifact. According to Kiral (2020), leaders who are in the pursuit of excellence make improvement a habit for themselves and for others. Gaudreau et al. (2020) stated the pursuit of excellence has been found to lead to improved measures of work performance. Participants' shared reflection, data collection, and slowing down are important to determining whether the current goals of the organization remain appropriate. Participant 3 shared, "I have learned to stop and just take stock. So, I need to stop and slow down enough to make sure that I am recalibrating for all our new team members, or just checking for understanding." Participant 4 also emphasized the importance of slowing down sharing, "If you are truly about improvement it shouldn't be a surprise that you have to slow down."

When sharing the steps toward continuous improvement, Participant 8 stated, "Always reevaluating the data, always looking at the data. Always looking at what is realistic versus pie in the sky." Participant 6 also spoke about the importance of data sharing, "I will look at the data. Data is important." Participant 4 stated,

What is it we are trying to accomplish or what is the specific problem we are trying to solve? So just always bring teams back or myself back to that first question. What is it that I am trying to impact here? What is it that I am trying to

accomplish? What is the specific problem that I am trying to solve and anchoring what follows to that.

Participant 1 reiterated the importance of engaging in continuous improvement stating, For me and for anyone, it's assessing where you are. I meant that honest conversation of where a person or an individual is, whether it's math, English, teaching, or leading. It's being honest with yourself and then being able to say, okay here's where I am and here's where I want to be.

Key Findings

This qualitative phenomenological study was composed of two major data collection methods. The first was eight semistructured interviews that were conducted followed by the collection of artifacts from the eight interview participants. The data collected were then coded and themes emerged. Major themes emerged along with subthemes. The key findings were determined to be the principles of grit that were mentioned by six or more of the interview participants with a frequency count of at least 15 mentions within the interviews. Triangulation of data through the collection of artifacts related to the themes identified increased the validity of the study. The eight interview participants provided multiple examples of the coded areas within their interviews. Table 10 shows the key findings with their corresponding frequency counts. Each of the five principles of grit yielded three key findings.

Key Finding: Courage

1. Identifying and knowing the why was identified in eight interviews, had eight artifacts, and a frequency count of 32.

2. Engaging in strategic leadership was identified in seven interviews, had three artifacts, and a frequency count of 24.
3. Listening to and learning from others was identified in six interviews, had 10 artifacts, and a frequency count of 35.

Table 10

Key Findings

Grit principle	Theme	Participants	Frequency	Artifacts
Courage	Identifying and knowing the why	8	32	8
	Engaging in strategic leadership	7	24	3
	Listening to and learning from others	6	35	10
Conscientiousness	Doing whatever it takes	7	35	10
	Delegating tasks to others	7	24	3
	Scheduling priorities	8	67	11
Long-term goals	Aligning department goals with district goals	6	16	13
	Engaging in backwards mapping	7	21	13
	Achieving goals together	8	32	14
Resilience	Being a reflective practitioner	8	25	1
	Demonstrating hardiness during stressful situations	7	16	0
	Finding balance	8	33	15
Excellence versus perfection	Valuing a growth mindset	7	37	14
	Seeking feedback from others	7	15	5
	Pausing to reevaluate the current reality	7	21	1

Key Finding: Conscientiousness

1. Doing whatever it takes was identified in seven interviews, had 10 artifacts, and a frequency count of 35.
2. Delegating tasks to others was identified in seven interviews, had three artifacts, and a frequency count 24.
3. Scheduling priorities was identified in eight interviews, had 11 artifacts, and a frequency count of 67.

Key Finding: Long-Term Goals

1. Aligning department goals with district goals was identified in six interviews, had 13 artifacts, and a frequency count of 16.
2. Engaging in backwards mapping was identified in seven interviews, had 13 artifacts, and a frequency count of 21.
3. Achieving goals together was identified in eight interviews, had 14 artifacts, and a frequency count of 32.

Key Finding: Resilience

1. Being a reflective practitioner was identified in eight interviews, had one artifact, and a frequency count of 25.
2. Demonstrating hardiness during stressful situations was identified in seven interviews, had zero artifacts, and had a frequency count of 16.
3. Finding balance was identified in eight interviews, had 15 artifacts, and a frequency count of 33.

Key Finding: Excellence Versus Perfection

1. Valuing a growth mindset was identified in seven interviews, had 14 artifacts, and a frequency count of 37.
2. Seeking feedback from others was identified in seven interviews, had five artifacts, and a frequency count of 15.
3. Pausing to reevaluate the current reality was identified in seven interviews, had one artifact, and a frequency count of 21.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to identify and describe how exemplary directors of special education use five principles associated with grit (courage, conscientiousness, long-term goals, resilience, and excellence versus perfection) to accomplish extraordinary results in their organization. Eight semistructured interviews were conducted with exemplary directors of special education. Artifacts that demonstrated the five principles associated with grit were collected and used in the data analysis to triangulate the data.

Chapter IV addressed the data and the findings as they related to the five research questions. Fifteen major themes were identified from the coding of the interviews. The themes identified and high frequency counts demonstrated the way in which the eight exemplary directors of special education interviewed use the five principles associated with grit to achieve extraordinary results in their organizations. Chapter V of this study provides a summary of the major findings, conclusions, implications for action, and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview

The purpose of the phenomenological study was to examine the ways in which exemplary directors of special education use the five principles of grit (courage, conscientiousness, long-term goals, resilience, and excellence versus perfection) to accomplish extraordinary results in their organizations. Chapter V begins with the study's purpose statement and research questions. This is followed by a review of the research methodology, data collection procedures, and the population sample. The chapter then presents an analysis of the data collected from the semistructured interviews and artifacts collected. The analysis revealed 15 major themes from the five research questions. Chapter V includes the conclusions, implications for action, and recommendations for future action. The chapter concludes with final remarks and reflections.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify and describe how exemplary directors of special education use five principles associated with grit (courage, conscientiousness, long-term goals, resilience, and excellence versus perfection) to accomplish extraordinary results in their organization.

Research Questions

1. How do exemplary directors of special education use courage to accomplish extraordinary results?
2. How do exemplary directors of special education use conscientiousness to accomplish extraordinary results?

3. How do exemplary directors of special education use long-term goals to accomplish extraordinary results?
4. How do exemplary directors of special education use resilience to accomplish extraordinary results?
5. How do exemplary directors of special education use excellence versus perfection to accomplish extraordinary results?

Methodology

The methodology for this study was a qualitative research design studying how exemplary directors of special education use the five principles of grit (courage, conscientiousness, long-term goals, resilience, and excellence versus perfection) to accomplish extraordinary results in their organizations. Qualitative research gathers data on naturally occurring phenomena through the use of observations, interviews, field notes, and artifacts to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences being studied (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patten & Newhart, 2018). The qualitative research design used in this study encompassed a phenomenological model. A phenomenological model is the study of how individuals make sense of a particular experience, including how they perceive and understand the experience (McMillian & Schumacher, 2010; Neubauer, et al. 2019). According to Patton (2015), a phenomenological model “aims at getting a deeper understanding of the nature of the meaning of our everyday experience” (p. 115). Specifically, the researcher studied the lived experiences of exemplary directors of special education and how they use the five principles associated with grit (courage, conscientiousness, long-term goals, resilience, and excellence versus perfection) to accomplish extraordinary results in their organizations.

Data for this study were collected through semistructured interviews conducted using Google Meet and through the collection of artifacts provided by the study participants. The interview protocol consisted of 10 semistructured open-ended interview questions along with two follow-up probes for each question. The interview questions and probes were developed by the thematic team of peer researchers under the guidance of three faculty members. Interview participants who consented to participate in the study were provided with information about the study including an informed consent document (see Appendix B), Research Participant's Bill of Rights (see Appendix I), and a copy of the interview questions that included a definition of each grit principle (see Appendix C). The interviews were scheduled by providing each participant with a Google calendar invite, and the interviews were conducted using the Google Meet platform. All interviews were recorded and transcribed using Scribbl. All recorded interviews were stored with an account that was password protected.

During the interviews, I followed the interview script as designed by the thematic research team. Follow-up questions were asked to elicit additional details or to provide clarification to a participant's response. Participants were provided a copy of the interview transcript to review for accuracy. In addition to the interview data, artifacts were collected from the eight participants to further demonstrate how each uses the five grit principles to accomplish extraordinary results in their organizations. For this study, a peer researcher reviewed the coding of one interview, which was equal to 13% of the interview data. This review yielded a standard 80% minimum agreement.

Population

The population for this study was exemplary directors of special education working in public schools. Based on the data from the National Center for Education Statistics (n.d.), there are 98,507 operating school districts in the United States, each of which employs a director of special education.

Sample

According to Patten and Newhart (2018), populations are often too large to sample every person; therefore, it is more efficient to study a subset of the population of interest. McMillian and Schumacher (2010) noted that a sample is the subset of the population from whom the data are collected and the researcher wishes to generalize the results. The sample for this study included eight exemplary directors of special education within the state of California employed in the position for at least 3 years.

Sampling Procedure

I implemented criterion sampling for this study. Patton (2015) noted that criterion sampling is chosen when a researcher wishes to study all cases that meet a specific criterion of importance. The criteria for the population of this study were individuals who:

1. Are directors of special education
2. Are located in California
3. Have at least 3 years in the current position
4. Meet at least three of the four criteria:
 - a. Recognition by peers
 - b. Recommended by one or more recognized regional executive leaders

- c. Have memberships in professional organizations in their field
- d. Have presented articles, papers, or published materials at conferences

Furthermore, purposive sampling was used to select the interview participants. I worked with my committee to identify candidates and secure their participation in the study.

Table 4 (repeated here for ease of reference) delineates how the participants met the established criteria for participation.

Table 4

Study Participant Criteria

Criteria	Participant							
	D1	D2	D3	D4	D5	D6	D7	D8
Director of special education	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Located in California	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Has at least 3 years in the current position	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Recognized by peers	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Recommended by one or more recognized regional executive leaders	x		x	x	x		x	x
Membership in professional organizations in their field	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Articles, papers, or published materials presented at conferences		x				x	x	x

Major Findings

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify and describe how exemplary directors of special education use five principles associated with grit (courage, conscientiousness, long-term goals, resilience, and excellence versus perfection) to accomplish extraordinary results in their organization. From the 15 key findings in

Chapter IV, six major findings were identified in relation to the research questions. The major findings are directly related to the research questions of how exemplary directors of special education use the five principles of grit (courage, conscientiousness, long-term goals, resilience, and excellence versus perfection) to accomplish extraordinary results in their organizations. The major findings are explored in detail in the following sections.

Research Question 1

The first research question asked, “How do exemplary directors of special education use courage to accomplish extraordinary results?”

Major Finding 1: Knowing One’s Purpose Helps Leaders Do What is Right for Students

Courage serves as an ethical principle and guidepost that helps individuals make the right choice (H. Harris, 1999; While et al., 2016). According to Duckworth (2016), grit prevails when people have the courage to keep going in the face of difficulty or doubt. The courage to make ethical decisions about what is right for students in the face of opposition or adversity was demonstrated in the responses of all eight exemplary directors of special education with 40 frequency mentions. The directors of special education interviewed emphasized the importance of staying committed to the right work, advocating for students in the face of opposition, and allowing one’s values to guide the decision making process. Participants further emphasized that courage comes from knowing one’s purpose when making decisions that may not be accepted by all. According to Kempster et al. (2011), purpose is linked to leadership and the ability to provide followers with a common direction. When individuals have purpose, the desire to help others increases (Duckworth, 2016).

Research Question 2

The second research question asked, “How do exemplary directors of special education use conscientiousness to accomplish extraordinary results?”

Major Finding 2: Prioritizing Is Critical to Staying Organized, Meeting Deadlines, and Building Relationships

The role of the director of special education is multifaceted, complex, and challenging requiring the need to juggle a variety of competing demands that can become time-consuming (Hussey et al., 2019; Luckner & Movahedazarhouligh, 2019). All eight exemplary directors of special education stated the importance of prioritizing and calendaring events as critical to staying organized, meeting deadlines, and being viewed as reliable by others. A total of 78 references to prioritizing appointments and deadlines was cited in the interviews and artifacts collected. This was the largest frequency of themes in Research Question 2 and the highest frequency of themes for the study. Individuals high in conscientiousness have been found to be hardworking, dependable, organized, responsible, industrious, and achievement oriented (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Roberts et al., 2012). Furthermore, participants also emphasized that when prioritizing tasks, putting people at the forefront was the most important. According to Heifetz and Linksy (2017), successful leaders who get results and move their organizations forward place emphasis on connections and personal relationships with others. Leadership is about finding common ground with others and developing relationships upon which to build the future of an organization (Kouzes & Posner, 2016).

Research Question 3

The third research question asked, “How do exemplary directors of special education use long-term goals to accomplish extraordinary results?”

Major Finding 3: Goal-Focused Leadership Increases Goal Attainment

According to Colbert and Witt (2009), effective leaders establish a clear understanding of the organization’s goals and “align employee’s efforts with these goals” (. 790). Furthermore, gritty leaders who set high-level goals elicit perseverance from those within their organization and serve as role models for passion and perseverance (Southwick et al., 2019). Working together to achieve goals was mentioned by all eight exemplary directors of special education with a frequency of 46 mentions. Scheduling weekly meetings to review goals, engaging in robust conversations, and embedding the organization and department goals in evaluations were strategies exemplary directors of special education used to achieve long-term goals. Directors of special education also emphasized the importance of shifting how long-term goal success is both obtained and measured, particularly in the face of challenges, thus refining the process and resulting in better outcomes. According to Duckworth (2016), grit is about holding the same long-term goal over an extended period of time in the face of challenges or setbacks. When leaders set long-term goals that are both meaningful and obtainable, followers are better able to persevere for long periods of time to achieve success (Schimschal & Lomas, 2018).

Research Question 4

The fourth research question asked, “How do exemplary directors of special education use resilience to accomplish extraordinary results?”

Major Finding 4: Importance of Reflective Leadership In the Face of Challenge or Adversity

Duckworth (2016) noted that individuals high in grit live life with hope and the belief that optimistic self-talk leads to perseverance over adversity, ultimately making one stronger. When individuals have a higher level of optimism and hope, they are better able to experience growth in response to stress (Ledesma, 2014). The use of personal reflection as a strategy for remaining resilient in the face of challenges was mentioned by all eight participants with a total of 26 frequency mentions. Specifically, participants shared that positive self-talk, gratefulness, and taking time to breathe and assess the situation were strategies for remaining resilient. Participants also emphasized the importance of checking their ego at the door and maintaining balance as strategies for remaining resilient and overcoming challenges in their professional journey. Resilience is believed to be a combination of hardiness, optimism, adaptability, and self-efficacy, and when experiencing stressful situations, hardy individuals have been found to be better able to persevere through adversity (Ledesma, 2014; Perlis, 2013; Samfira & Palos, 2021).

Major Finding 5: Making Time for Self-Care and Disconnecting Helps Leaders Balance the Demands of Work and Personal Life

All eight exemplary directors of special education identified the importance of engaging in self-care and taking time to disconnect from the job. Although the forms of self-care were subjective for each participant, coping mechanisms such as exercise, spending time with family, taking vacations, and connecting with friends were identified as critical to maintaining a healthy balance between work and personal life. Rice and Liu

(2016) stated when individuals develop the appropriate coping strategies they are more likely to have better social emotional functioning and well-being. Additionally, participants shared making intentional time to step away from the job and disconnect is critical to staying healthy and resilient. According to Ihrme and Sundstrom (2020), healthy and resilient leaders are more effective and positively influence the work environment.

Research Question 5

The fifth research question asked, “How do exemplary directors of special education use excellence versus perfection to accomplish extraordinary results?”

Major Finding 6: A Growth Mindset Helps Leaders Achieve Excellence in Their Organizations

Gritty individuals focus on the improvement of weaknesses through deliberate practice while embracing failure (Duckworth, 2016; Perlis, 2013). According to Kouzes and Posner (2016), leaders who embrace and lead with a growth mindset are more likely to interpret challenges and setbacks as opportunities to improve their skill set. Duckworth (2016) noted a “growth mindset and grit go together” (p.181). Seven exemplary directors of special education emphasized the importance of improving their skills and the skills of their employees through professional development with a total of 51 frequency mentions and represented 55% of the total references. Setting individual goals for employees, providing opportunities for improvement, and supporting individuals to make continual progress were cited as ways in which exemplary leaders prioritized continuous improvement in their organizations as a means of achieving excellence.

Unexpected Findings

The research shows that exemplary directors of special education rely more heavily on the principle of conscientiousness than on the other four principles associated with grit. Based on the research, 27.7% of the participants mentioned specific practices as they align with the principle of conscientiousness. Specifically, of the 15 major findings identified from the research, scheduling priorities had the highest frequency mentions with 78 total references. This finding indicates that to achieve extraordinary results in their organizations, gritty exemplary directors of special education place a higher value on the importance of staying organized to ensure deadlines are met and tasks are prioritized. Furthermore, gritty exemplary directors of special education indicated when establishing priorities, people are always placed at the forefront of their daily commitments.

Conclusions

The major findings of this study, in conjunction with the literature review, yielded four conclusions that describe how exemplary directors of special education use the five principles associated with grit (courage, conscientiousness, long-term goals, resilience, and excellence versus perfection) to accomplish extraordinary results in their organization. The findings of the study allude to the importance of using the five principles of grit to move organizations forward and help individuals succeed.

Conclusion 1: Courage Makes it Possible to Stand Up and Advocate for What Is Best for Students and the Organization

Based on the findings of the study and the supporting literature on directors of special education and students with disabilities, it is concluded that courage makes it

possible for gritty leaders to stand up and advocate for students to improve the educational outcomes for all. Directors of special education are responsible for a myriad of tasks, including ensuring the effective implementation of services to students with disabilities using evidence-based practices (Fan et al., 2019). Research has hypothesized that the foundation of courage is the belief that one does or does not have the ability to do what is morally right (Palanski et al., 2014). When sharing how they push past fear to take necessary action, the courage to stay committed to one's values was evident across all participants. Courageous leaders ethically inspire followers to do what is right by modeling core values (G. Lee & Elliot-Lee, 2016). To engage in tough conversations, challenge the status quo, and speak up in the face of push back from others requires individuals to understand their why and use that as a guiding compass for making difficult decisions. It is this commitment to the why that drives the desire of exemplary directors of special education to persevere and engage in the hard work necessary to improve systems of teaching and learning within organizations. By focusing on what is best for students, exemplary directors of special education are able to implement programs that positively support student growth and development while also meeting the needs of the school and larger community. Given the changing landscape of education, great leaders must be prepared to address the challenges they will face and find the most effective way to improve their organization's outcomes (Brazer et al., 2014; Landis et al., 2014; Valldeneu et al., 2013).

Conclusion 2: Conscientiousness is Enhanced by Engaging in Goal-focused Leadership

According to Wilmot and Ones (2019), there exists a link between conscientiousness and brain networks that is thought to be responsible for the prioritization of goals. Thus, it is concluded that when leaders clarify the goals of the organization and set the direction for meeting those goals, employee conscientiousness is enhanced (Colbert & Witt, 2009). Goal-focused leadership is thought to trigger facets of conscientiousness such as dependability, achievement, and meticulousness, which lead to enhanced job performance. All eight exemplary directors of special education noted the importance of working within teams to identify long-term goals that specifically address the needs of students with disabilities, such as the development of inclusive programs, implementing coteaching models of instruction, defining the entry and exit criteria for special education programs, and improving CAASPP scores.

Furthermore, the directors of special education emphasized the importance of working with teams to align department goals with districtwide goals to ensure a unified message among staff, families, and the larger community. In the interviews and transcripts, the directors of special education were able to clearly articulate the importance of engaging in ongoing, robust, conversations with their teams about systems of related support and ways to measure goal attainment. Strategies such as working collaboratively with teams to determine the most appropriate goals, setting aside time during weekly meetings to discuss goals, embedding goals in daily work tasks and evaluations, and shifting the mindset of followers to build capacity were strategies exemplary directors of special education emphasized as necessary to enhance

perseverance and goal achievement. Perlis (2013) noted that the commitment required to meet long-term goals must have a purpose, and it is this purpose that cultivates an individual's drive, passion, sustainability, stamina and grit.

Conclusion 3: Optimism and Work-Life Balance Builds Resilient Leaders

Resilient individuals are able to use optimism and creativity paired with self-confidence to assess stressful situations and respond accordingly (Perlis, 2013). Based on the findings of this study, it is concluded that resilience is important to the work of exemplary directors of special education. Directors of special education work in a field that requires the ability to juggle many competing demands, which can become time consuming. When examining their leadership practices in relation to the principle of resilience, all eight directors of special education consistently referred to finding ways to remain optimistic while also stressing the importance of engaging in activities outside of their work environment.

Participants emphasized the use of coping strategies such as gratitude, engaging in mindful moments, seeking feedback from others, taking time for reflection, focusing on family, getting adequate sleep, and engaging in some form of daily physical activity. Of the strategies identified by the participants, the importance of engaging in daily physical activity was noted by all eight directors of special education as critical to ensuring one was both physically and mentally ready to serve and help others. Participants also indicated that their work can be extremely challenging, and being willing to be vulnerable and open to learning served as ways to not only embrace the lessons learned during stressful times but also recover and make the necessary changes to move their organizations forward. Perlis (2013) noted that resilience is equal to hardiness

and is the element that helps individuals persevere despite obstacles in their path. Leaders who are resilient are more adaptive and are believed to contribute to more resilient organizations (Rice & Liu, 2016).

Conclusion 4: Growth Minded Leaders Believe In the Power of Continuous Improvement

Based on the research findings, seven exemplary directors of special education interviewed indicated they do not believe in perfection or seek perfection in themselves or in others. Rather, based upon the findings, it is concluded that participants believe in the power of a growth mindset as a way to move their organizations forward and meet their goals. Participants referenced the importance of making learning a habit and a regular part of their organization by embedding the time for learning within their departmental activities and encouraging staff to do the same when visiting and supporting school sites. According to Kouzes and Posner (2016), the best leaders are those individuals who engage in continual learning opportunities. Directors of special education also indicated that they view their role as one that supports the ongoing growth of school leaders and special education staff through strategies such as professional development, training, and coaching. Key to supporting ongoing growth, participants noted, is having a plan to measure growth and ensuring staff have what they need to get the job done. According to Perlis (2013), individuals high in grit do not seek perfection because the quest to be perfect is often unforgiving and inflexible. Rather, gritty leaders lead in ways that make improvement a habit for themselves and for their organization (Krial, 2020).

Implications for Action

This study provided insights into the lived experiences of eight directors of special education as they related to the five principles associated with grit (courage, conscientiousness, long-term goals, resilience, and excellence versus perfection) as identified by Perlis (2013). The key findings and conclusions resulted in the following implications for action to improve the outcomes of directors of special education.

Implication for Action 1: Professional Development Training Targeting the Development of Grit

The role of the director of special education is unique. Directors of special education are typically the only district administrators with the specific knowledge and skills needed to ensure special education programs are in compliance with the law, are equitable, and provide students with disabilities high quality instruction in the least restrictive environment. Their role also includes the skills necessary to successfully collaborate across disciplines with other educational departments to ensure academic achievement for all. To accomplish these tasks successfully requires directors of special education to utilize the principles associated with grit identified by Perlis (2013). Therefore, it is recommended that districts set aside funding to provide directors of special education ongoing professional development opportunities focused on growing their grit. Specifically, training should focus on helping directors of special education learn how to:

- Identify their why and their passions involving special education,

- Find ways to create shared meaning and deepen ties with their staff by engaging them in activities that help them identify their passions involving special education,
- Work within teams to establish goals that not only target areas of need but also engage the interest and passion of staff to encourage perseverance,
- Schedule protected times for teams to come together to engage in frequent, robust conversations about systems of support and goal measurement to ensure goals are met or adjusted accordingly, and
- Create opportunities of ongoing learning for themselves and their teams.

Implication for Action 2: Professional Development and Training for Directors of Special Education with a Focus on Advocating for Students

Today's directors of special education are faced with a myriad of responsibilities for ensuring the effective implementation of services to students with disabilities, requiring them to demonstrate a high degree of ethical decision-making. Research shows that the demonstration of ethical decision-making was rated as one of the most important skills for directors of special education (Fan et al., 2019). At times, ethical decision-making may require directors of special education to advocate for students and special education programs, challenging the status quo in the face of push back from peers and colleagues. Directors of special education must know their purpose and have the courage to act on their values to do what they believe is right for students. It is this why and sense of purpose that directors of special education can use as a compass for making ethical decisions as they advocated for students and programs. Therefore, it is recommended that districts provide directors of special education, and other district leaders, professional

development and training on how to identify their why and give them time to practice implementing their values and receive feedback. Programs such as Giving Voice to Values, developed by the Virginia Darden School of Business, offer online courses that focus on teaching individuals how to be more ethical. The program provides opportunities for individuals to identify situations in which ethics may be tested, learn how to anticipate their responses, and provide opportunities for them to practice engaging in implementing values with peers. This type of professional development and training would help directors of special education develop their grittiness by giving them the skills necessary to make courageous decisions about what is right for students and feel confident in acting upon those decisions to move their organization's forward.

Implication for Action 3: Course Work on Stress and Time Management That Is Built Into Leadership Preparation Programs

Given the complex roles and responsibilities that directors of special education are tasked with, their role can be time consuming, involving working long hours to ensure the job gets done. The prioritization of tasks and leaving time for self-care is important to ensure directors of special education are able to complete their job while giving the best of themselves to others. Current administrative leadership preparation programs focus on courses such developing and supporting instructional programs and teachers, supervision, and fiscal and safety management. Courses on how to manage competing demands and making time for engagement in self-care activities are noticeably absent. Therefore, it is recommended that administrative leadership programs build in content on stress and time management into current coursework. Online programs such as the Niroga Institute offer self-paced courses, personalized tools, and virtual applications with resources on how to

develop greater stress resilience, emotional regulation, and engage in mindful leadership. Embedding content specifically addressing stress and time management would ensure directors of special education are equipped with the skills necessary to make sure they know how to prioritize tasks and take care of themselves so they can support and care for those they lead.

Implication for Action 4: Publication of Findings

To increase the breadth and depth of knowledge about how leaders use the five principles associated with grit, it is recommended that the findings of this research in conjunction with the findings from the other nine peer researchers be used to create articles for publication. Additionally, the research findings from the thematic team can be used to develop presentations for conferences and incorporated into leadership professional development training programs. Specifically, the information developed for leadership training programs can be presented at induction programs that target new administrators with the goal of providing them with strategies to develop and grow their grit.

Recommendations for Further Research

The phenomenological study explored how exemplary directors of special education used the five principles associated with grit (courage, conscientiousness, long-term goals, resilience, and excellence versus perfection) to accomplish extraordinary results in their organization. Based on the findings of this study and the limited research on directors of special education, further research is recommended.

Recommendation 1

This study was limited to eight directors of special education working in public schools in California. It is recommended that this study be replicated to target a larger population of directors of special education across the United States. Additional research into how directors of special education use the principles of grit will provide valuable information and insight into effective leadership practices.

Recommendation 2

This study focused specifically on the lived experiences of directors of special education. Research should be conducted examining the lived experiences of other district leaders working in special education, including program specialists, coordinators, and assistant superintendents, each of whom affects the delivery of instruction to students with disabilities. Results could be compared to see how each type of special education administrator uses the principles of grit to accomplish extraordinary results.

Recommendation 3

It is recommended that this study be replicated with directors of special education with 5 or more years of experience in the field. The criteria for this study was a minimum of 3 years of experience. Because of the high demands of the job, the tenure for many directors of special education is 5 years or fewer. Therefore, exploring the experiences of directors of special education who have worked in the field for a longer period of time will help researchers identify whether the length of tenure is associated with the ability to access and use the principles associated with grit. Additionally, the information gathered will provide insight into what is needed to help retain exemplary special education leadership personnel for longer periods of time.

Recommendation 4

The findings of this study indicated that self-care plays a role in the success of exemplary directors of special education. It is recommended that a mixed methods study be conducted to analyze the effects of different self-care strategies on the success of directors of special education. Further research can provide insight into the types of self-care strategies that are the most effective for helping individuals improve their mental, emotional, and physical health and the impact these strategies have on their success.

Recommendation 5

This study did not control for the gender of the directors of special education interviewed. Research should be conducted on the lived experiences of male, female, and nonbinary directors of special education. The findings from this research could be compared to each other to determine whether gender has any implication on the use of the five principles associated with grit to accomplish extraordinary results.

Recommendation 6

Considering how gritty the participants were, another area of focus for future research could include an investigation into how grit is developed. Research exploring the experiences of directors of special education leading up to their directorship that allowed them to develop grit could serve to guide training or mentoring programs. Furthermore, the information gathered from this research could help inform districts about what is needed to recruit, support, and retain expert directors of special education.

Recommendation 7

The findings of this study focused specifically on directors of special education. This study should be replicated to investigate how public school principals use the

principles associated with grit as they relate to working with students with disabilities and their English Language learner population. The findings from this research could help to identify the specific supports needed to design high-quality instructional programs.

Concluding Remarks and Reflection

The study of how directors of special education use the principles associated with grit to accomplish extraordinary results in their organizations was not only fascinating, but also a joy for me to complete. The stories, ideas, and strategies that were shared by each of the participants who were interviewed provided a deeper insight into the challenges they face in their role serving students with disabilities as well as their joys and successes. Serving in the educational field for over 20 years, my opinion is that directors of special education have one of the most difficult, important, complex, and time consuming jobs in K-12 education. Learning more about how they accomplish results in their districts will help to inform my role as a school site leader and serve as a guiding compass when I move forward in my career.

The position of director of special education is not for the faint of heart. For many years, their responsibilities have focused on identifying students with disabilities and ensuring programs and services complied with the law. Much about their role, however, has changed. This study indicated that using the principles associated with grit is important to becoming a transformational leader and important in leading teams successfully. Although the exemplary directors of special education in this study clearly communicated that the job was challenging and oftentimes exhausting, they also reflected on the satisfaction they receive in seeing students and staff succeed. This satisfaction is what continues to propel them in the face of challenges to persevere. Furthermore, they

unanimously shared that passion for the job, purposeful long-term goal planning, self-care, and ongoing learning were essential to their success.

The five principles associated with grit discussed in this study lay the foundation for helping directors of special education move their organizations forward and engage in work that is both purposeful and meaningful to themselves and others. Throughout this dissertation process, and in my role as a school site leader, I am continually reminded how grit can help me to stay true to my passions and persevere when the things are difficult. As a leader, I am learning how to model these skills for my staff in the hope that they too can grow their grit. As I look toward the future and advancing my career within the field of special education, engaging in reflection about what I have learned from this study will be critical to maintaining my passion for students with disabilities and will drive my desire and determination to improve my skills as a transformational leader.

Successful leadership takes grit. Grit, however, is more than just passion and perseverance for long-term goals. Grit is the courage to follow your why and do it with conviction and courage because it is what is right for students. Grit is maintaining balance between work and home, taking care of yourself so you have what it takes to serve others. Grit is modeling a growth mindset and encouraging others to engage in continuous improvement. Finally, grit is that desire and ability to build and cultivate relationships through the development of shared meaning. Each of these principles associated with grit was found to help directors of special education set, work towards, and meet the goals they set for themselves and their organizations. The directors of special education who participated in this study exemplify the five principles associated

with grit and in doing so, they have and, I anticipate, will continue to achieve extraordinary results in their organization.

REFERENCES

- Amanchukwu, R. N., Stanley, G. J., & Ololube, N. P. (2015). A review of leadership theories, principles, and styles and their relevance to educational management. *Management*, 5(1), 6–14.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/283081945_A_Review_of_Leadership_Theories_Principles_and_Styles_and_Their_Relevance_to_Educational_Management
- Anderson, L. A., & Anderson, D. (2010). *The change leader's roadmap: How to navigate your organization's transformation* (2nd ed.). Pfeiffer.
- Anderson, M. (2017). Transformational leadership in education: A review of existing literature. *International Social Science Review*, 93(1), 1–13.
- Arias, A. E. (2017). *Grit attitudes demonstrated by school superintendents in California urban school settings* (Publication No. 10599929) [Doctoral dissertation, Pepperdine University]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.
- Ashbaker, B. Y. (2011). History of legal and legislative acts concerned with special education. In A. F. Rotatori, F. E. Obiakor, & J. P. Bakken, *History of special education* (pp. 21–45). Emerald Group Publishing.
- Babalola, M, Bligh, M. C., Ogunfowora, B., Guo, L., & Garba, O. A. (2017). The mind is willing, but the situation constrains: Why and when leader conscientiousness relates to ethical leadership. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 155, 75–89.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-017-3524-4>

- Baker, B. D., Green, P. C. III, & Ramsey, M. J. (2018). Financing education for children with special needs. In J. B. Crockett, B. Billingsley, & M. L. Boscardin (Eds.), *Handbook of leadership and administration for special education* (2nd ed., pp. 116–133). Routledge.
- Bakken, J. P., O'Brian, M., & Shelden, D. L. (2006). Changing roles of special education administrators: Impact on multicultural learners. *Educational Considerations*, 34(1), 3–8.
- Barrick, M. R., & Mount, M. K. (1991). The big five personality dimensions and job performance: A meta-analysis. *Personal Psychology*, 44(1), 1–25.
- Bettini, E., Benedict, A., Thomas, R., Kimerling, J., Choi, N., & McLeskey, J. (2017). Cultivating a community of effective special education teachers: Local special education administrators' roles. *Remedial and Special Education*, 38(2), 111–126.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0741932516664790>
- Billingsley, B., McLeskey, J., & Crockett, J. B. (2018). Conceptualizing principal leadership for effective inclusive schools. In J. B. Crockett, B. Billingsley, & M. L. Boscardin (Eds.), *Handbook of leadership and administration for special education* (2nd ed., pp. 306–332). Routledge.
- Blanchett, W. J., Mumford, V., & Beachum, F. (2005). Urban school failure and disproportionality in a post-Brown era: Benign neglect of the constitutional rights of students of color. *Remedial and Special Education*, 26(2), 70–81.
- Bolden, R. (2011). Distributed leadership in organizations: A review of theory and research. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 13, 251–269.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2370.2011.00306.x>

- Boscardin, M. L., & Lashley, C. (2018). Expanding the leadership framework to support socially just special education policy, preparation, and standards. In J. B. Crockett, B. Billingsley, & M. L. Boscardin (Eds.), *Handbook of leadership and administration for special education* (2nd ed., pp. 39–59). Routledge.
- Boscardin, M. L., Weir, K., & Kusek, C. (2010). A national study of state credentialing requirements for administrators of special education. *Journal of Special Education Leadership*, 23(2), 61–75.
<https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se/sr/cefspeced.asp>
- Brazer, S. D., Kruse, S. D., & Conley, S. (2014). Organizational theory and leadership navigation. *Journal of Research on Leadership Education*, 9(3), 254–272.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1942775114532640>
- Burns, B. M. (1985). Leadership: Good, better, best. *Organizational Dynamics*, 13(3), 26–40. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0090-2616\(85\)90028-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/0090-2616(85)90028-2)
- Buchanan, K. H., & Kern, M. L. (2017). The benefit of mindset: The psychology of contribution and everyday leadership. *International Journal of Writing*, 7(1), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.5502/ijw.v7i.538>
- Burrello, L. C., & Zadnik, D. J. (1986). Critical success factors of special education administrators. *The Journal of Special Education Leadership*, 20(3), 367–377.
- California Department of Education. (n.d.). California special education local plan areas.
<https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se/as/caselpas.asp>
- California Department of Education. (2021). Special education: CalEd facts.
<https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se/sr/cefspeced.asp>

- California Department of Education. (2022, April 19). List of school districts.
<https://www.cde.ca.gov/re/lr/do/schooldistrictlist.asp>
- Casteel, A., & Bridier, N. L. (2021). Describing populations and samples in doctoral student research. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies*, *16*, 339–362.
<https://doi.org/10.28945/4766>
- Caza, A., & Posner, B. Z. (2018). How and when does grit influence leaders' behavior? *Leadership and Organization Development Journal*, *40*(1), 124–134.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/LOD-J06-2018-0209>
- Christopoulou, M., Lakioti, A., Pezirkianidis, C., Karakasidou, E., & Stalikas, A. (2018). The role of grit in education: A systematic review. *Psychology*, *9*, 2951–2971.
<https://doi.org/10.4236/psych.2018.915171>
- Colbert, A. E., & Witt, L. A. (2009). The role of goal-focused leadership in enabling the expression of conscientiousness. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *94*(3), 790–796.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/a0014187>
- Connolly, M., James, C., & Fertig, M. (2017). The difference between educational management and educational leadership and the importance of educational responsibility. *Educational Management, Administration, and Leadership*, *47*(4), 504–519. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143217745880>
- Cook, B. G., Haggerty, N. K., & Smith, G. J. (2018). Leadership and instruction: Evidence-based practices in special education. In J. B. Crockett, B. Billingsley, & M. L. Boscardin. (Eds.), *Handbook of leadership and administration for special education* (2nd ed., pp. 353–370). Routledge.

- Cook, B. G., & Schirmer, B. R. (2003). What is special about special education? Overview and analysis. *Journal of Special Education, 37*(3), 200–205.
- Cornett J., & Knackstedt, K. M. (2020). Original sin(s): Lesson from the US model of special education and an opportunity for leaders. *Journal of Educational Administration, 58*(5), 507–520. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JEA-10-2019-0175>
- Credé, M. (2018). What shall we do about grit? A critical review of what we know and what we don't know. *Educational Researcher, 47*(9), 606–611. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X18801322>
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Crockett, J. B. (2019). The preparation of leaders for special education in the twenty-first century. In J. B. Crockett, B. Billingsley, & M. L. Boscardin (Eds.), *Handbook of leadership and administration for special education* (2nd ed., pp. 60–78). Routledge.
- Daniëls, E., Hondeghem, A., & Dochy, F. (2019). A review on leadership and leadership development in educational settings. *Educational Research Review, 27*, 110–125. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2019.02.003>
- Danner, D., Lechner, C. M., & Rammstedt, B. (2019). A cross-national perspective on the associations of grit with career success. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education, 50*(2), 185–201. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2019.1617110>

- Day, D. V., & Antonakis, J. (2018). *The nature of leadership* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Disabato, D. J., Goodman, F. R., & Kashdan, T. B. (2018). Is grit relevant to well-being and strengths? Evidence across the globe for separating perseverance of effort and consistency of interests. *Journal of Personality*, *87*(2), 194–211.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/jopy.12382>
- Dixson, D. D. (2020). How hope measures up: Hope predicts school variables beyond growth mindset and school belonging. *Current Psychology*, *41*(7), 4612–4624.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-020-00975-y>
- Duckworth, A. (2016). *Grit: The power of passion and perseverance*. Scribner.
- Duckworth, A., & Gross, J. J. (2014). Self-control and grit: Related but separable determinants of success. *Current Direction in Psychological Science*, *23*(5), 319–325. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721414541462>
- Duckworth, A. L., & Kern, M. I. (2011). A meta-analysis of the convergent validity of self-control measures. *Journal of Research in Personality*, *24*(3), 259–268.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrp.2011.02.004>
- Duckworth, A. L., Peterson, C., Matthews, M. D., & Kelly, D. R. (2007). Grit: Perseverance and passion for long-term goals. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *92*(6), 1087–1101. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.92.6.1087>
- Duckworth, A. L., & Quinn, P. D. (2009). Development and validation of the short grit scale (grit-s). *Journal of Personality Assessment*, *9*(2), 166–174.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00223890802634290>
- Dudley-Marling, C., & Burns, M. B. (2014). Two perspectives on inclusion in the United States. *Global Educational Review*, *1*(1), 14–31.

- Dweck, C. S. (2016). *Mindset: The new psychology of success*. Ballantine Books.
- Elliot, V. (2018). Thinking about the coding process in qualitative data analysis. *The Qualitative Report*, 23(11), 2850–2861.
- Eskreis-Winkler, L., Schulman, E. P., Beal, S. A., & Duckworth, A. L. (2014). The grit effect: Predicting retention in the military, the workplace, school and marriage. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 5(36), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2014.00036>
- Esteves, K. J., & Rao, S. (2008). The evolution of special education. *Scholarship and Professional Work-Education*, 72. 1–3.
https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/coe_papers/72
- Fan, C. H., Gallup, J. L., Bocanegra, J. O., & Wu, I. C. (2019). Using the CEC advanced preparation standards for special education administration to examine competencies for special education directors. *Journal of Special Educational Leadership*, 32(1), 39–56.
- Farkas, G., Morgan, P. L., Hillemeier, M. M., Mitchell, C., & Woods, A. D. (2020). District-level achievement gaps explain Black and Hispanic overrepresentation in special education. *Exceptional Children*, 86(4), 374–392.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0014402919893695>
- Francisco, M. P. B., Hartman, M., & Wang, Y. (2020). Inclusion and special education. *Education Sciences*, 10(9), 238. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci10090238>
- Fullan, M. (2014). *The principal: Three keys to maximizing impact*. Jossey-Bass.
- Fullan, M. (2019). *Numance: Why some leaders succeed and others fail*. Corwin.

- Fullan, M. (2020a). The nature of leadership is changing. *European Journal of Educational Research Development & Policy*, 55(2), 139–142.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/ejed.12388>
- Fullan, M. (2020b). *Leading in a culture of change* (2nd ed.). Jossey-Bass.
- Gaudreau, P., Schllenberg, B. J. I., Gareau, A., Klajic, K., & Manoni-Millar, S. (2022). Because excellencism is more than good enough: On the need to distinguish the pursuit of excellence from the pursuit of perfection. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology: Personality Processes and Individual Differences*, 122(6), 1117–1145. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pspp0000411>
- Georgoulas-Sherry, V., & Kelly, D. R. (2019). Resilience, grit, and hardiness: Determining the relationship amongst these constructs through structural equation modeling techniques. *Journal of Positive Psychology and Wellbeing*, 3(2), 165–178.
- Gladwell, M. (2008). *Outliers: The story of success*. Back Bay Books.
- Grafton, E., Gillespie, B., & Henderson, S. (2010). Resilience: The power within. *Oncology Nursing Forum*, 37(6), 698–705.
- Grissom, J. A., & Loeb, S. (2011). Triangulating principal effectiveness: How perspectives of parents, teachers, and assistant principals identify the central importance of managerial skills. *American Educational Research Association*, 48(5), 1091–1123.
- Hallinger, P. (2010). Developing instructional leadership. In B. Davies & M. Brundrett (Eds.), *Developing successful leadership* (pp. 61–76). Springer.

- Hallinger, P., & Murphy, J. (1985). Assessing the instructional management behavior of principals. *The Elementary School Journal*, 86(2), 217–247.
- Hammershaimb (2018). Distributed leadership in education. *Journal of Online Higher Education*, 2(1), 1–7.
- Harris, A. (2008). Distributed leadership: According to the evidence. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 46(2), 172–188.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/09578230810863253>
- Harris, H. (1999). Courage as a management virtue. *Business and Professional Ethic Journal*, 18(3/4), 27–46. <https://doi.org/10.5840/bpej1999183/416>
- Heifetz, R., & Linsky, M. (2017). *Leadership on the line: Staying alive through the dangers of change*. Harvard Business Review Press.
- Helland, M. R., & Winston, B. E. (2005). Towards a deeper understanding of hope and leadership. *Journal of Leadership and Organizational Studies*, 12(2), 42–54.
- Hersey, P., Blanchard, K. H., & Natemeyer, W. E., (1979). Situational leadership, perception, and the impact of power. *Group and Organization Management*, 4(4), 418–428. <https://doi.org/10.1177/105960117900400404>
- Hewitt, P. L., Smith, M. M., Ge, Y. L., Mössler, M., & Flett, G. L. (2022). Perfectionism and its role in depressive disorders. *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science*, 54(2), 121–131. <https://doi.org/10.1037/cbs0000306>
- Hill, P. L., Burrow, A. L., & Bronk, K. C. (2014). Persevering with positivity and purpose: An examination of purpose commitment and positive affect as predictors of grit. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 17, 257–269.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-014-9593-5>

- Howard, M. C., & Cogswell, J. E. (2018). The left side of courage: Three exploratory studies on the antecedents of social courage. *Journal of Positive Psychology, 14*(3), 324–340. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2018.1426780>
- Hugh, L. M. (1992). The “big five” personality variable–construct confusion: Description versus prediction. *Human Performance, 5*(1-2), 139–155.
- Hussey, W. J., Thomas, S. H., Anderson, K., & Algozzine, B. (2019). A survey of responsibilities, workload, and satisfaction of administrators of special education. *Journal of Special Education Leadership, 32*(2), 117–128.
- Hutchinson, C. (2021). *A mixed methods study of the impact of state special education funding distribution on the academic gap of students identified with disabilities*. (Publication No. 28772064) [Doctoral dissertation, Gardner-Webb University]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.
- Ihme, K. R. M., & Sundstrom, P. (2021). The mindful shield: The effects of mindfulness training on resilience and leadership in military leaders. *Perspectives in Psychiatric Care, 57*(2), 675–688. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ppc.12594>
- Ireh, M., & Bailey, J. (1999). A study of superintendents: Change leadership styles using the situational leadership model. *American Secondary Education, 27*(4), 22–32.
- Isaac, J. D., Starrett, T. M., & Pemberton, J. B. (2016). Special education administrators’ perceptions of responsibilities and challenges. *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research, 15*(7), 1–19.
- Jachimowicz, J. M., Wihler A., Bailey, E. R., & Galinsky, A. D. (2018). Why grit requires perseverance and passion to positively predict performance. *PNAS, 115*(40), 9980–9985. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1803561115>

- Jackson, J. J., Wood, D., Bogg, T., Walton, K. E., Harms, P. D., & Roberts, B. W. (2010). What do conscientious people do? Development and validation of the behavioral indicators of conscientiousness (BIC). *Journal of Research in Personality, 44*(4), 501–511. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrp.2010.06.005>
- Jonsen, K., & Jehn, K. A. (2009). Using triangulation to validate themes in qualitative studies. *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management, 4*(2), 123–150. <https://doi.org/10.1108/17465640910978391>
- Kearns, J. (2015). *The examination of grit in California superintendents* (Publication No. 3738522) [Doctoral dissertation, Brandman University]. ProQuest Dissertation and Thesis Global.
- Kelly, D. R., Matthews, M., & Bartone, P. T. (2014). Grit and hardiness as predictors of performance among west point cadets. *Military Psychology, 26*(4), 327–342. <http://doi.org/10.1037/mil0000050>
- Kempster, S., Jackson, B., & Conroy, M. (2011). Leadership as purpose: Exploring the role of purpose in leadership practice. *Leadership, 7*(3), 317–334. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1742715011407384>
- Kim, E., Zhang, J., & Sun, X. (2019). Comparison of special education in the United States, Korea, and China. *International Journal of Special Education, 33*(4), 796–814. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1219486.pdf>
- Kiral, E. (2020). Excellent leadership theory in education. *Journal of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, 4*(1), 1–30.

- Kirby, P. C., Paradise, L. V., & King, M. (1992). Extraordinary leaders in education: Understanding transformational leadership. *Journal of Educational Research*, 85, 303–311. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220671.1992.994141130>
- Kober, N., & Rentner, D. S. (2020). *History and evolution of public education in the U.S.* <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED606970.pdf>
- Kouzes, T. K., & Posner, B. (2016). *Learning leadership: The five fundamentals of becoming an exemplary leader*. Wiley.
- Kovach, M. (2018). An examination of leadership theories in business and sport achievement contexts. *Journal of Values-Based Leadership*, 11(14), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.22543/0733.62.1215>
- Landis, E. A., Hill, D., & Harvey, M. R. (2014). A synthesis of leadership theories and styles. *Journal of Management Policy and Practice*, 15(2), 97–100.
- Ledesma, J. (2014). Conceptual frameworks and research models on resilience in leadership. *Sage Open*, 4, 108. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244014545464>
- Lee, G., & Elliott-Lee, D. (2006). *Courage: The backbone of leadership*. Jossey-Bass.
- Lee, T. H., & Duckworth, A. L. (2018). Organizational grit. *Harvard Business Review*, 96(5), 98. <https://hbr.org/2018/09/organizational-grit>
- Leithwood, K., Harris, A., & Hopkins, D. (2019). Seven strong claims about successful school leadership revisited. *School Leadership and Management*, 40(1), 5–22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2019.1596077>
- Legislative Analyst's Office. (2018, February 27). *History of special education funding in California. Budget and policy post*. <https://lao.ca.gov/Publications/Report/3764>

- Legislative Analyst's Office. (2019, November 6). *Overview of special education in California*. <https://lao.ca.gov/Publications/Report/4110>
- Lemons, C. J., Sinclair, A. C., Gesel, S., Danielson, L., & Gandhi, A. G. (2019). Integrating intensive intervention into special education services; Guidance for special education administrators. *Journal of Special Education Leadership, 32*(1), 29–38.
- Lemons, C. J., Vaughn, S., Wexler, J., Kearns, D. M., & Sinclair, A. C. (2018). Envisioning an improved continuum of special education services for students with learning disabilities: Considering intervention intensity. *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice, 33*(3), 1–40.
- Lengyel, L. S., & Vanbergeijk, E. (2021, June). A brief history of special education: Milestones in the first 50 years. *EP Magazine, 25–29*.
<https://www.epmagazine.com/blog/a-brief-history-of-special-education-milestones-in-the-first-50-years-part-i-of-ii>
- Liu, W. C. (2021). Implicit theories of intelligence and achievement goals: A look at students' intrinsic motivation and achievement in mathematics. *Frontiers in Psychology, 12*, 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.593715>
- Luckner, J. L., & Movahedazarhouli, S. (2019). Leadership in special education: Administrators' current challenges in one western state. *Journal of Special Education Leadership, 32*(2), 1–14.
- Marzano, R. L., Waters, T., & McNulty, B. A. (2005). *School leadership that works: From research to results*. ASCD.

- Mason-Williams, L., Bettini, E., Peyton, D., Harvey, A., Rosenberg, M., & Sindelar, P. T. (2020). Rethinking shortages in special education: Making good on the promises of an equal opportunity for students with disabilities. *Teacher Education and Special Education, 43*(1), 45–62. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0888406419880352>
- Maxwell, J. A. (2013). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Mazzetti, G., Vignoli, M., Pertuzziello, G., & Palareti, L. (2019). The harder you are, the healthier you become. May hardiness and engagement explain the relationship between leadership and employee health. *Frontiers in Psychology, 9*, 1–9. [https://doi.org/10.3389.fpsyg.2018.02784](https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.02784)
- McClendon, C., Neugebauer, R. M., & King, A. (2017). Grit, growth mindset, and deliberate practice in online learning. *Journal of Instructional Research, 6*, 8–17.
- McClesky, J. A. (2014). Situational, transformational, and transactional leadership and leadership development. *Journal of Business Studies Quarterly, 5*(4), 117–130.
- McCleskey, J., & Waldron, N. L. (2015). Effective leadership makes schools truly inclusive. *Phi Delta Kappan, 96*(5), 68–73. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0031721715569474>
- McLaughlin, M. J., & Burho, J. (2018). In search of educational equity. In J. B. Crockett, B. Billingsley, & M. L. Boscardin (Eds.), *Handbook of leadership and administration for special education* (2nd ed., pp. 443–457). Routledge.
- McMillan, J. H., & Schumacher, S. (2010). *Research in education: Evidenced-based inquiry* (7th ed.). Pearson.

- Morgan, P. L., Farkas, G., Cook, M., Strassfeld, N. M., Hillemeier, M. M., Pun, W., H., Wang, Y., & Schussler, D. L. (2018). Are Hispanic, Asian, Native American, or language-minority children overrepresented in special education? *Exceptional Children, 84*(3), 261–279. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0014402917748303>
- Muenks, K., Wigfield, A., Yang, J. S., & O’Neal, C. R. (2016). How true is grit? Assessing its relation to high school and college students’ personality characteristics, self-regulation, engagement, and achievement. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 109*(5), 599–620. <https://doi.org/10.1037/edu0000153>
- Murphy, C. R. (2018). Transformation inclusive education: Nine tips to enhance school leader’s ability to effectively lead inclusive special education programs. *Journal of Educational Research and Practice, 8*(1), 87–100. <https://doi.org/10.5590/JERAP.2018.08.1.07>
- National Center for Education Statistics. (n.d.). *Common core of data: America’s public schools*. U.S Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/tables/201920_summary_2.asp
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2022). Students with disabilities. *Condition of education*. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cgg>
- Neubauer, B. E., Witkop, C. T., & Varpio, L. (2019). How phenomenology can help us learn from the experiences of others. *Perspectives on Medical Education, 8*, 90–97. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40037-019-0509-2>
- Noel, J. (2020). *California foundations of education: Educational development within a diverse social history*. Myers Education Press.

- Obiakor, F. E. (2011). Historical and contemporary contexts, challenges, and prospects in the education of students with exceptionalities. In A. F. Rotatori, F. E. Obiakor, & J. P. Bakken, *History of special education* (pp. 363–378). Emerald Group Publishing.
- O'Connor, C., & Joffe, H. (2020). Intercoder reliability in qualitative research: Debates and practical guidelines. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 19*, 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406919899220>
- O'Reilly, C. A., & Pfeffer, J. (2000). *Hidden value: How great companies achieve extraordinary results with ordinary people*. Harvard Business School Press.
- Oronato, M. (2013). Transformational leadership style in the educational sector: An empirical study of corporate managers and educational leaders. *Academy of Leadership Journal, 17*(1), 33–47.
- Osenk, I., Willimason, P., & Wade, T. D. (2020). Does perfectionism or pursuit of excellence contribute to successful learning? A meta-analytic review. *Psychological Assessment, 32*(10), 972–983. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pas0000942>
- Palanski, M. E., Cullen, K. L., Gentry, W. A., & Nichols, C. M. (2014). Virtuous leadership: Exploring the effects of leader courage and behavioral integrity on leader performance and image. *Journal of Business Ethics, 132*, 297–310. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-014-2317-2>
- Parmar, R. S. (2021). Special education representation and rating of school leadership. *Journal for Leadership and Instruction, 20*(1), 9–13. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1302877.pdf>

- Patten, M. L., & Newhart, M. (2018). *Understanding research methods: An overview of the essentials* (10th ed.). Routledge.
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Pazey, B. L., & Yates, J. R. (2018). Conceptual and historical foundations of special education administration. In J. B. Crockett, B. Billingsley, & M. L. Boscardin (Eds.), *Handbook of leadership and administration for special education* (2nd ed., pp. 18–38). Routledge.
- Perlis, M. M. (2013, October 29). 5 characteristics of grit: How many do you have? Forbes. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/margaretperlis/2013/10/29/5-characteristics-of-grit-what-it-is-why-you-need-it-and-do-you-have-it/?sh=d3843b74f7b9>
- Polkinghorne, D. E. (2005). Language and meaning: Data collection in qualitative research. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 52*(2), 137–145.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0167.52.2.137>
- Ponnock, A., Muenks, K., Morell, M., Yang, J. S., Gladstone, J. R., & Wigfield, A. (2020). Grit and conscientiousness: Another jangle fallacy. *Journal of Research in Personality, 89*, 1–5. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrp.2020.104021>
- Pont, B. (2020). A literature review of school leadership policy reforms. *European Journal of Education, 55*, 154–168. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ejed.12398>
- Price, J. H., & Murnan, J. (2004). Research limitations and the necessity of reporting them. *American Journal of Health Education, 35*(2), 66–67.

- Rate, C. R., Clarke, J. A., Lindsay, D. R., & Sternberg, R. J. (2007). Implicit theories of courage. *Journal of Positive Psychology, 2*(2), 80–98.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760701228755>
- Reed, S. (2019). *Special education in California schools: The challenges and solutions from multiple perspectives* [Practice brief]. Policy Analysis for California Education. <https://edpolicyinca.org/publications/special-education-california>
- Rice, V., & Liu, B. (2016). Personal resilience and coping with implications for work. Part 1: A review. *Work, 54*(2), 325–353. <https://doi.org/10.3233/WOR-162300>
- Ris, E. W. (2015). Grit: A short history of a useful concept. *Journal of Educational Controversy, 10*(1), 1–20.
- Roberts, B. W., Lejuez, C., Krueger, R. F., Richards, J. M., & Hill, P. L. (2012). What is conscientiousness and how can it be assessed? *Developmental Psychology, 50*(5), 1315–1330. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0031109>
- Robertson-Kraft, C., & Duckworth, A. L. (2014). True grit: Trait-level perseverance and passion for long-term goals predict effectiveness and retention among novice teachers. *Teachers College Record, 116*(3), 1–27.
- Salend, S. J., & Duhaney, L. M. G. (2011). Historical and philosophical changes in the education of students with exceptionalities. In A. F. Rotatori, F. E. Obiakor, & J. P. Bakken, *History of special education* (pp. 1–20). Emerald Group Publishing.
- Salisu, I., Hashim, N., Mashi, M. S., & Aliyu, H. G. (2019). Perseverance of effort and consistency of interest for entrepreneurial career success: Does resilience matter? *Journal of Entrepreneurship in Emerging Economies, 12*(2), 279–304.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/JEEE-02-2019-0025>

- Samfira, E. M., & Paloş, R. (2021). Teachers' personality, perfectionism, and self-efficacy as predictors for coping strategies based on personal resources. *Frontiers in Psychology, 12*, 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.751930>
- Sari, I. M., Sowiyah, & Hariri, H. (2022). Situational leadership practices in school: A literature review. *International Journal of Current Science Research and Review, 5*(7), 2404–2423. <https://doi.org/10.47191/ijcsrr/V5-i7-22>
- Schermerhorn J. R. (1997). Situation leadership: Conversations with Paul Hersey. *Mid-American Journal of Business, 12*(2), 5–12.
- Schilpzand, P., Heckman, D. R., & Mitchell, T. R. (2015). An inductively generated typology and process model of workplace courage. *Organization Science, 26*(1), 52–77. <https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.2014.0928>
- Schimschal, S. E., & Lomas, T. (2018). Gritty leaders: The impact of grit on positive leadership capacity. *Psychological Reports, 122*(4), 1449–1470. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0033294118785547>
- Schmidt, F. T. C, Nagy, G., Fleckenstein, J., Moller, J., & Retelsdorf, J. (2018). Same same, but different? Relations between facets of conscientiousness and grit. *European Journal of Personality, 32*(6), 705–720. <https://doi.org/10.1002/per.2171>
- Sebastian, J., Allensworth, E., Wiedermann, W., Hochbein, C., & Cunningham, M. (2018). Principal leadership and school performance: An examination of instructional leadership and organizational management. *Leadership and Policy in Schools, 18*(4), 591–613. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15700763.2018.1513151>

- Seguin, C. (2019). A survey of nurse leaders to explore the relationship between grit and measures of success and well-being. *Journal of Nursing Administration, 49*(3), 125–131.
- Shadraconis, S. (2013). Organizational leadership in times of uncertainty: Is transformational leadership the answer? *LUX: A Journal of Transdisciplinary Writing and Research from Claremont Graduate University, 2*(1), 1–15.
<https://doi.org/10.5642/lux.201301.28>
- Skrtic, T. M., & Knackstedt, K. M. (2018). Disability, difference, and justice: Strong democratic leadership for undemocratic times. In J. B. Crockett, B. Billingsley, & M. L. Boscardin (Eds.), *Handbook of leadership and administration for special education* (2nd ed., pp. 148–174). Routledge.
- Southwick, D. A., Tsay, C. J., & Duckworth, A. L. (2019). Grit at work. *Research in Organizational Behavior, 39*, 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.riob.2020.100126>
- Spaulding, L. S., & Keith, D. L. (2010). The history of special education: Lesions from the past, implications for the future. *Faculty Publications and Presentations, 158*.
https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/educ_fac_pubs/158
- Spaulding, L. S., & Pratt, S. M. (2015). A review and analysis of the history of special and disability advocacy in the United States. *American Educational History Journal, 42*(1), 91–109.
- Stein, L. (2016). Schools need leaders - not managers: It's time for a paradigm shift. *Journal of Leadership Education, 15*(2), 21–30.
<https://doi.org/10.12806/V15/I2/I3>

- Sun, A. Q., & Xin, J. F. (2020). School principal's opinions about special education services. *Preventing School Failure: Alternative Education for Children and Youth*, 64(2), 106–115. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1045988X.2019.1681354>
- Tang, Z., Wang, M-T, Guo, J., & Salmela-Aro, K. (2019). Building grit: The longitudinal pathways between mindset, commitment, grit, and academic outcomes. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 48, 850–863. <https://doi.org/10.01007/s10964-019-00998-0>
- Thompson, E., & France, R. G. (2015). Suburban district leadership does matter. *Journal of Leadership and Instruction*, 14(1), 5–8.
- Thurlow, M. L., Quenemoen, R. F., & Lazarus, S. S. (2019). Leadership to improve student outcomes. In J. B. Crockett, B. Billingsley, & M. L. Boscardin (Eds.), *Handbook of leadership and administration for special education* (2nd ed., pp. 5–17). Routledge.
- Trautwein, U., Ludtke, O., Roberts, B. W., Schnyder, I., & Niggli, A. (2009). Different forces, same consequence: Conscientiousness and competence beliefs are independent predictors of academic effort and achievement. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 97(6), 1115–1128. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0017048>
- Tudryn, P., Boscardin, M. L., & Wells, C. (2016). Distributed leadership through the lens of special education leaders. *Journal of Special Education Leadership*, 29(1), 3–22.
- U.S. Department of Education. (2022). A history of the individuals with disabilities education act. <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/IDEA-History>

- Valesky, T. C., & Hirth, M. A. (1992). Survey of the states: Special education knowledge requirement for school administrators. *Exceptional Children*, 58(5), 399–406.
- Valldeneu, M., Tarrats, E., & Ferras, X. (2021). Leadership styles and organizational outcomes: A study across international hubs. *Organization Development Journal*, 39(1), 13–22.
- Van Wart, M. (2013). Lessons from leadership theory and the contemporary challenges of leaders. *Public Administration Review*, 73(4), 553–565.
- Von Culin, K. R., Tsukayama, E., & Duckworth, A. L. (2014). Unpacking grit: Motivational correlates of perseverance and passion for long-term goals. *Journal of Positive Psychology*, 9(4), 306–312.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2014.898320>
- Wallace Foundation. (n.d.). *How district central offices can help lead school improvement*. <https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Documents/how-district-central-offices-can-help-lead-school-improvement.pdf>
- Wang, Z., Li, C., & Li, X. (2017). Resilience, leadership, and work engagement: The mediating role of positive affect. *Social Indicators Research*, 132, 699–708.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-016-1306-5>
- White, P. C., Harvey, T. R., & Fox, S. L. (2016). *The politically intelligent leader: Dealing with the dilemmas of a high-stakes educational environment*. Rowman & Littlefield.

- Wilmot, M. P. & Ones, D. S. (2019). A century of research on conscientiousness at work. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, *116*(46), 23004–23010.
<https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1908430116>
- Wong, A. E., & Vallacher, R. R. (2018). Reciprocal feedback between self-concept and goal pursuit in daily life. *Journal of Personality*, *86*(3), 543–554.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/jopy.12334>
- Woolley, K., & Fishbach, A. (2016). For the fun of it: Harnessing immediate rewards to increase persistence in long-term goals. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *42*(6), 952–966. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jcr/ucv098>
- Yell, M. L., Prince, A. M. T., & Katsiyannis, A. (2022). *M.C. v. Antelope Valley Union High School* (2017): Implication for special educators. *Interventions in School and Clinic*, *57*(4), 274–282. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10534512211024949>
- Yell, M. L., Shriner, J. G., Thomas, S. S., & Katsiyannis, A., (2018). Special education law for leaders and administrators of special education. In J. B. Crockett, B. Billingsley, & M. L. Boscardin (Eds.), *Handbook of leadership and administration for special education* (2nd ed., pp. 60–78). Routledge.
- Yukl, G. (2012). Effective leadership behavior: What we know and what questions need more attention. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, *26*(4), 66–85.
<https://doi.org/10.5465/amp.2012.0088>
- Zaretsky, L., Moreau, L., & Faircloth, S. (2008). Voices from the field: School leadership in special education. *The Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, *54*(2), 161–177.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Synthesis Matrix

Reference	Instructional Leadership	Situational Leadership	Distributed Leadership	Transformational Leadership	Special Education Leadership	Grit	Courage	Conscientiousness	Long-Term Goals	Resilience	Excellence vs Perfection
Amanchukwu et al., 2015		X									
Anderson & Anderson, 2010				X							
Anderson, 2017				X							
Arias, 2017							X	X	X		
Babalola et al., 2017								X			
Bakken et al., 2006					X						
Barrick & Mount, 1991								X			
Bettini et la., 2017					X						
Billingsley, 2011	X										
Billingsley et al., 2018	X										
Bolden, 2011			X								
Boscardian & Lashley, 2018					X						
Buchanan & Kern, 2017					X						
Burello & Zadnik, 1986					X						
Burns, 1985				X							
Caza & Posner, 2018						X			X		
Christopoulou et la., 2018						X					
Colber & Witt, 2009								X			
Crede, 2018						X					
Crockett, 2019					X						
Daniels et al., 2019		X									
Dixson, 2020						X					
Duckworth et al., 2007						X		X	X		
Duckworth & Kern, 2011									X		
Duckworth & Gross, 2014									X		
Duckworth, 2016						X	X		X	X	X
Dweck, 2016						X					
Eskreis-Winkler et al., 2014						X					
Fan et la., 2019					X						
Fullan, 2019				X							
Gaudreau et al., 2022											X
Georgoulas-Sherry & Kelly, 2019									X	X	

Gladweel, 2008									X		
Grafton et al., 2010										X	
Grissom & Loeb, 2011	X										
Hallinger & Murphy, 1985	X										
Hallinger, 2010	X										
Hammershaib, 2018			X								
Harris, 1999							X				
Harris, 2008			X								
Helland & Winston, 2005						X					
Hersey et al., 1979		X									
Hewitt, et al., 2022											X
Hill et al., 2014						X					
Howard & Cogswell, 2018							X	X			
Hugh, 1992											
Hussey et al., 2019					X						
Ihme & Sundstrom, 2021										X	
Ireh & Bailey, 1999		X									
Isaac et al., 2019					X						
Jachimowicz et al., 2018						X					
Kelly et al., 2014						X			X		
Kempster et al., 2011						X					
Kral, 2020											X
Kirby et al., 1992				X							
Ledesma, 2014						X				X	
Lee & Elliott-Lee, 2016							X	X			
Lemons et al., 2019					X						
Liu, 2021						X					
Luckner & Movahedazarhoughligh, 2019					X						
Marzano et al., 2005	X	X									
Mazzetti et al., 2019									X		
McClendon et al, 2017						X					
McClesky, 2014		X									
Muenks et al., 2016						X					
Murphy, 2018				X							
Oronato, 2013				X							
Palanski et al., 2014							X				
Pazey & Yates, 2018					X						
Perlis, 2013						X	X	X	X	X	X
Ponnock et al., 2020								X			
Rate et al., 2007							X				
Rice & Liu, 2016										X	
Ris, 2015						X					
Roberts et al., 2012								X			
Robertson-Kraft & Duckworth, 2014						X					
Salisu et al., 2019						X					
Samfira & Palos, 2021								X			X
Sari et al, 2022		X									

Sebastian et al, 2018	X										
Seguin, 2019						X					
Schermerhorn, 1997		X									
Schlipzand et al., 2015							X				
Schimschal & Lomas, 2018						X			X		
Schmidt et al., 2018								X			
Shadraconis, 2013				X							
Southwick et al., 2019						X		X	X		
Tang et al., 2019					X	X					
Thrulow et al., 2019											
Trautwein et al., 2009								X			
Tudryn et la., 2016			X		X						
Valesky & Hirth, 1992					X						
Von Culin et al., 2014						X					
Wang et al., 2017										X	
White et al., 2016							X				
Wilmot & Ones, 2019								X			
Wooley & Fishbach, 2016									X		
Wong & Vallacher, 2018									X		
Yell et al., 2018					X						
Zaretsky et al., 2008					X						

APPENDIX B

Interview Protocol



Informed Consent

Based on your experience as a **DIRECTOR OF SPECIAL EDUCATION**, you are being asked to participate in a thematic research study conducted by **Maria Moore**, a doctoral candidate from UMASS Global, a nonprofit affiliate of the University of Massachusetts. This Informed Consent document provides important information regarding the purpose of the study, risks to study participants, participant confidentiality, participant consent, benefits to the participant, and important study contact information.

Purpose of the Research:

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to identify and describe how exemplary **DIRECTORS OF SPECIAL EDUCATION** utilize five principles associated with grit (courage, conscientiousness, long-term goals, resilience, and excellence vs. perfection) to accomplish extraordinary results in their organizations.

Responsible Investigator: Maria Moore

By signing below, I understand that:

- a. There are minimal risks associated with participating in this research.
- b. The Researcher(s) will protect my confidentiality by keeping the identifying codes and research materials in a locked file drawer, or password protected electronic data file that is available only to the researcher(s).
- c. The possible benefit of this study to me is that my input may help add to the research regarding the strategies that exemplary leaders use to create personal resiliency.
- d. If I have any questions or concerns about the research, I am free to contact the researcher or the dissertation chairperson. Contact information for both the researcher and dissertation chairperson is listed below.
- e. My participation in this research study is voluntary. I may decide to not participate in the study, and I can withdraw from participation at any time. I understand that there will be no negative consequences should I decide not to

participate or withdraw my participation at any time throughout the study process.

- f. I may decide not to answer particular questions during the interview if I so choose.
- g. The investigator or University may stop the study at any time.
- h. No information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent and all identifiable information will be protected to the limits allowed by law.
- i. If the study design or the use of the data is to be changed, I will be informed, and my consent re-obtained.
- j. I understand that if I have any questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process that cannot be answered by the Researcher or Dissertation Chairperson, I may write or call the Office of the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, UMASS GLOBAL, at 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341- 7641.

Researcher and Dissertation Chair Contact Information:

Please direct all questions or concerns about this research to one of the following:

Researcher Contact Information:

Maria Moore
xxxxxxx@mail.umassglobal.edu
(xxx) xxx-xxxx

Dissertation Chairperson Contact Information:

Dr. Jonathan Greenberg
xxxxxxx@umassglobal.edu

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

By signing below, I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this *Informed Consent* document as well as the *Research Participant's Bill of Rights*. I have read and understand both documents, and hereby consent to participate in the research study and agree to the procedure(s) set forth.

Study Participant's Signature

Date

Researcher's Signature

Date

APPENDIX C

Grit Thematic Interview Script

I would like to start by thanking you for sharing your valuable experiences with me. I know your time is precious and I appreciate your willingness to participate in this interview. Making this personal connection with you will be of great benefit to my research and I truly appreciate your contribution to this study.

My name is _____ and I (brief description of what you do). I'm a doctoral candidate at UMassGlobal (formerly Brandman University) in the area of Organizational Leadership. I'm a part of a team conducting research to describe how exemplary leaders utilize five principles associated with grit (courage, conscientiousness, long-term goals, resilience, and excellence vs. perfection) to accomplish extraordinary results in their organizations.

Our team is conducting approximately 72 interviews with leaders like yourself. Our hope is that the information we gather will provide a clearer picture of what grit is, and how exemplary leaders use principles of grit to lead their organizations to extraordinary accomplishments. Our work also will add to the body of research currently available.

Informed Consent (START RECORDING to obtain verbal consent)

Prior to this interview, you received information concerning the purpose of the research, a copy of the interview questions, UMassGlobal's Participant's Bill of Rights, and the Informed Consent form. After reviewing the protocols, you were offered an opportunity to ask questions concerning the research and the consent process. At that time, you provided verbal consent to be a participant in the interview. For purposes of

verifying your consent would you again provide a verbal yes as to your consent that will be included in the recording of this interview? Thank you.

I will now begin the interview. When our interview is complete, I will stop the recording and conclude our interview session. After your interview is transcribed, you will receive a copy of the complete transcripts to ensure I have accurately captured your thoughts and ideas. Following your review and approval of the transcription, the data will be analyzed along with the data I have collected from the other respondents.

I would like to remind you that any information that is obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential. I will be looking for themes that are present across all of the interviews. In reporting out the data, I will refer to respondents by pseudonyms and not by name, work location, or employer. The digital recording will be erased three years after the publication of the dissertation in accordance with the strict guidelines set forth by the UMassGlobal Institutional Review Board (IRB) whose major function is to protect respondents.

Please remember that anytime during this process you have the right to stop the interview. If you do not understand the questions being asked, please do not hesitate to ask for clarification. Is there anything I can clarify before we begin?

Okay, let's get started, and again, thanks so much for your time.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

Before we begin our interview questions, I want to review the purpose of this study and the five research questions that will be the focus of our interview today.

Purpose Statement:

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify and describe how exemplary leaders (superintendents, principals, city managers, police chiefs, corporate or nonprofit leaders, military leaders, etc.) utilize five principles associated with grit (courage, conscientiousness, long-term goals, resilience, and excellence vs. perfection) to accomplish extraordinary results in their organizations.

Research Questions:

1. How do exemplary leaders use courage to accomplish extraordinary results?
2. How do exemplary leaders use conscientiousness to accomplish extraordinary results?
3. How do exemplary leaders use long-term goals to accomplish extraordinary results?
4. How do exemplary leaders use resilience to accomplish extraordinary results?
5. How do exemplary leaders use excellence vs. perfection to accomplish extraordinary results?

The interview questions will be preceded by a definition of the grit principle that is connected respectively to each of these five research questions.

Note: The phrase *extraordinary results* used in the Purpose Statement and Research Questions is defined as accomplishments where the outcomes are remarkable, surprising, and exceptional; going beyond the standard expectation, not something usual (Hougaard & Carter, 2018; O'Reilly & Pfeffer, 2000).

Interview Questions

The first principle related to grit that I would like to talk about, and which is found in research question one, is **Courage**.

Definition: Courage is the mental, physical, and moral strength to pursue and accomplish a worthy goal despite the presence of danger or fear (Lee, & Elliot-Lee, 2006; Schilpzand, Hekman, and Mitchell, 2008).

Interview Questions #1 and #2

#1. Describe a situation in your organization that required courage in the face of danger or fear to achieve an extraordinary result.

Probing question: Part of being courageous is pushing past fear, how have you personally managed to push past fear to create necessary action?

#2. Leaders often have to choose which challenges to pursue. What causes you, as a leader, to take courageous actions, and what makes you decide not to take action?

Probing question: Was there a time when you regretted not taking action?

We now move to our second principle from research question two, **Conscientiousness**.

Definition: Conscientiousness is a fundamental personality trait that drives the desire and ability to be diligent, organized, achievement-oriented, self-disciplined, and reliable (Perlis, 2013; Jackson et al., 2010).

Interview Questions #3 and #4

#3. All of us are confronted by a variety of competing demands in our jobs. When faced with competing demands, how do you stay organized?

Probing question: How do you minimize distractions during the workday?

#4. There are times when we must make sure the job gets done. Please tell me how you stay self-disciplined to ensure you meet your deadlines.

Probing question: Can you give an example of when being self-disciplined helped you to achieve extraordinary results?

Our third principle from research question three is **Use of Long-Term Goals**.

Definition: Use of Long-term goals reflects utilizing a top-level future outcome that serves as a compass for sustained action, inspiring passion, and consistent focus over long stretches of time (Duckworth, 2007 & Jachimowicz, et. al., 2018).

Interview Questions #5 and #6

#5. How have you used long-term goal setting to achieve extraordinary results in your organization?

Probing question: How do you know when you need to adjust your established goals?

#6. Can you share an example of when you faced challenges while working toward a long-term goal?

Probing question: What did you do to stay focused?

Our fourth principle found in research question four is **Resilience**.

Definition: Resilience is an individual's ability to adapt and recover from stress and adversity while maintaining or returning to a positive mental state of wellbeing despite hardship (Grafton et al., 2010; Rice & Liu, 2016).

Interview Questions #7 and #8

#7. Can you share a story of a time when you had to overcome a stressful work situation; how were you able to return to a positive mental state of wellbeing?

Probing question: What did you learn from this situation?

#8. How do you continue to cultivate resiliency in your professional journey?

Probing question: What are some strategies that you use to boost your physical and/or mental wellbeing?

Our fifth principle in research question five is **Excellence vs. Perfection**.

Definition: Excellence vs. Perfection is a mindset toward fulfilling one's purpose and prioritizing improvement over a lofty ideal that may not be attainable (Duckworth, 2007; Perlis, 2013; Arias, 2017).

Interview Questions #9 and #10

#9. Can you share an example of a time when you prioritized improvement over a lofty ideal?

Probing question: What shaped your mindset towards improvement compared to achieving perfection?

#10. What steps or strategies do you take that help to prioritize continuous improvement?

Probing question: How do you overcome barriers to your work when pursuing improvement or growth?

This concludes the interview questions. I would like to again thank you very much for your time. If you would like, when the results of our research are known, we will send you a copy of our findings.

APPENDIX D

Field-Test Participant Feedback Questionnaire

1. How long did the interview take? Did the time seem to be appropriate?
2. Were the questions clear or were there places when the interviewee was unclear?
3. Were there any words or terms used during the interview that were unclear or confusing?
4. How did you feel during the interview? Comfortable? Nervous? For the observer: how did you perceive the interviewer in regards to the preceding descriptors?
5. Did you feel prepared to conduct the interview? Is there something you could have done to be better prepared? For the observer: how did you perceive the interviewer in regards to the preceding descriptors?
6. What parts of the interview went the most smoothly and why do you think that was the case?
7. Are there parts of the interview that seemed to be awkward and why do you think that was the case?
8. If you were to change any part of the interview, what would it be and how would you change it?
9. What suggestions do you have for improving the overall process?

APPENDIX E

Field-Test Observer Feedback Questionnaire

1. How long did the interview take? Did the time seem to be appropriate?
2. Were the questions clear or were there places when the interviewee was unclear?
3. Were there any words or terms used during the interview that were unclear or confusing?
4. How did you feel during the interview? Comfortable? Nervous? For the observer: how did you perceive the interviewer in regards to the preceding descriptors?
5. Did you feel prepared to conduct the interview? Is there something you could have done to be better prepared? For the observer: how did you perceive the interviewer in regards to the preceding descriptors?
6. What parts of the interview went the most smoothly and why do you think that was the case?
7. Are there parts of the interview that seemed to be awkward and why do you think that was the case?
8. If you were to change any part of the interview, what would it be and how would you change it?
9. What suggestions do you have for improving the overall process?

APPENDIX F

Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) Training



Completion Date 13-May-2021
Expiration Date N/A
Record ID 42483808

This is to certify that:

Maria Moore

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME.

Human Subjects Research
(Curriculum Group)
Social-Behavioral-Educational Researchers
(Course Learner Group)
1 - Basic
(Stage)

Under requirements set by:

Brandman University



Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w40ec72a3-8383-4862-97a3-d95ea6ae0843-42483808

APPENDIX G

IRB Approval

IRB Application Approved As Submitted: Maria Moore

2 messages

Institutional Review Board <my@umassglobal.edu>

Fri, Oct 7, 2022 at 8:11 AM

Reply-To: webmaster@umassglobal.edu

To: mmoore3@mail.umassglobal.edu

Cc: greenber@umassglobal.edu, irb@umassglobal.edu

Dear Maria Moore,

Congratulations, your IRB application to conduct research has been approved by the UMass Global Institutional Review Board. This approval grants permission for you to proceed with data collection for your research. Please keep this email for your records, as it will need to be included in your research appendix.

If any issues should arise that are pertinent to your IRB approval, please contact the IRB immediately at IRB@umassglobal.edu. If you need to modify your IRB application for any reason, please fill out the "Application Modification Form" before proceeding with your research. The Modification form can be found at the following link: <https://irb.umassglobal.edu/Applications/Modification.pdf>.

Best wishes for a successful completion of your study.

Thank you,

Doug DeVore, Ed.D.

Professor

Organizational Leadership

IRB Chair

ddevore@umassglobal.edu

www.umassglobal.edu

APPENDIX H

Interview Guide

Purpose Statement:

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify and describe how exemplary leaders (superintendents, principals, city managers, police chiefs, corporate or nonprofit leaders, military leaders, etc.) utilize five principles associated with grit (courage, conscientiousness, long-term goals, resilience, and excellence vs. perfection) to accomplish extraordinary results in their organizations.

Research Questions:

1. How do exemplary leaders use courage to accomplish extraordinary results?
2. How do exemplary leaders use conscientiousness to accomplish extraordinary results?
3. How do exemplary leaders use long-term goals to accomplish extraordinary results?
4. How do exemplary leaders use resilience to accomplish extraordinary results?
5. How do exemplary leaders use excellence vs. perfection to accomplish extraordinary results?

Definition: Courage is the mental, physical, and moral strength to pursue and accomplish a worthy goal despite the presence of danger or fear (Lee, & Elliot-Lee, 2006; Schilpzand, Hekman, and Mitchell, 2008).

Interview Questions #1 and #2

#1. Describe a situation in your organization that required courage in the face of danger or fear to achieve an extraordinary result.

#2. Leaders often have to choose which challenges to pursue. What causes you, as a leader, to take courageous actions, and what makes you decide not to take action?

Definition: Conscientiousness is a fundamental personality trait that drives the desire and ability to be diligent, organized, achievement-oriented, self-disciplined, and reliable (Perlis, 2013; Jackson et al., 2010).

Interview Questions #3 and #4

#3. All of us are confronted by a variety of competing demands in our jobs. When faced with competing demands, how do you stay organized?

#4. There are times when we must make sure the job gets done. Please tell me how you stay self-disciplined to ensure you meet your deadlines.

Definition: Use of Long-term goals reflects utilizing a top-level future outcome that serves as a compass for sustained action, inspiring passion, and consistent focus over long stretches of time (Duckworth, 2007 & Jachimowicz, et. al., 2018).

Interview Questions #5 and #6

#5. How have you used long-term goal setting to achieve extraordinary results in your organization?

#6. Can you share an example of when you faced challenges while working toward a long-term goal?

Definition: Resilience is an individual's ability to adapt and recover from stress and adversity while maintaining or returning to a positive mental state of wellbeing despite hardship (Grafton et al., 2010; Rice & Liu, 2016).

Interview Questions #7 and #8

#7. Can you share a story of a time when you had to overcome a stressful work situation; how were you able to return to a positive mental state of wellbeing?

#8. How do you continue to cultivate resiliency in your professional journey?

Definition: Excellence vs. Perfection is a mindset toward fulfilling one's purpose and prioritizing improvement over a lofty ideal that may not be attainable (Duckworth, 2007; Perlis, 2013; Arias, 2017).

Interview Questions #9 and #10

#9. Can you share an example of a time when you prioritized improvement over a lofty ideal?

#10. What steps or strategies do you take that help to prioritize continuous improvement?

APPENDIX I

Participant's Bill of Rights



UMASS GLOBAL 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 UMASS GLOBAL Institutional Review Board, which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. The UMass Global 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, UMASS GLOBAL, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA, 92618.