

**The Spirituality of  
Special Education  
Administrators**

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**Overview**

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- ca Connections & Predictions
- ca Discussion of the Research
- ca Implications of the Research
- ca Future Inquiry
- ca Theme of the Research: *Special Education*  
*Administrators choose how they experience work.*

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**Presentation Objectives**

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- ca You will:
  - ca Think about how you find meaning in your work.
  - ca Compare your experiences to the research findings.
  - ca Evaluate whether you may approach work differently in the future.

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## Advance Organizer

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- ❧ Research question & supporting questions
  - ❧ Making meaning
  - ❧ Leadership
  - ❧ Coping
  
- ❧ Why this study?
  
- ❧ How do these topics manifest in *your* work?

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## Using the Organizer

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- ❧ At the end of the presentation, I will ask for these organizers.
  
- ❧ Section 1: Answer one or more questions.
  
- ❧ Section 2: Check the box to make a prediction.
  
- ❧ Turn and talk to a neighbor, with each person sharing at least one response.

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## Foundations of the Research

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- ❧ Descriptive Qualitative – No statistics or causality
  
- ❧ Knowledge is created by participants
  
- ❧ Weave ideas together without changing them
  
- ❧ Data Collection & Analysis

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## Students with Disabilities



- ca Students are the crux of special education administrators' motivation for work
- ca Provides a clear, easily understood purpose of their work.
- ca Strong feelings about helping these students have are present, sometimes even since childhood-inherited factor

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## Productive Thought Processes



- ca Positive personal qualities
  - ca Calm, optimism
  - ca Paradox: *Feeling inadequate*
- ca Reflective metacognition
  - ca Filtering thoughts, things seem worse beforehand, sticking with values
- ca Shows they are at the level of Postconventional development (Cook-Greuter, 2000)

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## Enacting Core Values



- ca Trust-taking risks to go first and give power to others
- ca Repair mistakes-inevitable, but make amends
- ca Honesty-even when difficult
- ca Direct assistance to families-significant motivator
- ca Productive partnerships-come from giving power and provides foundation for collaboration for SWDs
- ca Paradox: *Working within parameters*

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## Fulfilling Collaboration



- ca Listen carefully-learned over time & accept feedback
- ca Mentor-encouragement + validation = be themselves
- ca Persistence-due to seeing the Ultimate in all
- ca The Golden Rule-helps in all situations
- ca Paradox 1: *Skill and will deficits of others*
- ca Paradox 2: *Perceptions of others-negative*
- ca Paradox 3: *Secreted spirituality*

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## Resilience to Change



- ca Self-regulation strategies-wide variety, some spiritual
- ca Letting go-can detach even when easier not to
- ca Continued learning-cognitive and identity development
- ca Dealing with the unpredictable-major environmental factor
- ca Paradox 1: *Doubt—resulting from environment & adult development*
- ca Paradox 2: *Feeling lonely and misunderstood-sense of unworthiness*

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## Work as Part of Life



- ca Paradox 1: *Difficulty dropping work*
  - ca *Thinking about it compulsively*
  - ca *Based on care for others, not on desire for power*
- ca Paradox 2: *Work dominating life*
  - ca *Overemphasis on Doing and Others at the expense of Being and Self (Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2011)*
- ca Work as part of a whole life
  - ca Spirituality is part of a credo
  - ca Integrity
  - ca Meaning found in work is strongly linked to life in general

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## Appreciating & Relying on the Ultimate

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- ☞ Default mode that involves a perception of the Ultimate in everything whether 'good' or 'bad'
  
- ☞ *Can be difficult to feel appreciation based on the emphases in our culture-environmental factor*
  
- ☞ Connected to Perennial Philosophy

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## Summary of Themes

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- ☞ The Ultimate
- ☞ Inherited, Environmental & Choice Factors
- ☞ Students with Disabilities
- ☞ Productive Thought Processes/*Feeling Inadequate*
- ☞ Enacting Core Values/*Working within Parameters*
- ☞ Fulfilling Collaboration/*Skill, Will Deficits of Others*
- ☞ Resilience to Change/*Doubt, Misunderstood*
- ☞ Work as Part of Life/*Work Dominating Life*
- ☞ Appreciating & Relying on the Ultimate

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## Implications

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- Prospective Special Education Administrators
- Institutions of Higher Education
- Colleagues of Special Education Administrators
- Superintendents
- Special Education Administrators

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## Implications



- ca *Prospective special education administrators*
  - ca Explicitly consider whether it is the right field for them.
- ca *Institutions of higher education*
  - ca *Admissions*: Inquire about candidates' ways of making meaning and strategies for resilience.
  - ca *Coursework*: Develop the adult students' self-awareness as a leadership tool through a course called *Adult Development for Educational Leadership*.

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## Implications



- ca *Colleagues of Special Education Administrators*:
  - ca Better understanding of the motives of the administrators could promote a harmonious work environment.
- ca *Superintendents*:
  - ca *Hiring*: Find a person who is self-aware and will be content with the nature of the work.
  - ca *Legal liaison*: Consider contracting with an outside expert to take over the intense legal situations, thus freeing up the special education administrator.

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## Implications



- ca *Special Education Administrators*
  - ca Frequently, deeply reconnect with the Ultimate by using self-regulation strategies
  - ca Create a 'meaning at work' narrative and revisit it frequently
  - ca Cultivate 'critical friend' peer mentoring relationships to process the work and support adult development
  - ca Prioritize spending time in contact with students with disabilities at work

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**Future Research Ideas**

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*CS*

- ☞ Non-Spiritual Special Education Administrators
- ☞ Higher Education Special Education Administrators
- ☞ Effect of Increased Self-Regulation
- ☞ Effect of a Course or Workshop

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**Overview**

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- ☞ Discussion of the Research (What was found? Why?)
- ☞ Implications of the Research
- ☞ Future Research Ideas
- ☞ Links Between the Research and Your Experience
- ☞ Might Any of the Implications Influence Your Perspectives or Behavior?

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**Scholarly Conversation**

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*CS*

I am interested in your questions/comments about my favorite topic.

Research Theme:  
*Special Education Administrators choose how they experience work.*  
 Contact information: [merritt.waters@gmail.com](mailto:merritt.waters@gmail.com)

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