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Spiritual practice and burnout among special educators in a small town school district

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SPIRITUAL PRACTICE AND BURNOUT AMONG SPECIAL EDUCATORS IN A
SMALL TOWN SCHOOL DISTRICT

A Thesis

by

Rev. Matthew Amos Wilson

submitted to

The School of Education and Allied Professions

UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON


in partial fulfillment of
the requirement for the
degree of

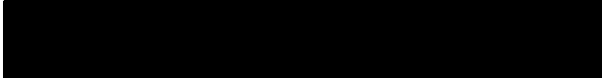
Master of Science in Education

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To my beloved Janine—partner, wife and friend—with all
my love: “Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will
find; knock, and it will be opened to you”.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Since IDEA 1997, continuing policy changes regarding public schools in the United States have caused an increased demand for special educators, even as attrition rates in the field have remained high. If the combination of high demand and high attrition continues in the United States, then the quality of public school education could be challenged. What are some of the causes of such high attrition, and can the rate be lowered? How will the country be able to keep qualified special educators working in our public schools?

The 1997 United States Department of Education's report to Congress stated that almost 3700 special education jobs were vacant and 26,000 special education teachers were not certified in the field. In the same year, a literature review reported on the growing attrition rates and burnout among special educators. The research showed that special educators' attrition rates were "much higher" than regular education teachers' rates. One explanation of the disparity was a high burnout rate among special educators. In fact, in the review, the authors noted that, "Stress and burnout constitute one set of factors that is directly influencing teacher attrition, current staffing patterns, and the quality of educational and related services for students with special needs" (Wisniewski & Gargiulo 1997, p. 325). More recently, (Fore, Martin, and Bender, 2002) said that burnout among special educators remains higher than the attrition rate for teachers in general education.

In addition to the quantitative data that has been gathered on the population of special educators, new qualitative data might also add to our understanding of the

problem posed by attrition, stress and especially burnout. Collecting and understanding this kind of qualitative data may assist the entire field of special education in lowering its overall risk for burnout and thereby reduce the attrition rate.

Perhaps, some special educators have found a way to cope with burnout caused by the emotional ups and downs of their classrooms and the growing demands from administration and legislation alike. It is possible that their stories might illustrate how teachers put the ideology of "people first" into their day-to-day work with students who have disabilities, and how they keep from depersonalizing their relationships with the students. It is also possible that understanding what they believe are their personal accomplishments might demonstrate what sustains them and allows them to continue to work in the high burnout field of special education. Any of this subjective material may add to the quantitative understanding of burnout, and this has the potential to benefit both students and teachers alike.

Though the literature has noted several factors that affect burnout, it is likely that qualitative evidence will add to the understanding of how these factors operate and it may lead to the emergence of new factors that affect burnout. Some of these new factors that affect burnout may not yet have been thoroughly defined. Hearing from the educators themselves could help uncover those factors and how they operate. One of those factors may involve the possible connection educators see between what they deem as ultimate in their lives and their own level of burnout. Such a possibility is the focus of this study.

This study seeks to examine a small sample of teachers in order to view the connection between the burnout score they receive and something that they perceive as ultimate, something the study operationally defined as "spiritual". The study will collect

qualitative data in an interview format from some of the special educators in the Bellefontaine City School District. The first three questions on the interview protocol will obtain qualitative evidence from these educators that might support their scores on the three subscales of the Maslach Burnout Inventory for Educators, a quantitative measure of burnout. The remainder of the questions from the protocol will then collect qualitative attributions the subjects make about "spirituality" and any possible connections they see between spirituality and their level of burnout. It will describe how one group of teachers from the Bellefontaine City School District functions under the current high burnout environment that is public school special education.

Chapter II

Synthesis of the Related Literature

Introduction

This chapter will explore the literature in three areas as it seeks to operationally define the terms “burnout” and “spirituality”. First, it will analyze and adopt one measure of burnout known as the Maslach Burnout Inventory for Educators (MBI-ES). This inventory was given to the subjects in phase one of this study. The validity and reliability of the measure, the role of feelings in the MBI and an examination of factors that the literature has found relates to the MBI will be addressed. Second, the chapter will examine the three subscales of the MBI in light of several theories, concentrating mostly on the work of Martin Buber and Parker Palmer. These theories contributed to the development of the interview protocol used in phase two of the study. Finally, the ideas of the theologian Paul Tillich will be examined in order to operationally define “spirituality” for purposes of this study.

“Burnout” and the Maslach Burnout Inventory Scale

The term “burnout”, as it is used here, comes from a 1981 study by Maslach. The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) delineated three aspects of the burnout syndrome: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and lack of personal accomplishment.

“The Emotional Exhaustion (EE) subscale assesses feelings of being emotionally overextended and exhausted by one’s work. The Depersonalization (Dp) subscale measures an unfeeling and impersonal response toward recipients of one’s service, care, treatment, or instruction. The Personal Accomplishment (PA)

subscale assesses feelings of competence and successful achievement in one's work with people". (Maslach, 1996, p. 4)

High scores on the EE and Dp subscales and a low score on the PA subscale indicate a high risk for burnout. Conversely, low risk for burnout is indicated in low scores on the EE and Dp scales and a high score on the PA subscale.

Validity and Reliability of the MBI

The Mental Measurements Yearbook (2007) includes two reviews of the MBI, third edition. The Robert Fitzpatrick review concludes: "The psychometric characteristics of the MBI appear to be at least adequate and the scores have good intuitive appeal. Evidence for validity is not strong, but on the other hand there is little basis for saying the MBI is not meaningful and useful" (Mental Measurements, 2007). Fitzpatrick expresses some concern for the shortness of the questionnaires and the test-retest reliability. The other reviewer, Claudia R. Wright, notes that the administration of the MBI "for research and applied purposes has a history of nearly 3 decades, a confirmation of the utility of the instrument". Her conclusion is that the reliability and validity of the tool "remains sound but incomplete" (Mental Measurements, 2007).

Though these reviews are somewhat mixed, the MBI is the measure adopted by this research. This is because through the 1980's and early 1990's the MBI was the most widely used reliable and accepted measure of burnout among human service professionals (Embich, 2001). Further, though according to (Embich, 2001), the MBI was not widely used in the field of special education until the mid 1990's, Edmonson and Thompson's 2000 meta-analysis of burnout among special educators found that, when

burnout studies were done on special educators, the MBI was by far the most frequently occurring burnout measure, representing 95.4% of the total burnout constructs in the literature and appearing in 93.5% of the synthesis population primary studies (Edmonson, 2000). The utility and history of the MBI provided justification to use it with this group of teachers.

"Feelings" and the MBI Subscales

The MBI is a quantitative measure of burnout; however, it measures burnout as a numerical range from low to high degrees of experienced *feeling* (Maslach, 1996). Therefore, it is important to briefly describe what is meant by feelings on the MBI, especially on the MBI subscales.

The MBI defines educator burnout by measuring the feelings an educator has. Educator burnout begins with a subscale called emotional exhaustion, or "the tired and fatigued *feeling* that develops as emotional energies are drained" (Maslach, 1996, p. 28). When the negative *feelings* teachers have toward their students become chronic, then they experience depersonalization, the second subscale of teacher burnout. Depersonalization manifests itself in physical distancing, psychological withdrawal, cold attitudes, indifference or even the use of derogatory labels (p. 28). The third subscale of the MBI, personal accomplishment, is also related to the *feelings* of the educator: "When educators no longer *feel* that they are contributing to students' development, they are vulnerable to experiencing profound disappointment" (p. 28). Burnout is a measure of feelings, but teasing out the different factors that contribute to feelings of burnout has been the subject of a great deal of research in the literature.

Factors Contributing to Burnout

There are several factors upon which MBI research has focused. Early research using the MBI was mostly conducted in other human service fields, but not in special education. This early research often focused on environmental factors and on personality factors that contribute to a person's burnout score.

On the environmental side, Schwab, Jackson, and Schuler (1986) found that when age and gender were controlled in their human service sample, role conflict had the largest effect on emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. Pretorius (1994), in a study on regular education teachers, found that role conflict and class size were significant predictors of emotional exhaustion, and class size and role ambiguity were significant predictors of depersonalization. Both of these studies illustrated the effect that environmental factors have on burnout scores.

Personality variables have also been examined over the years in burnout studies. Piedmont (1993), demonstrated that environment and personality factors work independently of one another. In this study the effects of work environment were controlled in a small sample of occupational therapists, and neuroticism and other personality variables continued to significantly affect burnout over a seven-month period. Both of these studies predicted what kind of personalities are subject to burnout, but neither of them focused specifically on special educators

The MBI began to be used more and more in the field of special education after 2000. Several new environmental factors that contribute to special educator burnout have been investigated. For instance, Embich (2001) examined seven potential burnout factors

that she felt were related to new methods of service delivery, especially team teaching. She found that principal support and age were unrelated to burnout; however, workload, experience, education level, role ambiguity, and role conflict, all factors most closely related to team teaching success, contribute significantly to burnout in special education teachers (Embich, 2001). As the field of special education has changed, so have many of the environmental factors contributing to burnout; however, the personality characteristics of special educators has not been taken into account as it was in the earlier research on other human service professionals.

Acknowledging this discrepancy, Zabel and Zabel (2001) analyzed the same factors in a current sample of special educators that they had analyzed twenty years earlier. In this follow-up study the researchers determined that the factors associated with burnout in special educators has changed as the field has changed. For instance, the greater amount of paperwork mandated by IDEA 1997 has contributed to higher emotional exhaustion (EE) subscales on the MBI-ES assessment (Zabel & Zabel, 2001). Zabel and Zabel found that there was much less of an impact now on the level of teacher burnout based on age and/or experience level. The authors state that, "the most striking finding is the maturing of the profession. The age, amount of special education experience and amount of professional development of this large sample...increased markedly" (2001, p. 135).

Zabel and Zabel concluded that the people inside special education, not just environmental factors, should be the subject of further research. Research using the MBI has uncovered many different factors that contribute to burnout. Demographic

descriptions of human service subjects were some of the earliest topics that MBI researchers addressed. The next studies focused on environment and personality characteristics. Studies from the late 1990's updated their focus to include new environmental factors that have arisen as the field of special education has adapted to new legislation and the changing roles of special educators. At each turn, new variation on the burnout subscales attributable to the environment of special educators was accounted for; however, the voice of the special educator—his or her personality and story—was not included in the objective data. This study seeks to include subjective data upon which observations can be made about burnout.

In order to create subjective interview questions that would allow the special educators in this study to expand on the meaning of their MBI score, the questions in the interview protocol were based on the work of three theorists: Martin Buber, Parker Palmer and Paul Tillich.

Theory and the Three Subscales of the MBI

Emotional Exhaustion and Human Limitations

Basic to forming question one about emotional exhaustion on the interview protocol is the theory that human beings have limits. The bedrock developmental theories of Piaget, Erikson and Freud suggest that the human being's capacity to function psychologically is limited and that, as far as those limits are concerned, they cannot be surpassed until certain "stages" in development. For purposes of the study, the simple question, "Do you feel emotionally exhausted at the end of the day?" was used to address this issue of human emotional limitations. When people speak of their emotional state, they often begin also to speak of what they perceive the sources of their emotions to be.

The focus of this question is just to "get the ball rolling" so that the interview may continue. The next question bears a closer connection to a specific set of theories and concepts.

Depersonalization and Martin Buber

Question two dealt with the subscale of depersonalization. It tried to get at the kind of relationships that teachers have with their students. One way of looking at this question is to bear in mind the work of Martin Buber (1958). Buber was a Jewish Mystic who is best remembered for his articulation of relationships. The ideal form of relationship between human beings is one he called the I-Thou relationship. According to Buber, an I-Thou relationship has both a spiritual and a humanistic aspect. In his way of thinking, I-Thou is a dialogical relationship where both teacher and student are open to having an impact upon one another. For Buber it is the best way to relate to God; therefore, it is the ideal way of relating to other human beings as well. Though it is ideal, human beings sometimes resort or fall into a way of relating known as the I-It. I-It is a hierarchal relationship where the teacher speaks at the student, thereby making him or her into an object instead of a human being worthy of love and respect. Though this is an extremely short description of Buber's concept, the MBI construct of depersonalization appears to support the effect of a special educator turning an I-Thou relationship he or she has with her students into an I-It relationship.

Following Buber, the responses to question two that would seem to support a low Dp score (and thus a low risk for burnout) would include words that recognize the unique value of the students. These values would be expressed by the use of the students' names. The teacher with a low Dp score would be expected to speak of his/her students

respectfully and individually. Such responses might include statements of value or purpose the teacher sees that others do not, or statements of value or purpose that the teacher may believe connects the student to an ultimate other. On the other hand, it would seem that teachers with a high Dp score would speak of the students in dehumanizing terms. They would be less likely to use names or be aware of individual aspects of the students that they work with, of individual value that they perceive in the students. These kinds of relationships might also be applied to other teachers, parents or even administrators of whom the interviewee speaks.

Perceived Accomplishment and Parker Palmer

The third question on the interview protocol draws from the theories and ideas of Parker Palmer. Palmer (1999) suggests that what a person sets his or her heart on is what determines their success as a teacher. This heart's desire is therefore related to a teacher's sense of personal accomplishment. If there is indeed a connection between heart's desire and accomplishment, as Palmer says, then two things might be present in the subjects' responses to question three.

First, unlike other professions, teaching is always done at the intersection of personal and public life. A teacher's concern is with the personal development of their students, but his or her income and professional survival depends on public opinion and the conditions set by institutions far larger than themselves. Because of this, teaching is "a daily exercise in vulnerability" (Palmer, 1998. p.17). For special educators this vulnerability is not only felt in the self, it is manifested in the students too. Their disabilities are often vulnerabilities as well. As a result, they are dependent on others like parents, physicians, extended family, community members, politicians, bureaucrats,

schoolteachers and officials. On the one hand, speaking of the success of the students will come into play (the private side). On the other hand, opinions about how the teacher's work is perceived by the public will be present too. It would seem likely that language about both personal and public indications of accomplishment will be present in the responses these teachers make to the third question on the protocol.

The second item that Palmer brings to the framing of question three on the protocol has to do with teachers relating to their teaching. For Palmer, those educators who relate to the subjects of their teaching will have a stronger sense of PA than those who relate to just the objects of their teaching. Like Buber, Palmer delineates the difference between objective and subjective epistemologies. He defines the subjects we teach as the things themselves like, "the genes and ecosystems of biology" (Palmer, 1998, p. 106). Palmer says that people who operate objectively see teaching as the process of disconnecting the self from the thing that they wish to know, and he criticizes objectivist teaching by calling it the "fearful way of knowing" (Palmer, 1998, p. 51).

According to Palmer, because the objective approach is a fearful way of knowing, teachers who enter special education with *only* an objectivist view in mind may soon discover other fears that have "hitched a ride" on their daily work, fears that could affect their sense of personal accomplishment. For instance, they may develop a fear of having their work go unappreciated; of being inadequately rewarded; of believing that they have entered the wrong profession or spent too much time on student goals that seem trivial next to the great expanse of objectively perceived science (Palmer, 1998, pp. 47-48). Any of these fearful expressions may be present in the interview responses low PA subjects make to question three. Subjects with low PA are at higher risk for burnout.

Those whose scores show a high PA (and thus a low risk for burnout) would conversely be expected to be involved in what Palmer calls the relational way of knowing. The relational way of knowing is one in which knowing is practiced as a form of love. Subjects are the things themselves that draw students to them and to which they give their ultimate respect. For Palmer, subjects become "sacred" (literally translated as worthy of respect), and include not just the topics taught, but the relationships built around those teachings between the teacher, the student and the subject itself. The relational way of knowing is the way in which love takes away fear and co-creation replaces control; it is the way of knowing that helps educators "reclaim the capacity for connectedness on which good teaching depends" (Palmer, 1998, p. 56).

Question three approaches PA with Palmer's ideas as a point of reference. With this in mind it would seem that teachers who have a low PA score would be expected to cite places and times when they feared for their careers and saw burnout just around the corner. Teachers with a high PA score, on the other hand, would likely be expected to speak more subjectively about their students and the subjects they teach. For instance, high PA scorers might speak less about programs and curriculum and more about personal and individual encounters with students and the materials being taught to them. Additionally, the high PA subjects might be likely to speak about a mentor, or about a persistently influential subject that "won't let them go" (Palmer, pp. 21-22) and the low PA subjects might be likely to speak about loneliness, isolation and the dryness of the curriculum they have to teach. Finally, if Palmer is on target, then language about both personal and public indications of accomplishment should be present in the responses these teachers make to the third question on the protocol.

“Spirituality” and the MBI

Though “spirituality” is not specifically defined in the work of either Buber or Palmer, both their work and evidence from other literature can contribute to an operational definition of the term. For purposes of this study, “spirituality” will be operationally defined as words the subjects use to describe a connection they feel to an ultimate other or to a concern they have beyond themselves. These words may come from either the lexicons of traditional religions, namely the Judeo-Christian lexicons our culture is most influenced by, or from other sources that point to a reality the subject feels connects them to a broader perspective. Questions five and six seek to elicit responses that use spiritual language from the subjects; however, discovering spiritual responses has challenges.

For instance, James Fowler in his seminal work, Stages of Faith uses the term “faith” instead of spirituality as a way of getting at the essential constructs of meaning, perspective and the connections one makes to that which is beyond oneself. For Fowler, “Faith, rather than belief or religion, (or spirituality) is the most fundamental category in the human quest for transcendence” (Fowler, 1981, p. 14). He sees “faith” as a term that is applicable to all cultures and traditions of religion, for he believes that faith is not a separate dimension of human life, but it is that upon which every human being sets their heart. Faith, for Fowler, orients the entire person. It speaks to their purpose and goal, their hopes and strivings and their thoughts and actions (Fowler, 1981). But what does “faith” have to do with burnout?

Three years after Fowler’s Stages of Faith was published, Bulka (1984) suggested that the then emerging construct in human services known as “burnout” might be

addressed by a variable he called self-transcendence. In speaking of Clergy, Bulka said that self-transcendence might be an important variable in fending off burnout. Though his research at the time did not continue to pursue this connection, it did lay the groundwork for other research that came after.

For instance, Golden (2004) surveyed 321 Clergy to see how a measure of spiritual transcendence affected their burnout score. The survey consisted of several instruments including the MBI and a scale called the Spiritual Transcendence Scale (STS) that measured three dimensions of Spiritual Transcendence including Prayer Fulfillment, Universality and Connectedness. Several findings were evident. First, the most significant dimension on the STS scale related to Clergy burnout is the individual's perceived relationship with God (Prayer Fulfillment). Secondly, the effect of this perceived relationship is statistically independent of other variables, for the STS scale showed "a small but significant incremental validity (2%) when controlling for personality and work environment, the two factors most commonly linked to burnout" (Golden, 2004, pp. 122-123). Finally, the implications of this study are that, among Clergy at least, "when it comes to the work-related distress of burnout, the ability to lose oneself in prayer or meditation is different than the ability to lose oneself in other areas of life such as in a hobby or in service" (Golden, 2004, p. 123). The dimension of spirituality measured by the STS added more to the burnout effect than did the other variables measured on this sample. Since a multitude of factors have been shown to have an effect on burnout across a multitude of professions (Maslach, 1981/1996), the effect of spirituality on burnout in the Clergy may also apply to the subjects of this study, special educators.

“Faith”, “Belief”, “Self-Transcendence” and “Prayer Fulfillment” are all terms subsumed in this study by the operationally defined term “spirituality”. Spirituality is based on Paul Tillich’s idea of ultimate concern (Tillich, 1957), and the responses made to questions five and six will be analyzed in terms of this idea.

Tillich and Spirituality

The focus of this study has so far been defined in terms of educational and clergy research. At this point, we can briefly refocus the study through a theological lens. “Theology” comes from two Greek words—“theos” and “logos”. It literally translates as “a word about God”. In their response to questions four and five, the teachers in this study will be asked to speak about how they perceive the ultimate, thus they will be doing “theology”. Because it is not the aim of this study to define “God” in any particular or parochial way, the work of the theologian Paul Tillich was chosen to frame this part of the theoretical background. Tillich is a mid-twentieth century German theologian whose ideas come out of the historical situation of two world wars, Christian theology and existential philosophy. Tillich was chosen for this part of the literature review for three reasons.

First, Tillich emphasized experience. This makes his work ideally suited for the qualitative part of this study because people are being asked to speak from their experience in the interviews. Further, they are given the authority to do so; their experiences matter a priori. Giving qualitative evidence such authority is in line with Tillich’s existential starting point: “the immediate experience of one’s own existing reveals something of the nature of existence generally” (Tillich, 1951, p.62).

The second reason why Tillich was chosen as the basis for these two questions is that his work speaks to the milieu in which the particular subjects of this study live and work. The members of the sample are "modern", that is they share in the modern experience of disruption, meaninglessness and despair which gives rise to the same kinds of existential questions that Tillich probes with his method of correlation. In addition to this, like Tillich, the special education teachers in the sample have been reared in a Christian culture. Even though some of them claim no special allegiance to the Christian religion per se, questions of spirituality find their most common response in these subjects in theological language that reflects the protestant or catholic Christian faith of their overarching culture.

Finally, even though Tillich knew that our own existential experience takes its overarching language from Christianity, he also believed that the experience of the ultimate can be separated from specific religions. The subjects' experience and ideas are what Tillich would call their philosophy. In his work, Tillich bridges the chasm between philosophy and theology by noting that philosophy deals with the structure of being, and theology deals with the meaning of being for us. In both one's philosophy and one's theology it is the study of being, or "ontology", which sits in the middle. Tillich speaks about the ways in which an individual person's being connects to Being in general; in this way he does not link ontology to only one religion. This understanding of ontology is at the heart of the last two questions on the protocol.

For instance, in question five, when the subjects are asked, "Do you consider any of the things (or practices) that you have shared in this interview so far to be spiritual?", they are being asked to connect who they are (being) with "Being" in general. In

question six, the same kind of question is asked, only this time it is more specific (Please talk about how thoroughly you feel that spirituality does or does not impact your own level of burnout). In question six being has become one aspect of who they are, namely their burnout score. In both questions there is no reference to any particular religion. Instead, the last two questions in this study are based on the second of two criterion in Tillich's thought, something he calls "ultimate concern".

For Tillich, every understanding of spiritual things (*geisteswissenschaft*) is circular and it moves between two poles: the eternal truth of its foundation (ground of being) and the temporal situation in which the eternal truth is received. Within this circle people make decisions about faith. These decisions are necessarily paradoxical. That is, they are committed and alienated, faith-filled and full of doubt. These decisions reflect what Tillich has dubbed the decision maker's "ultimate concern" (Tillich, 1951, pp. 3-15). It is "ultimate concern" which figures most prominently in the formation of the interview protocol for this study.

Spirituality and Ultimate Concern

Questions five and six focused on what the subjects would say about what Tillich called their "Ultimate Concern" and how it affects their burnout. Ultimate Concern is unconditional. It is made independent of any condition of character, desire or circumstance. It is total—no part of us or our world is excluded from it; therefore, it is also infinite, for nothing is able to flee from it. (Tillich, 1951, p. 12). Tillich lists many expressions of ultimate concern including: poetry, music, social ideas, social actions, and even educational aims and methods (Tillich, 1951, p. 14). All of these are mediators of ultimate concern that express aspects of the larger theological ideas Tillich elucidates.

For Tillich ultimate concern does not stand alone. It is not just the result of a person's choices; it is intimately connected to both the ground of being from which it springs and the method in which it comes to light. The method by which people come to discover and speak of their ultimate concern Tillich called the "method of correlation".

Tillich writes "the method of correlation explains the contents of...faith through existential questions and theological answers in mutual interdependence" (Tillich, 1951, p. 60). Questions four and five ask the subjects to use the method of correlation. The questions address the teachers' existential situation, i.e. their level of burnout, by asking them if they see any connections between those situations and an ultimate reality. Is there a "theos logos", or word about God, that they feel addresses that reality? If Tillich's method of correlation is truly being used, then the spiritual half of the connection they see will not totally alleviate burnout, but neither will the burnout remain unaffected by the person's words about spirituality. The two will be mutually interdependent. In this way, the last two questions in the study seek responses that are correlational in the Tillichian sense, seeking the ways in which the subjects' words about what concerns them ultimately affect the varying aspects of their own burnout.

As a result of these two commonalities, it is appropriate to look for the possible emergence of these subjects' ultimate concern and their use of Tillich's correlational method in the spiritual language they use in their interviews.

Conclusion

Studies like Zabel & Zabel (2001) and the Meta Analysis of Edmonson & Thompson (2000) indicate that burnout among special educators is attributable to more

than just demographic or environmental variables. In their works they suggest that further research investigate other factors that affect burnout, especially aspects of personality and behavior. The literature since then demonstrated that though there are indeed a number of environmental factors, both Zabel and Zabel (2001) as well as Bulka (1984) suggested that the special educators themselves should be the subject of further research. This study seeks to take that step by gathering qualitative evidence that gives voice to the stories and explanations that teachers give for each of the aspects of burnout the subscales measure.

Further, this study builds on the Golden (2004) study of Clergy burnout which revealed a statistically significant connection between burnout and something the researchers defined as "transcendence". Though there are several terms in the literature for the factor that Golden measured on the Spiritual Transcendence Scale, this research used the theory of Buber, Palmer and especially Tillich to operationally define "spirituality" in order to see whether qualitative data from this sample could add to the MBI-ES scores of the teachers in this sample and what they said about their own perceived spirituality, their sense of ultimate concern, of being connected to something greater than self, and the affect this connection had on their level of burnout. Was there something in the subjects' words that could expand what the subscales affirmed?

There are three research questions in this study. First, how will this sample of special educators from a northwestern Ohio small town school system score on the MBI-ES? Second, will the information gathered in the follow-up interviews of these subjects support the MBI-ES scores they receive? And finally, will the subjects identify certain

spiritual practices as a factor in either their burnout score or in avoiding burnout in their profession?

CHAPTER III

Methodology

The guiding question behind this study is: "Do the special educators in this sample see a relationship between spirituality and burnout?" In this study, twenty special educators were given the Maslach Burnout Inventory for Educators (MBI-ES), and then ten of those special educators were asked to take part in an interview. Because the interview protocol included both questions about the three subscales that the MBI measures and the subjects' own words about the role of spirituality in helping them deal with burnout, the data were analyzed in two ways. First, the qualitative evidence from the interview was analyzed to see if it supported the three subscale scores the subjects received from the MBI-ES. After that, the subjective data was again analyzed to see if the subjects reported a relationship between spirituality and burnout. Finally, the qualitative data were analyzed to see if any common themes emerged regarding how the interviewed subjects related spirituality and burnout that could be used to give direction to possible future research.

Design

Because of the small sample, this study does not attempt to show a statistical correlation between burnout and spirituality. Instead it uses a mixed methods design incorporating both a qualitative approach and the use of a quantitative measure to demonstrate what a small group of special educators say about the connections that might exist between spirituality and burnout. The study took place in two phases. Phase one of the study was quantitative. Phase two was qualitative.

Prior to phase one, consent was obtained from the Superintendent and School Board to do the research project in the district. During phase one, each of the twenty participants were given the MBI-ES. A score and range for each subscale was determined and some general demographic information was obtained. In phase two, the phase one data was used to narrow the list of possible interviewees down to ten people. Calls were made, consent was given by six individuals and interviews were conducted. In this way both the quantitative MBI-ES data from phase one, and the qualitative interview data from phase two were incorporated into the final analysis of the study.

Participants and Setting

The twenty participants in this study, sixteen women and four men, are special education teachers who teach in a small town public school district in north central Ohio. The district in which they work draws from a population of about thirteen thousand in the surrounding town. The district maintains one high school, one middle school and four elementary schools. The participants from phase one of the study included nine elementary special educators, seven middle school educators, and four who teach at the high school level. This group was narrowed down in phase two of the study to six special educators. This narrowing down was based on several criterion.

First and foremost, an effort was made to include interview subjects from as broad a range of MBI-ES scores as possible. This proved to be challenging because the sample is so small. Originally, the research was going to focus just on high burnout subjects; however, no subjects fell completely into the high range on all three subscales. As a result, subjects were chosen that fit as extreme a range as possible (see table 2 below). Other factors were also considered as the group of twenty was narrowed down. A balance

of the following demographic factors was sought: gender, building level, and experience. In the end, the set of interviewees included three men and three women; two elementary teachers, two middle school teachers and one high school teacher; four people with twenty or more years of experience, and two people with ten or less years of experience.

Data Collection and Analysis

Phase One: Survey Data

In phase one, the pool of twenty special education teachers agreed to be participants after viewing a Power Point presentation on the proposed research. This meeting was held in November 2005. To insure that no connection was accidentally made in the staff presentation between burnout and spirituality, three professionals from other parts of the district previewed the Power Point. When they were asked what they thought the research was about, none of them made the burnout/spirituality connection.

Following their agreeing to take part in the study, the participants were given the MBI-ES during their respective building's department meetings. Once the scores were obtained, the author used the scoring key provided by the instrument's publisher to do two things. Each subject received a score for each of the three subscales, and then the three subscale scores were categorized for each subject using the MBI-ES high, medium and low range designations. See Table 1 below:

TABLE 1

Subscale Range	Emotional Exhaust.	Depersonalization	Perceived Accomp.
HIGH	27 or over	14 or over	0-30
MODERATE	17-26	9-13	31-36
LOW	0-16	0-8	37 or higher

Each person's three subscales were placed into one of these categories and a three letter code was assigned to each subject based on where his or her ranges fell ("L" for low; "M" for moderate; "H" for high). For example, a subject scoring a 15 on Emotional Exhaustion, a 3 on Depersonalization and a 40 on Personal Accomplishment would be coded LLL, meaning that the subject is in the low range for all three of his/her subscales. The final data are compiled and presented in the results section of this thesis. This work comprised the end of phase I of the study.

Phase Two: Interview Data

The twenty coded MBI-ES scores were distributed according to the mode of their three subscale scores. For example, "LLL" and MLL each have a mode of "L"; MML has a mode of "M", and so on (see results section). Ten People ranging from codes "LLL" to "HMM" were asked to participate in an interview--there were no subjects who had more than one "H" in their range code. In addition to the range codes, the ten subjects were also chosen in order to obtain a balance of building level, experience and gender. Six said they would participate, but one subject's data was lost due to a computer crash. After this distillation process, five subjects were interviewed. Below is the breakdown of who was finally interviewed:

TABLE 2

Number of subjects asked to be interviewed	Range/Codes	Number saying "yes" to being interviewed
2	LLL; LLL	0
3	MLL; LLM; LML	3
2	MML; MMM	2

3	HMM; HMM; MLH	1
10 total		6 total

The five face-to face interviews in phase two were conducted in small conference rooms within the teacher's buildings. They ran between 35 and 45 minutes each, and were carried out in early August 2006. The burnout inventory was carried out the previous spring. Since the MBI-ES is a "snapshot" survey that can change over time, the two data collections should have been done within the same school grading period so that a more accurate relationship between them might be obtained. If this design is used again, the survey and the interviews will be done closer together in order to strengthen the validity of the results.

For the interviews, a six-question protocol was developed. It contained one probing question on each of the three MBI subscales, one question about what the subjects do to prepare for teaching and avoid burnout, one question asking the subjects if they felt the practices they do alleviate or eliminate burnout were spiritual, and one question about whether they believe that spirituality impacts their own level of burnout. At the beginning of each interview, the Maslach scores were shared with the interviewee and definitions/explanations of the subscales were presented. Below are the questions from this protocol:

1. Do you feel emotionally exhausted or drained at the end of the day or week? In regards to your work as a special educator, what kinds of things leave you feeling emotionally drained or overextended, and what do you do when you feel that way? What kinds of work-related things bring you joy?

2. How would you characterize your relationships with your students overall and on a day-to-day basis? Please talk about how those relationships compare or contrast to the other relationships you have in your life.
3. Do you feel a sense of accomplishment from your job? If you do, please tell me about one accomplishment that you feel you have had as a special educator. If you don't, please tell me about what it would take for you to feel a sense of accomplishment in your job.
4. What do you do to prepare for teaching? What do you do to alleviate burnout or to keep from it?
5. Do you consider any of the things that you have shared in this interview so far to be "spiritual"?
6. Please talk about how thoroughly you feel that spirituality does or does not impact your own level of burnout?

The interview data analysis from phase two was done in a number of ways. Notes were kept on the protocol by the interviewer. Additionally, the interviews were audio taped and transcribed. The interview transcripts were then examined on a subject-by-subject basis.

First, questions 1-3 were examined by subject, then each subject's burnout score was paired with his/her response to the question based on that subscale to see if the subjective material supported their score. (For instance, if Subject 5 got a "16" as her EE score, then that number was illuminated and expanded according to what her response was to question one on the interview protocol because that is the question derived from

the definition of Emotional Exhaustion). For question 4, a list was written on each subject's response to what they do to alleviate burnout as they prepare for teaching. For questions 5 and 6, indications by the subjects that there either was or was not a connection between what they saw as spiritual and what was done to alleviate burnout was noted.

After that analysis, the transcripts were cut up and bundled by question and response instead of by subject. A word study was done on each set of questions and common words or categories of words were examined. As a result of this word study, two quantifiable common themes were discovered. These two themes were labeled as possible directions for future research.

Confidentiality

At each phase, confidentiality was maintained. The power point shown at the initial meeting included a confidentiality statement. The demographic materials and the Maslach inventory was numbered and coded for level of burnout to maintain confidentiality. A neutral party kept the corresponding list in order to be able to call back potential interviewees and to grant those who wanted it access to their MBI-ES scores as was promised at the time of the initial presentation. The interviews were conducted one-on-one, and transcripts and audiotapes of the interviews were kept confidential. A woman from another town forty-five miles away did the transcriptions. She did not know any residents who lived in the Bellefontaine school district, nor any of the interviewed teachers.

Chapter IV

Results

Chapter four is broken into three parts. Part I of Chapter IV contains a chart of results from all twenty subjects on the MBI-ES measures. Part II contains the subject by subject analysis of the data. Part III contains a brief summary of the combined results. Part IV includes a discussion of the results and limitations of the study, and introduces two themes derived from word studies of the complete set of interviews that might be used for future research.

Part I: Results of the MBI-ES Survey

Table 3: Sample Summary of MBI-ES Scores

Name	Subject #	EE	DP	PA	Summary	Mode(S)
Cindy H	1	16	1	41	LLL	L
James H	4	9	0	44	LLL	L
RYAN S	9 (declined)	12	4	41	LLL	L
Tracey M	14	8	0	45	LLL	L
MARY M	15 (declined)	9	1	44	LLL	L
Darcie J	20	14	3	39	LLL	L
Julie Q	18	11	6	44	LLL	L
Treva S	16	13	0	41	LLL	L
BETH M	7	4	2	32	LLM	L
DEANNE	11(accepted)	10	2	36	LLM	L
RAINE	6 (accepted)	19	1	44	MLL	L

MARY	2 (accepted)	16	10	44	LML	L
Teresa W	12	11	8	47	LML	L
Amanda H	19	10	0	26	LLH	L
JAY	8 (accepted)	18	9	41	MML	M
*JERRY N	5 (accepted)	21	8	36	MMM	M
ROBIN W	13 (declined)	35	7	36	HMM	M
DAVID	10 (accepted)	29	12	36	HMM	M
Maribeth E	17	35	12	40	HML	HML
BETH MI	3 (declined)	23	3	24	MLH	MLH

From this table you can see all twenty sets of subject results. In addition to this, the ten people who were asked to interview have their names in capital letters. The six who confirmed that they wished to be interviewed are highlighted. The one subject whose information could not be used has an “*” by his name. The subject by subject analysis of the five remaining interviewees begins below.

Part II: Subject by Subject Results

Questions 1-3 each deal with a separate subscale of the MBI-ES; question 4 seeks to help the subject list and define the practices they do to alleviate burnout and question 5 is designed to explore whether/how they see those practices to be “spiritual”. Question 6 asks them to connect spirituality with burnout. The subject by subject results are written out below. The subjects are placed in order, highest to lowest risk for burnout according to the modes of the three combined ranges their MBI-ES scores fall into.

Subject 1: David

Subject one's interview took place on Friday August 4, 2006 at 1:30 in the Middle School conference room. Subject one ("David") is a 57 year-old Caucasian male eighth grade inclusion teacher with 25 years of experience, 22 in special education. He has been married for 37 years, and all of his children are grown. He has a Master's degree plus 30 hours and has been at his current assignment for four years. David is directly responsible for 22 8th grade students labeled ED and LD. His MBI-ES score was one of two in the total sample of 20 measured, that showed subscale ranges of high, moderate, moderate: EE 29; DP 12; and PA 36 (HMM). Finally, David considers himself to be a "very religious" Mennonite.

David's EE subscale score was 29. This is two higher than the top of the "high" range on the scoring key. When asked about his emotional exhaustion in question one, Dave began speaking about how difficult IEP writing is to him. His words recall the findings of (Zabel & Zabel, 2001) that paperwork contributes to burnout. David calls the time the IEP paperwork is due, "the worst three weeks of the year". He said the pressure to get them done, and meeting the parents who, "don't care anyhow" are two of the challenges. He also pointed to this: "You have people making decisions for you that they do not have to fulfill. But I do". Further, he described himself as a "bundle of nerves" during IEP time, and complained that he "wakes up" with them, and the next morning they "are still there".

The MBI-ES is a "snapshot" measure; its results can vary each time it is given. So, it is possible that Dave's IEP's, what he calls his "worst three weeks of the year", were looming. This would account for his high EE score.

Two other aspects of his answer to number one are worth mentioning. First, at the end of his comments about IEP writing, he said that on those days, "I run harder in the morning". This shows that he does have something in place that helps him cope with the stress. Second, Dave said that what he enjoys most about his work is when he sees someone do well on a test, when he sees some success being made. He adds to that, "and I do not see enough of that". The anxiety and perceived lack of self-determination that Dave speaks of in his response to question one supports his high EE score.

David's score on the depersonalization subscale (Dp) was a "12". This is toward the high end of the moderate range of 9-13. His response to question two was first to speak about himself. He said, "I am a lot older than a lot of these students are used to having. I went to school in the 50's and 60's, and I have really had trouble changing my strategies". He spoke about his expectations—"discipline, good responses, and responsibility, interactions"—and how they divide him from his students: "So therefore, about ten minutes into the year my students do not like me". After that, Dave spoke about the role he sees himself in. He said:

"I feel most times the students do not like me but I am not here to be their friend. But in the same token, they a lot of times, balk at what I want them to do because they are not use to having to do it. They certainly don't get it at home, and the new teachers do not take that route either. Although I love each one of my students, I don't think they understand that I do."

In this response Dave did two things. First, his words demonstrated the kind of cleavage he finds between himself and his students—they want a friend, he is not here to

be their friend. Next, he wanted them to do certain things that they balk at, things that David feels they don't have to do at home or with the other teachers. He does not elaborate on these "things", whether they are tasks or something else; however, he does indicate that the student's lack of "appropriate" responses separates them from him. The qualitative evidence from Dave's answer to number two supports the moderate Dp score of "12" that he received. At the time the MBI-ES was given to him, David was not assertively depersonalizing "them", but he was speaking of, what seemed to him to be, a very real separation between himself and the students. Dave pushes the students away psychologically, but never completely crosses the line into depersonalizing them; in fact, he shows great concern for who they are. The moderate Dp score is consistent with the ambivalent attitude Dave exhibited when he said, "Although I love each one of my students, I don't think they understand that I do".

David's score on Personal Accomplishment (PA) was a 36. This score placed him directly on the line between the moderate range and the low range (PA is scored in the opposite direction from EE and Dp). The qualitative evidence in his responses to question three rehashed some of the themes he had already introduced including the lowering of expectations, the lack of outside reinforcement and Dave's preponderance to see things in terms of conflict.

He began by reflecting on his years of experience. Over the years he believed the students had changed. They now are "pampered all the way through". David sees this as a universal truth noting that "regular teachers say the same thing I do. Everybody has had to down scale their curriculum and what their expectations are". These points reiterate the themes of lowered expectations and lack of outside reinforcement that Dave

introduced in his first two rejoinders. After this, he turned toward an example of a time when he felt a sense of accomplishment:

“Maybe it was when I was in the SBH class. I started the SBH class in Logan County. I had a fourteen year old alcoholic—he was kind of the ring leader. After a month of banging heads, I made a deal with him. He would come in the mornings, and I had a bean bag chair, and he would sleep there for two or three hours every morning with the understanding that he had to get his work done. If he did not, he would lose the privilege. It worked. Out of twelve kids that I started with that year, he was the only one that graduated”.

But even this story was seen in terms of conflict; Dave goes on:

“Really I had to leave after two years because I thought I was going to get fired because a supervisor came in and saw him and said I could not do that. It was the best thing I ever did in twenty-five years—it was the best spur of the moment decision I ever made”.

When asked what it would take for him to feel a sense of accomplishment again, David turned back to one of his themes and said that it would take a “radical change in the home life...the support system and parents”.

Because David’s story of success is bracketed between two sentences blaming students and then parents for cases in which things don’t work out, this qualitative evidence does not support his PA score as well as the replies to questions one and two did. The interview evidence suggests a high-range score should have been received by Dave on the Personal Accomplishment subscale. A further indication of this is that Dave is the only subject who did not give an unqualified “yes” to question three: “Do you feel

a sense of personal accomplishment from your work?" upon it being asked. Another possible explanation may be that this subject's 25 years of experience and approaching retirement might have yielded more solid and substantial accomplishments than the one he chose to spotlight here in the interview. Whatever the reason for the less consistent qualitative evidence, Dave did receive a moderate, not high-range, score on the MBI-ES for PA.

Dave's responses to the first three questions yielded these results. David speaks at some length about the difficulty he has doing IEP's in his response to the EE related question. There seems to be a clear distance between how he self-reports his interactions with students and how he feels about them inside, thereby making the DP score understandable. David's PA score, on the line between moderate and low, is not as easy to support with the qualitative evidence. That evidence would seem to suggest that Dave ought to have a higher PA score; however, the difference may be that he did not share some of the more meaningful and positive stories of accomplishment that he has from his 25 year long career during this interview.

A story of conflict appeared in David's response to question four. When asked about the practices he personally does to prepare for teaching and avoiding burnout, he responded:

How many In-Services have I attended? There is one *'How to handle the hard to handle'* that still sticks out in my mind, and I remember one sentence: When one student is about to hit your button hard, you look at him and smile and think, 'you are not going to get me today'. That beats running. I have even said it aloud to the students".

He also added these to his list of practices: calm self-talk; remembering to not take the students comments personally; presenting materials in more than one way; and he mentions running again. Distancing himself from the idea of being a friend to the students and giving himself permission to “not be the best teacher in the world” are also in Dave’s response to question four.

Though he spoke about all these practices as ways to prepare for teaching and to avoid burnout, when asked if he saw any of them as “spiritual”, he paused and then replied: “I have not thought about it; however, I consider myself a spiritual person. I could have mentioned that I pray through all of this too....often times, it is what keeps me going”. Once David started down this road, he made several observations about himself. He spoke at length about “prayer” and what that is to him. He also shared again about his love for his students: “I said that my students don’t know it, but I love them and that is certainly spiritual. If you didn’t love them you would have been fired a long time ago because they would have had marks and bruises all over them”. David also spoke in his response to question five about his Sunday school class “full of teachers”, and he briefly touched on the Mennonite denomination, scripture, and spiritual gifts.

David’s answer to question six, the culminating question of the interview asking him to connect spirituality with his level of burnout, was a modest affirmation: “I think so. That’s why I maintain twenty-five years, and anticipate seven more”. That answer gained resonance as he began to tell the story of how he got started teaching:

“When I was in college the first time, I was in business. There was two things I said I would not do, and that was teach school and teach slow learners. I had a sister in law who was a Downs, she didn’t hit forty-two. When I first came

into the family, she always wanted to hold my hand and put her arm around me like Downs often do—she wanted me to go to the door—get away with me. I think that it was just a couple of years after that, I got saved. And I ended up doing what I said I would not do. I started at MRDD. I started at the bottom. Is that a coincidence that I got saved and opened up, my heart opened up?

David's ending story linked his start in the field to a person with disabilities that he once knew. Two of the other subjects would do the same. Dave then went on to tie that story with his own sense of having been "saved". His last sentence of the interview speaks directly to the connection he sees between spirituality and burnout: "I don't know if spirituality is going to carry me through this, but it is what got me into this business".

Summary

In summary, two out of the three sets of David's first three responses seemed to echo and support the MBI-ES scores that he received. And though he makes no independent connections between the practices he does to eliminate or reduce burnout and his own sense of spirituality at first, after Dave begins to speak of spirituality, he concludes that he thinks spirituality does impact his own level of burnout. He says that spirituality got him into the field of special education and helped him maintain his commitment to it, but he doesn't know if it will carry him through to the end of his career.

Subject 2: Jay

Subject 2, "Jay", was interviewed on Friday August 4, 2006. This was conducted in the Southeastern Elementary school intervention room. Jay is a 27 year-old Caucasian male who has been directly responsible for 17 elementary school students with special education needs labeled ED and LD. He has taught for five years, doing both pull out and inclusion. He has been in his current assignment for one year. He has been married for five years and has one child. Jay has a Bachelor's degree. Scores on the MBI-ES survey showed Jay to be in the moderate range. His subscales were: EE 18; DP 9; PA 41, making his overall pattern MML.

Jay scored in the moderate range on EE, only two points away from the low end (17-26). He began his response to the question by saying that his "biggest pet peeve" is a lack of support from administration and/or parents. He followed up on this by saying that when he experiences these kinds of things, he is able to go home and "vent". Throughout his responses Jay refers to "going on" when things get tough. He also said, "with students you can't take it personally, whatever happens, they are kids and they are not out to get you". After this he relates in some detail a story about "punishing" a student and not being backed up by the principal.

Jay said that he enjoys watching students when "their faces light up when they finally get it". He then illustrates this with a story:

I did special Ed, SBH. When I saw kids turn around and make better choices, they became less reliant on the probation department, or less reliant on me. That was a big deal. I remember the first year I came, I had a third grader that did not know the alphabet and by the end of the year he was reading at the first grade

level. That was pretty cool. Those make my day. Being given more responsibility, it's a good thing in my eye.

There is a discrepancy between Jay's first approach to question one, and his addendum about what brings him joy. In his approach Jay detailed how the principal didn't back him up. Because he included so much detail in this story, it is possible that it had happened just before the interview. If this is the case, then it would account for his score on EE falling into the moderate range instead of the low range. This would be so because the MBI-ES measures a person's risk for burnout in the moment that it is taken, and it is not always stable overtime. If Jay had taken the survey again after his frustration with the principal, the score might have shown an increase. Whatever the case, the qualitative evidence from Jay's response to question number one does seem to support the low end moderate range score that Jay got on the EE subscale.

Jay's "9" for the Dp subscale also fell into the low end of the moderate range. An "8" would have placed him at low risk for burnout on this subscale. His comments to question number two supported this score. Jay talked about how invested he is with his students, even knowing what they do on the weekend. But that investment and description of the relationship he has with his students came out of an experience of loss Jay recounted. This conflagration of investment and loss may be enough to account for his on-the-line Dp score:

"I get pretty invested. When they move on to 5th or 6th grade it gets tough to watch them. It is also a good thing. There have been many times when I haven't been there for students as much as I want to be. A case a few years ago, a fourth

grader was really coming around, and I was excited about the progress he was making. He had a breakdown at home one night. I had to take a personal day the next, and I never saw him again. He was taken out of the foster home he was in and is now a ward of the state. It was so abrupt, and you don't forget something like that. He was on the verge and now he is probably taking a huge step back.

Take each day and make it count to the fullest".

The interview evidence from response number two does seem to affirm the MBI-ES number Jay received for Dp.

The interview evidence from his response to number three also seems to affirm the PA score he received. When asked question number three: "Do you feel a sense of accomplishment from your job?" Jay's response was very short and precise. Here it is in full: "Yes, absolutely. I know I have done my job when they do not need me. The student who didn't know his alphabet, I saw him in middle school—he always acknowledges me". By referring back to the successful student he spoke about in his response to question one, Jay confirms that his own sense of accomplishment is tied to doing his job until his students don't need him anymore, something he said that he had experienced many times. This evidence clearly supports Jay's extremely low risk for burnout as it is expressed in his PA score of 41. Indeed all three of the pieces of qualitative evidence from this subject's first three interview responses back up the subscale numbers he received.

For question number four Jay said that his main practice for handling stress and burnout was running (he is a marathon runner). He also mentioned leaving work at school; spending time with family; looking at all options that affect himself, the teacher

and the student; and reflecting during his plan period as essential practices that he does to keep him from being burnout. In a more elaborate response to question four Jay returned to the theme of moving on by referring to the story of the boy who moved away suddenly and concluding: "some things you just never forget. The kids move on. You just try to use that in a positive way".

He did not believe that there is any practice that one could do to totally eliminate burnout. Instead, Jay's principle of "moving on" was brought to the surface in this final part of his response to question four. He said: "Well, I think that if you were to completely distance yourself, then you would not be doing a good job. I need that turmoil *to keep on going*. If I am not feeling that connection with students, then I should get out".

Jay responds enthusiastically to the fifth question about whether he saw any of these practices as spiritual. "Oh yea, spirituality is a huge part of it. I couldn't do this job without it". Jay's responses to number five followed several pathways after that. First, he followed up his enthusiastic, "Oh yea..." with yet another story. This one was about being called to the teaching profession.

"I felt when I was in college that I was called to become a teacher, my mom is a teacher. When I was in college I didn't know what I wanted to do and I felt I was called to this. And I think that that was a huge part that led me to it".

After that, Jay spoke about the connection he sees between running and praying. "Yea, a lot of times when I am out on the road, I will pray and think about what is going on...It is a conversation basically with God. It is time I have alone. When I need it, I take

the time, no matter what the situation, to talk to God and pray". Jay also answered question five by saying that he and his wife pray and study scripture together "every night", and he said that though they have become "burned out a little bit" on church, still belonging to a faith community is important to them, adding, "We are keeping our eyes open for the right place".

Finally, Jay spoke about how he saw the connection between spirituality and his job as a teacher. First, he indicated that he feels he has a kind of proselytizing mission to his students because, "No one's taught them anything spiritually—you kind of slip it in there when you can". He decried the kind of hypocrisy that he says he sees in the teacher's lounge where teachers, "dog kids up and down....and cuss up a storm at times", but he said that "Christianity is a huge part of what you strive for" nonetheless. In Jay's responses to question five, optimism, letting go and striving to be more Christlike—in Jay's own words, "to do things after Christ's example"—were the key elements of teaching.

Like his response to question four, Jay's response to question six is also short and concise. The last words of his interview were, "Yea, if I didn't have the level of spirituality I do have, I would not be here now. I couldn't do this on my own".

Summary

All of the qualitative evidence in the first three responses appears to support the quantitative evidence to which it was related. The interview material showed that EE, Dp and PA were where they should be for Jay. Additionally, Jay made a clear statement in the end that he saw a positive relationship between spirituality and his ability to "be here now" and do what he does as a special educator.

Subject 3: Mary

Subject 3 is "Mary". Mary is a 53 year-old High School special educator with 32 years of experience. She is white, and Mary is responsible for "50 +" inclusion students, ages 9th-12th grade, and she is the head of the high school special education department. She has been at her current assignment for 29 years. Our interview occurred on August 11, 2006. Mary's MBI-ES scores were EE 16; DP 10; PA 44 (LML).

Mary's EE score of 16 is at the top of the low range (0-16). As she responded to question one, she said the things that cause her the most emotional strain are lack of respect and insubordination, "not only to me but just to everything in general". This is one of the keys to understanding Mary's point of view. For her, each child has potential, though some don't even recognize it in themselves, and doing better is the key. She puts it this way,

"There is so much potential in these kids—if you could just, I don't know, the biggest thing is to get them to see that they are, and can make, a difference and can be productive members of society, and they do not have to continue going on living the way that they have been raised. That is my biggest, I think, obstacle in teaching."

As she continued to respond to question two, Mary characterized much of what causes her stress not as conflict or confrontation, but as "fighting". To deal with this, she refuses to "fight at home" and when she gets there, she relaxes, walks, drinks some wine, and talks with her husband and kids. She speaks of home and school as "two different worlds", and when asked about her work, she said,

"I really do enjoy my job; I don't think I would be happy teaching kids that want to learn. I have always wanted to work with—I don't know what it is—the element of surprise or danger, I don't know what it is, I have always wanted to work with the kids that no one else wanted to deal with. I don't know why. I just do."

The tension she raises in this quote accounts for why her EE score is at the top of the range and not at the bottom like the other two women in the sample. Depending on what day she takes the MBI, Mary could easily shift into the moderate range; however, the information she told the interviewer does seem to support her "16" EE score.

Mary's Dp score is a "10", falling inside the moderate range on the MBI-ES (9-13). Her comments indicate that she is not precise about what role she sees herself in regards her pupils. Mary answered question two about relationships by thinking aloud through what she thought her role is at school. She started out saying that though she is not really a mother, "Most of these kids don't have anybody in their life that has ever parented them or set goals for them". And in the end she drew the conclusion that, her role is, "More of a neutral type person—not really a parent and not a teacher—someone to show them that they can do something with their lives. And no matter how many times they dog me or disrespect or whatever, I am still going to be there for them".

The part of the role that she is most certain about involved bringing others on board like the parent, the probation officer, and the regular education teacher.

"I try to be consistent. Although I don't try to do it alone either. I try to get the parent on board. I try to get the probation officer on board, and I try to get the regular teacher also. I try to do it as a team to let them know they need school.

They need an education in order to be successful. And if they are not happy with their life the way it is, the only person that can change it is them. Not that they necessarily agree with me—they don't."

Mary deals with many different students (50+), and she tended to espouse that the students are the ones most responsible for their own success. This large number of students and the belief Mary has that students are responsible for their own success may be two strong reasons why her depersonalization score is high. If this is the case, then Mary's interview data supported her moderate Dp score.

Mary had a very high PA score of 44. When she was first asked question three, Mary probed the question a little bit, but ended up saying that she did feel a sense of accomplishment, *intrinsically*. And then she went on to explain what she meant by that word. Mary presented an unlikely success story to highlight her sense of accomplishment. Mary's story was about "JD", the "successful" jailbird, and it is shot through with the same kind of "yes, but..." answer that her other responses also contained.

Let's talk about "JD". OK, here's a kid that went through elementary and middle school and everybody said that he was the biggest pain in the you know where. And he was. They removed him from middle school and put him in the alternative school and brought him back to the high school thinking he was fixed. We all knew he wasn't.

With a lot of perseverance on ... everybody's part he graduated last year after three years. However, I was pulling up the Logan County jail list every 2-3 days,

because the majority of the kids I deal with end up in there, and he has been in jail the majority of the summer... You think you make a difference, but you know there's this kid that needed a lot of counseling and probably medication in order to be successful, and I could never get Mama to buy into that. For some reason, she blamed herself.

But that's a success story—one kid that got through. He did come the last week of school (in May) and thanked me for every thing I did. I am sure my mouth was open because he never had a kind word to say about anybody”.

It is difficult to understand at this point in the interview, why Mary scores so high on PA. Perhaps like David, Mary's sense of accomplishment comes from other times and events in her long career. She is the head of the high school department of special education, and that may contribute to her high PA score. For Mary the Dp and EE subscale scores seem to be supported, but her high PA score does not match the story she tells about “JD”—though there are probably other stories that would confirm her score of a “44” much better.

In her response to number four, Mary noted several things that she did to avoid burnout and prepare for teaching. “I try to talk with the people I work with. A lot of times if you can bounce back a situation with a kid, it can be your first year teacher or an aide that helps you put things back into perspective. I think we all need that.” In addition to that, like some of the other subjects, Mary found that, “just meeting, getting together

with friends” is an important practice. Mary also said, “I am the type of person that needs to be busy to be happy”, and so she knits, crochets, paints, mows and cleans.

When she was asked question five, Mary registered some misunderstanding in her initial response. Here is the exchange:

Interviewer: “All these different kinds of practices—do you consider any of them spiritual?”

Mary: “Meaning?”

Interviewer: “Actually, I want you to define it, if you do—and why?”

Mary: “I don’t know what you mean by spiritual.”

Interviewer: “What I want you to do, I can’t describe, because that is what I am after.”

Mary: “Do you mean from a higher power? Absolutely.”

Immediately after that exchange, Mary said, “I really do. I mean I am always saying, ‘Dear Lord, help me get through this’, or ‘help me find goodness in this child’, or ‘help find whatever it takes to redirect this child, please help me take the spell of Satan out of this child’”. This triggered several other things in Mary too. She spoke about the death of her sister, a probation officer named Chrissie—a story of loss to which she attached great meaning. She also spoke again at length about her ties to both Catholicism and Methodism, and about her feelings concerning attending worship:

“I always feel that there is somebody up there looking out for me....It is part of who I am and what I believe in. It is just a day to day thing. I think that the

reason that I don't go to church on a regular basis is that because growing up I had to go to church every single Sunday, and to Sunday school. When I go back I can still recite every single part of Mass. I don't believe you have to go to church to believe in God. I believe that if you are a good person, and you do what needs to be done, then you do not have to go to church every Sunday."

Mary seems to connect the practices she does to alleviate burnout directly to her ideas about spirituality. She spoke of prayer, and she spoke of belief, and she used very traditionally spiritual words and phrases to explain the connection she saw.

For Mary the connection between spirituality and burnout appears to be very strong, albeit challenging. Here is her response to the final question:

"I think that it is real important for me to believe that there is a God out there. I think it is just something that once we leave here we are all useful. This is just a test; I am hoping that is the way it is. If I didn't believe in that—if there is no more after this—it is kind of depressing. I truly believe that there is life beyond."

Summary

Mary's Dp and EE subscale scores are supported by the qualitative evidence. Though one would imagine in a thirty-one year career there are other events that have given her a strong sense of accomplishment, the "44" Mary received on her PA is not supported by the stories and illustrations she chose to tell in this interview. Mary did see a connection between spirituality and burnout. For Mary, the relationship between spirituality and burnout amounts to a test. She will both survive the situation and move on, or she will not and burnout.

Subject 4: Raine

"Raine", Subject 4, is a 43 year-old white intervention specialist in her 21st year of teaching. She is directly responsible for six, sixth grade students designated as being either DH or DH/MH. She teaches these students in a pull-out setting. She has been at her current assignment for four years and has a Master's degree. She has been married for 19 years and has two children currently living at home. Her MBI-ES is (MLL) with an EE of 19, a DP of just 1, and a PA of 44. Raine is the middle school special education department head.

Raine's EE score is a "19"; it shades toward the low end of the moderate range of 17-26. She describes the kind of exhaustion she sometimes feels as good exhaustion: "I feel if I am emotionally exhausted then I feel I have been challenged throughout the day." Further, she saw emotional exhaustion as an important indicator that a teacher is doing a good job, "if it was completely alleviated," Raine says, "then it would be time to retire". The qualitative evidence supports her EE score and fits into her philosophy quite well. If she did not see EE as a necessary indicator of doing a good job, then her score would likely have been different. She feels the emotional exhaustion, but she also tolerates it—this tends to affirm her moderate EE score.

Raine had an extremely low DP score of only "1". This is evident in the way she described her relationship to the students during the interview: "I have never wanted to be a friend to the students. I want them to see me as an adult and see me as such. I think I am trusted by them. Every time I get a letter from the students, I save it. They say you helped with this class; I came to you and trusted you. And I am really proud of those

things". This brief answer supported and under girded her philosophy of teaching which she shared at the end of her response to question two.

"I have a philosophy that every day is a new day. I developed that one when I was working with severely handicapped children and some things could happen where you could hold a grudge against them. They may have done something that you could carry it over to the next day. So every day is a new day. I remember running into one, and he said, 'You know, you always gave me a second chance'. So I always try to be consistent."

The qualitative data appears consistent on this question, for Raine used the phrase "every day is a new day" three times during her interview. The repetition and consistency found in her response to question two reinforced the accuracy of the low Dp score that Raine received.

Raine's "44" for PA places her well into the low range. Again, she scores very low on this subscale, just as she did for Dp. When asked the PA question, Raine told about a non-verbal boy (Aaron) that eventually was able to start reading.

"I think one accomplishment that stands out is a student four or five years, non-verbal, just grunts. I was nervous about working with this student. I tried not to get into the negative from the previous teachers. He loved to look at books. He knew very little sign—it was between he and his parents. I knew no sign language but was willing to learn. I found a program that often had sign books with it. So, when I was doing it with other students, I started the books with sign with him. By the end of the year I had gotten him to a primer level of reading. As he opened the book you could see him sitting there doing the signs. And he knew

what he was doing. I would pull the word up and he would sign it—he understood it.

By sharing this story, Raine tied her sense of accomplishment to student success. She defined success as student independence: “When I see a student become more independent with a task... when I work with kids that explode when others stare at them and it is something we have been working on, and it doesn’t bother them anymore, that is success”.

Once again, the verbal evidence does seem to support the very high score Raine has on the MBI-ES for personal accomplishment. This PA score and the Dp score demonstrate that this woman is at low risk for burnout, and the slightly moderate EE score can be accounted for by Raine’s philosophy that a little stress helps a teacher know that she is doing a good job. Raine’s scores are substantiated by the qualitative evidence.

Of all the questions, Raine’s response to question number four, asking what practices she does to eliminate or alleviate burnout, is her most extensive. It takes up a little more than a page. She begins by speaking about her biggest stressor, alternative assessment. Here again the connection made by (Zabel & Zabel, 2001) between burnout and paperwork is expressed in the qualitative evidence. Raine says that she feels like alternative assessment holds her accountable for what the students can and cannot do, but in the process it becomes, “more a test of our ability to organize than it is to show how the child performs”. Then Raine begins to speak more directly about the practices she does to alleviate this stress.

She talked about several different practices. They included: putting it all aside and just “having a fun afternoon”; taking her bag home everyday, but some days not even

opening it; using calm self-talk; going to her own children's extracurricular events; getting some distance from work; and celebrating individual students' day to day successes in her classroom—"Oh look, Judy Ann can write her name in cursive now. Let's have five minutes of free time".

Raine concluded her response to question four with another story about a time fourteen years into her career when, in her words, "I felt really burned out and said that was it. I felt I was being taken advantage of".

"I was teaching SBH (Severe Behavior Handicap) in elementary, and I know I was doing a good job of it. They moved me to the middle school, and I said I did not want to do this the rest of my life. A position came open elsewhere and they did not give it to me. I was kind of like, 'What is this?' There was another position in another building--I went to my supervisor and said I wanted it. I remember walking into (the principal's) office with the letter. He said to me if I can work out to give you another position would you stay? I remember thinking this is what I want to do. I stood my ground and said, "No".

"I went to another building and different position. That was probably the best thing for me but I did not know that at the time. I met a young lady and became her mentor. She is now going to college. Some greater being helped me out there".

Raine is the only subject who related a story having to do with nearly being burned out, ready to quit. It is an important story in terms of this research chiefly because, she explicitly connects the resolution of the story to the concept of help from a

“greater being”—and Raine uses the term on her own and unprompted before the term “spirituality” is brought up in the interview in question five.

Question five, the question designed to get at whether the subjects’ saw a relationship between these practices the spoke about to alleviate burnout and their own definitions of spirituality, came next. Raine did not make a direct connection between the two. She began by distancing herself from the traditional, church-going definition of spirituality, but she never returned to the practices she spoke about earlier in the interview. After the question was asked, her immediate response was, “I am privately spiritual. I do not go to church. I do consider myself a Christian. The God I believe in is not taking attendance every Sunday”. As she continued to respond, she spoke philosophically about what she does for a living: “I feel I am being measured with what I am doing with my life. Working in S.E. can be very trying. It does take a special person”. Then she summed up her statement about spirituality like this: “It is valuing life, and everybody has a purpose, it is not my place to say what that purpose is”.

The closest Raine came to drawing a connection between the practices she does to alleviate burnout and spirituality was to talk about specific tasks she did as an MH/DH teacher. For instance she said, “I try to do little projects that show that they have value. The Christmas wrapping project that give them a lot of accomplishment. Teachers can see them in another way. I push to get others to see their value and get them in the classroom.” She does not mention whether or not these kinds of projects help her eliminate or alleviate burnout.

Though in her response to question five, Raine does not directly relate spirituality to the practices she does to alleviate burnout, her surprising response to question four

does support such a connection between burnout and a "higher power", and she does so more explicitly than any of the others did. She is the only one to relate a story that is specifically about almost burning out and quitting, and she is the only one who mentions the term "higher being" before the idea of spirituality is even introduced by the interviewer. In addition to this connection, Raine also described how others in education are spiritual, "I think that people who do the best in any field of education are spiritual. I think that you can tell. Because I think they have a little bit more caring and compassion".

Summary

All three of Raine's scores on the MBI-ES subscales appear to be substantiated by the interview data she provided. She did not make a connection between spirituality and the practices she spoke about doing to alleviate burnout; however, she did say that there is a relationship between spirituality and purposeful special education. She said this in two ways. First, Raine said that educators who do the best are spiritual. Second, it is interesting to note that she was the only subject to bring up the idea of a "greater being" that lowered burnout prior to having spirituality explicitly brought into the conversation by the interviewer.

Subject 5: Deanne

Subject 5, "Deanne", is an elementary school intervention teacher who I interviewed on August 11th in the conference room of Northeastern Elementary School. She is white, 28 years old and has a Master's degree and six years of experience. She is directly responsible for the inclusion of 17 elementary age students with disability labels

of ED and LD , and she has been in her current assignment for one and a half years.

Deanne's MBI-ES scores are: EE 10; DP 2; PA 37. Deanne has the lowest EE score of everyone in the interview sample; it is just a "10". Her Dp score is also very low at a "2" (Raine's "1" is slightly lower). Her PA score of "36" falls only into the moderate range, but it is only one shy of the low range cut off. Over all, her pattern is LLM.

Like Raine, Deanne's low EE rating seems to be supported by the qualitative evidence. In her response to question one, she says that "most of the time I feel energetic". Even though Deanne says confrontation over behavioral issues "stresses me out", she relies a lot on her relationships with the other teachers to work through the emotional exhaustion confrontation produces in her. She "tries a lot of things" when she becomes frustrated, and "most of the time the other teachers are willing to work with me, and it usually works out". This reliance on the team approach keeps Deanne's EE score down, apparently, for the interview evidence supports her low EE score of "10".

Deanne's Dp score is also quite low; it is only a "2". This may be an outgrowth of her emphasis on good rapport and high expectations. For instance, Deanne said,

"I feel that I have a good rapport with my students. I feel that they feel very comfortable around me. There are days that they may not like me at the end of the day. I have high expectations for them. I push my kids. Sometimes that stresses them out, which stresses me out. But I am not the type of person that lets them get by with nothing and not letting them put their best effort forth".

Maintaining good rapport and insisting on high expectations are two ways that Deanne said she kept her students close. Her answer to question two demonstrated that, how her

students do, affects her personally. This evidence does seem to indicate that Deanne does not depersonalize her students, and therefore, it does tend to support her low Dp score.

Deanne responded to question number three about the personal accomplishment subscale by using an illustration. Her response and illustration did not seem to support the score of "36" she received on the PA subscale. Her direct answer to the question, "Do you feel a sense of accomplishment from your job?" was an unqualified, "Oh, yes". The story she followed this up with also seemed to indicate that this score would come out higher.

"We had a student come from the Discovery Center. We were worried about him being included. We really worked hard with his single parent dad and made sure to be mainstreamed and included.... I tutored him for three summers, and I just pushed hard to see him being included. It is so neat to see him have friendships in the classroom, and he is involved with a lot and is going to be a 4th grader. So it is quite exciting. In kindergarten he was included basically for calendar time. And each year he was included more. This past year I wasn't his teacher anymore, but he was fully included".

It is difficult to tell why Deanne's PA score fell into the moderate range instead of the high range. A further exploration of this topic might have yielded the cause of the bump upward, but the exact reason is not revealed in the interview data. Though her PA score was not clearly supported, her other two subscale scores, 10 EE and 2 Dp did seem to be supported by the things Deanne shared in the interview.

When asked about the practices she does to avoid or alleviate burnout, Deanne began her response with her philosophy: "I guess I just look at each day as a new day".

She then described her outlets which include walking; getting her mind off of things; summers; sporting events; family; and talking with other staff. Acknowledging these practices as essential ways of coping with stress, she also stated:

No, I think that is always going to be the stress. You are excited about every fall and excited about school, but you always have the stress. There is just constantly one more thing, what else could I be doing to do a better job? I don't think that there is anything that could wipe that out. I even took that book study last year through the ESC, it talks about yoga, but that is just not me. It was an interesting book to read, but I don't know..."

Question five asked Deanne to think about whether she considered the practices she does to alleviate or eliminate burnout to be "spiritual". Deanne made a clear connection between at least one of the practices she does to alleviate burnout and spirituality when she spoke at length about walking and talking to God. She responded, "I do know when I walk; I do a lot of reflecting....I guess I do a lot of talking to God when I am walking. 'Help me get through things'". She wasn't sure whether that made the practice, as she said, "spiritual in itself"; however, she did expand on the theme of talking to God. "There are times when I turn to God for help to get through the day. I also drive an hour each way, so I have a lot of receiving time on my way to and from school. It is a good preparing and cooling down time every day".

Finally, Deanne's response to the final question came in two steps. First, she declared the importance of several traditionally "spiritual" elements she finds in her life, "I definitely feel that there is a higher being. I go to church every Sunday", and then she related that sense of spirituality to stress and her low level of burnout. She noted: "I feel

that, being spiritual, I am able to be more positive about things. I am not negative. I know people get stressed and find the negative in things. I know that everything happens for a reason, and I am able to get through it”.

Summary

The qualitative evidence does seem to support two of Deanne's subscale scores, for EE and for Dp. Deanne's moderate PA score did not seem to be supported. Deanne related spirituality and burnout in her response to question number six. She said, “Everything happens for a reason, and I am able to get through it”.

Part III: Combined Results

Qualitative Evidence in Support of MBI Scores

Two of the interviewed subjects had qualitative evidence that clearly supported all three of their scores on the MBI-ES. The other three had evidence from their interviews that supported two out of the three subscale scores, but the PA subscale scores for David, Deanne and Mary were not supported. The subject-by-subject write-ups indicate that one possible reason for the discrepancy may be that not enough positive stories about personal accomplishment were garnered. If the design is changed in future research the PA subscale might also find stronger support in the qualitative evidence. All in all, the MBI results, except for PA, can be said to be supported by this interview data.

Qualitative Evidence of Relationship between Spirituality and Burnout

The guiding question of this research was to explore whether there is a relationship between spirituality and the MBI-ES burnout level of the subjects in this sample. It was believed that the subjects would say that a relationship between

spirituality and burnout existed, and that those who claimed this relationship existed would score lower on the MBI-ES risk for burnout than those who did not claim this relationship. The first part of the hypothesis was realized by the results; the second part was not.

The final results seem to show that, regardless of their own level of burnout all five subjects did claim that a relationship existed; however, there was no connection between the actual level of burnout and the subjects that claimed the relationship existed. The MBI-ES risk for burnout and a subjects' claim that a relationship existed between spirituality and burnout was not discovered conclusively.

Though all five of the subjects did claim some kind of a relationship existed between spirituality and burnout, each of them described a unique view of the relationship they saw. Dave concluded that he thought spirituality did impact his own level of burnout in this way. He said that spirituality got him into the field of special education and helped him maintain his commitment to it, but he doesn't know if it will carry him through to the end of his career. Similarly, Jay made a clear statement that he saw a positive relationship between spirituality and his ability to "be here now" and do what he does as a special educator. Mary said that the relationship between spirituality and burnout amounts to a stressful test God gives and people either pass or do not pass. Raine said that there is a relationship between spirituality and purposeful special education, and she made the connection between the helpful presence of a higher being earliest of all the subjects. And finally, Deanne directly related her concept of spirituality to her own level of burnout: "...and I am able to get through it. Everything happens for a reason".

Part IV: Discussion of Results and Limitations

The results show that claiming a relationship exists between spirituality and burnout is not related to one's own level of burnout in these subjects. A much larger study would have to be done to prove or disprove that something called "spirituality" actually affects burnout scores the way other factors in the research have been shown to do (Embich, 2001). Fine tuning the definition of spirituality or using a tool to measure spirituality such as the STS developed by (Golden, 2004) would help in this regard. Though this study did not show a direct connection between the *level* of burnout and the claim for a relationship to spirituality, the results did demonstrate that all five subjects claimed that some sort of a relationship between spirituality and burnout existed. This is worth continued examination.

On the one hand, it may be that the evidence which shows that all five saw a relationship may be attributable to researcher bias. Creating some more distance between the interviewers and the sample would be one way to decrease this bias. Another way to decrease the possible bias would be to triangulate the analysis by having either another researcher check the thoroughness of the analysis or having the subjects themselves go back over what the analysis showed to confirm or deny its assumptions and conclusions. Honing the interview protocol and widening the range of MBI-ES scores the interviewed subjects received would also improve the validity of the results and decrease potential bias. On the other hand, exploring the results of the responses by using a quantified word study has also led to a more objective set of results that could point toward a stronger research project in the future.

Emergent Themes for Future Research

All of these special educators used spiritual words and phrases as they spoke about burnout and their work. Twenty-five names for an ultimate other, thirty words that came from the Judeo-Christian lexicon (like "Prayer" and "Call", "Satan" and "Saved") and a dozen similarly theological phrases appeared in the data. The number of times such words and phrases were used was significant across the entire sample.

For instance, the subjects used a variety of language to depict an ultimate reality. Traditional Judeo-Christian language was predominantly used when naming this ultimate; however, the subjects' own experiences of organized religion was not described as helping them eliminate or alleviate burnout per se, except in one case. In fact, their description of things "spiritual" was often set against their description of organized religion. The semantics of many of them indicated that the subjects felt they needed an "other" from time to time to accomplish their work. These words and phrases demonstrated that the subjects, (1) were willing to name an ultimate in their lives and (2) were working out connections they experienced between what they called spirituality and their own life's work. In the midst of this language, two themes emerged, either of which might prove to be a fruitful field for future research.

The first theme to emerge was prayer, or words the subjects said they addressed to an ultimate "other". In the qualitative data these educators said that prayer provides a way to cope with the stresses they face each day. This result may point to the same kind of factor found among the clergy in research and labeled "prayer fulfillment" (Golden, 2004). To improve the methodology of a future study on prayer, this study's "spirituality" might be more clearly defined by borrowing Golden's specific working

definitions of the aspects of connectedness and ultimate concern. Because four of the five subjects said that prayer is one practice that relieves the immediate pressure and stress of their jobs and keeps them from becoming burned out, further research on the definition, role and use of prayer by special educators would be worthwhile.

Stories of call were the second theme found in the interviews. Four of the five participants specifically tied the story of how they got started in teaching to some notion of God or an experience of being guided by an ultimate other. The call stories most often included a description of a starting point, the influence of someone or something from outside that enters the person's life, and then a different choice made as the result of that influence. The call stories in this data are about origins, and each of the subjects in this sample clearly attached their current circumstances to a power beyond themselves that was active early in their careers. Finally, the call stories related by these teachers provided the most dramatic alignment of spirituality and teaching in the study; for in their stories, the subjects melded their own career choices with a sense of direction and guidance they felt they had received from something beyond their own direct experience.

Finally, because language supporting the idea of the teachers' belief in something outside themselves is prevalent in the words they shared with the interviewer about their stories of call, another possible direction for future research might be to do oral histories on retired special education teachers to see how this kind of language is used in the stories they tell about their careers. Such a set of stories might prove inspirational to current teachers still struggling with burnout. Perhaps, just learning of their struggles might help alleviate the burnout that special educators feel at the point where they are about to be overwhelmed.

Conclusion

At one time teaching was thought of as "tutelary", which is not just passing on knowledge, but also watching over, protecting the student. Therefore, some of the most poignant pieces of being a special education teacher revealed in this data are the stories of students that were "lost" for one reason or another and the effect that had on the teachers' feelings of burnout. These stories are powerful because they point to the rift that exists in modern education between the subject matter that is taught and the "subjective matter" of the teacher and the student themselves. They indicate the places where burnout is not only measurable, but also worth being addressed. Teachers work each day to keep students "interested", literally "between" the subjective and objective states of "being". That is what they speak about when they tell their stories. As a result, most of the teachers in this data set address their burnout in indirect ways, speaking about their care for the student and the frustrations they encountered as they sought to "get information into" the student's head.

Perhaps it is in this daily work, in the gap between the subjects and the objects of teaching, where spirituality exists. Perhaps it is there where spirituality, however it is defined, can help a special educator near to burnout find his or her purpose and move out of burnout. As Raine says in the summation to her interview:

Spirituality is too hard to explain. I do feel I am (spiritual), and I do believe that is why I am able to do the work I do with the challenging students, because I can see there is a purpose to them instead of seeing only that they are not going to be a valedictorian".

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