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K-12 LEADERSHIP
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IT IS IN GIVING THAT WE RECEIVE: THE SPIRITUALITY OF SPECIAL
EDUCATION ADMINISTRATORS (399 pp.)

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

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

The findings formed several themes, with the Ultimate at the center and service to students with disabilities as the essential motivator for the special education administrators' work. Appreciation of the grace of the Ultimate in success and reliance upon the grace of the Ultimate during struggles was another key theme. Additionally, paradoxical pairings emerged: (a) productive thought processes/feeling inadequate, (b) enacting core values/working within restrictions, (c) fulfilling collaboration/frustration with others, (d) resilience to/being overwhelmed by change, and (e) work integrated into life/work pushing life out of balance.

Deeper analysis suggested three significant influences on the participants' experience, including (a) inherited factors, (b) environmental factors, and (c) choice factors. The swirl of special education administrators' spiritual leadership depicts the integrated themes revealed through this study. Vitally, the participants choose to cultivate a sense of the Ultimate throughout all aspects of their work life. The autonomy inherent in their ability to choose, especially, supports the conclusion that there is hope for improved outcomes for students with disabilities. Recommendations are provided for prospective and current special education leaders, other professionals who work with them in the schools, and for institutions of higher education that prepare them for this avocation.