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INTRODUCTION

Purposes of education are embedded within the overall understandings and belief structures of individuals. Research indicates however, that beliefs, and therefore purposes, held by pre-service teachers, remain basically unchanged through education programmes (Britzman, 1986; McDiarmid, 1990; Pajares, 1992; Wideen et al., 1998). In spite of this resilience to educative change, it is argued here that facilitating authentic development of teachers purposes of education, by changing their hearts and minds - that is, their holistic beliefs - remains a worthwhile task, and can potentially be assisted through the use of the existential crisis.

This paper begins by exploring the nature of purposes and Kierkegaard’s doctrine of how, before explaining how purposes can be well grounded. It is then argued that through the existential crisis, beliefs can be identified, valued, prioritized and authenticated. It is argued in this analysis that the existential crisis is a potential means by which purposes of education, being aspects of beliefs, can be changed in an educative
sense, as the very hearts and minds of individuals change.

**THE NATURE OF ‘PURPOSES’**

When addressing purposes of education and purposes of teacher education, it is necessary to acknowledge that ‘education’, being an abstract concept, does not have purposes or aims. This is recognised by Dewey (1985, p. 114) who claims that “it is well to remind ourselves that education as such has no aims. Only persons, parents, and teachers, etc., have aims, not an abstract idea like education”. Purposes then, belong to persons and not to concepts. Due to the loss of the traditional metanarratives (Lyotard, 1991) in contemporary, postmodern society, if education and teacher education are to be thought of as ‘meaningless’ in the sense that they have no inherent universal aims or purposes, does this deny good grounds for any purposes?

While abstract concepts such as ‘education’ can be understood to be potentially inherently meaningless, it is recognised that ‘purposes’ belong to beings. Therefore the content that relates to purposes of education and purposes of teacher education, is to be found with persons and not with the concepts themselves. As entities who have at least some agency (Kearney, 1987, p. 55-56), we act in intentional ways. These intentions
are part of our whole being, including our intuitions, emotions and our cognitive understandings. Therefore we can be understood to act from the intentions of both our hearts and our minds. Purposes in this context do not lend themselves to becoming assigned to individual components in the dichotomised model of humankind inherited from Descartes. Purposes can be understood to be attributes of a holistic and deeply personal nature.

As purposes of education and of teacher education are drawn from the depths of the whole individual, they are understood to be inextricably linked to the purposes and meanings that one has for one’s life. This link between purposes of education and beliefs about human nature and the meanings of life has been identified by many scholars (Freire, 1972; Peters, 1973; Higginbotham, 1976; O’Hear, 1981; White, 1990). It is argued that “no teacher or school system is so innocent as to believe that educational functions are performed without reference to ideas on the nature of man’s existence and his ultimate purpose in life” (Kneller, 1958, p. 42). In this sense there is understood to be unity of meaning and purpose for the individual. The purposes that are evident within one’s variously fragmented roles, including that of teacher educator, have unity with each other and with how one’s purpose of life is understood.
Understanding purposes in such a way may seem to portray them as being liable to the subjective arbitrariness and fanciful whim of the individual. This appears especially problematic if the notion of ‘truth’ is understood in terms of how one’s particular purposes of education correspond to an ideal view of education, possibly assumed as inherent within the vocabulary of the term itself. However it is argued that purposes are not to be understood in this fashion, and their grounding does not depend on a correspondence with an ‘objective’ reality.

KIERKEGAARD’S DOCTRINE OF HOW

Before examining how purposes and meanings can be well grounded, it is necessary to understand Kierkegaard’s doctrine of how. As the modern ‘father of Existentialism’, Kierkegaard (1989, p. 43) depicted the human individual as a “relation that relates”, and Heidegger (1969, p. 31) too described the person as the relationship “of responding to being”, while in-the-world. The individual is not an atomistic, detached subject that is often assumed to be characteristic of existential philosophy. Describing the individual as a relation that relates, has major implications for how purposes and meanings can be well grounded, and requires a review of how the existentialists, in particular Kierkegaard,
Nietzsche and Heidegger, approached the notion of ‘truth’.

Kierkegaard (1992, vol 1, p. 203) declared that “subjectivity is truth”. By subjectivity he did not signify arbitrariness but rather inwardness. He claimed that the objective what of our knowledge could only ever be an approximation, and asserted that emphasis should be given to the how. His approach is not so much an attempt to deny objective truths, because objectivity is not the major concern for the existential view. He declared that ‘Objectively the emphasis is on what is said; subjectively the emphasis is on how it is said’ (ibid, p. 202). As summarized by Wahl (1969, p. 20), “this doctrine is related to what Kierkegaard calls the doctrine of how. The crucial thing is not what I believe in - not in the object of my belief - but the way in which I believe that object”. So, contrary to a common misconception, existential inwardness is not inward looking, but is rather founded upon its relations as it exists in-the-world.

For Nietzsche (1998, p. 85), there is no ‘truth’ in an absolute sense, but “only a perspectival seeing” which makes ‘objectivity’ absurd and a non-concept. Similarly Heidegger opposed the notion that ‘truth’ should be used to represent the correspondence between statement and ‘fact’, and argued that truth should be thought of in terms of the Greek aletheia. This term refers to the uncovering
of hidden things, thereby “taking them out of their concealment” (Heidegger, 1996, p. 202). One can be “in” truth (Heidegger, 1988, p. 18) in this regard when coming to understand a phenomenon, not for what the thing is - as Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology attempted to portray - but from the perspective of existential phenomenology, being in truth means how a meaning, a phenomenon, is understood in relation to oneself. A foundation for meaning can be gained through lived experience phenomenologically rather than through a particular philosophy (Garrison, 1987, p. 487) even although on the surface such lived experiences appear “fraught with ambiguity, ambivalence, and contradiction” (Britzman, 1992, p. 25). Being in relation, truth for the individual refers to how one relates to what one understands.

This doctrine of how has major implications for the purposes that one has, and in this context, the purposes of education and teacher education. Purposes are understood to belong to beings and because people are relations, the understanding of one’s purposes also contributes to one’s sense of personal identity. Personal identity is gained by how an individual relates and values his or her relations and is not made through objective or abstract categories which relate to the ‘what’ of one’s being. This categorisation can only be an attempt to
answer the question 'what am I?' which is an aspect of the metaphysical question 'what is it to be human?'. Therefore, little value is recognised in the approach to a philosophy of education class that asks student-teachers to pick one school of thought presented in a smorgasbord style, which they believe suits them best. One's entire identity is only partly able to be revealed by the actual purposes of education that one articulates as one's own. More telling is how one relates to such purposes. This therefore indicates that attention needs to be given to the manner in which one relates to one's particular purposes of education, as well as the content and implications of the purposes themselves.

WHAT IS IT TO HAVE WELL-GROUNDED MEANINGS AND PURPOSES?

The potential dilemma for adopting a ‘subjective’ view of truth as discussed above, is that purposes may become so relative that they are subject to individual arbitrariness. Therefore by implication the notion of changing (through educating) purposes of education and teacher education may be ill-founded. However these ‘subjective’ purposes in which individuals are related, have two important characteristics which allow them to be well grounded and also offer teacher educators with an approach to changing them. The first of these
characteristics is the holistic nature of meanings and purposes, and the second is that they are also understood to be potentially dialectically integrated with understandings that others have. These shall now be dealt with individually.

Purposes of education do not exist in isolation from the other purposes and meanings of the individual, as views on education are always integrated with how an individual understands human nature and the purpose of human life. While having presence in differing categories of relationships, the individual is not necessarily in a state of fragmentation as some claim (Bauman, 1995, p. 91; Standish, 1995, p. 121). Each human identity is regarded to be a holistic presence that relates to various relationships, which by themselves appear to be disjointed and fragmented. However it is the same presence of the individual that is present in each of these roles or relationships (Schrag, 1997, p. 17). The works of Kierkegaard (1987, vol.2, p. 327) and Heidegger (1996, p. 356) call the individual out from the inauthentic way of being ‘lost’ in fragmentation, from the ‘crowd’. They encourage one to pull oneself together, to authentically recognise one’s identity through the unified connectedness of all one’s meanings and purposes.

Through Existentialism it is identified that meaningful principles on which to base all of one’s purposes are
gained authentically, although it is acknowledged that individuals more often live their lives inauthentically. Authenticity, in this context, is simply understood to be the individual becoming aware of her or his meanings and purposes, and choosing them to be hers or his own. That is, one is simply ‘choosing oneself’ (Kierkegaard, 1987, vol.2, p. 258; Nietzsche, 1978, p. 239; Heidegger, 1996, p. 136). Through authenticity a unity of all of one’s meanings and purposes is able to be recognised. Therefore an important aim of education (and mission in life) is to develop a meaningful sense of coherence as all of one’s purposes are inextricably linked to each other and to how one understands one’s life. Consequently, because “understanding always concerns the whole of being-in-the-world” (Heidegger, 1996, p. 142), each purpose must be embedded in individual understanding.

This interconnected unity of meaning has been described as one’s core spirituality (Chandler et al., 1992; Witmer & Sweeney, 1992), where one participates with “the existential questions regarding the meaning of one’s life”, to produce a stance for who one is and what is the purpose of one’s life (Webster, 1999, p. 25). Understanding, then, “always operates within a set of already interpreted relationships, a relational whole” (Palmer, 1969, p.131). This holistic understanding prevents any purposes, especially those affecting one’s
relation to education, from an individual’s fanciful arbitrariness (ibid., p. 143; Gadamer, 2000, p. 266).
Therefore an individual’s purposes of education must share an internal consistency with the other meanings, purposes and beliefs that he or she may have.

The second characteristic of meanings and purposes, that enables them to be well grounded, is that they have a potential hermeneutical nature. This means that the ‘truth’ of one’s meanings “is not reached methodologically but dialectically” (Palmer, 1969, p.165). One is continually sensitive to the possibilities offered through the meanings that others have, and how one’s own understandings stand in relation to these. The meanings and purposes that an individual has, are able to be strengthened through the ‘to-and-fro’ of dialogue (Kerdeman, 1998, p.259), where horizons become fused. The questioning of meanings that is characteristic of a dialogue with others, “places hermeneutical work on a firm basis” (Gadamer, 2000, p. 269).

Purposes and meanings can become well grounded through the unity they have with all the other understandings that an authentic individual has. The meanings of an individual are not isolated from other meanings found in society, and therefore they are grounded even further by being hermeneutical. This has been described as an “existential encounter”, where
there is “mutual testing and risktaking” (Michelfelder & Palmer, 1989, p.5) between agents in a dialogue. This then grounds the understandings that individuals have by integrating them with the understandings found in the community at large. There is consequently a unity of meaning to be found both in the holistic - or spiritual - understandings of the individual, and through the fusion with other horizons found in society. The challenge in being able to make meanings and purposes well grounded, is to move personal understandings from being inauthentic to becoming authentic.

THE EXISTENTIAL CRISIS

Through Existentialism, it is argued that much more meaningful principles on which to base one’s purposes for education are to be gained authentically. The existential crisis is considered to be a means by which one can become authentic. It is understood as a ‘crisis’ because it offers a potential turning point to change the meanings that one has, and the way that one relates to these. It is ‘existential’ because it produces an angst, characterised by feelings of doubt and uncertainty, and it individuates, in that the meanings decided upon become one’s own for which one becomes responsible. The existential crisis challenges whether the meanings of society that have been accepted inauthentically as
‘givens’, offer real significance for one’s own experiences. Through this, one recognises what is of most significance for one’s life, and this allows one to prioritize the things that matter in order of their importance.

To change a person’s understandings that involve both the heart (intuitions and emotions) and mind, requires the development of an awareness of realising various possibilities of meaning. Until such an event, one remains with often unquestioned and incoherent understandings. When in this condition, Gadamer (2000, p. 299) argues that “It is impossible to make ourselves aware of a prejudice [inauthentic understanding] while it is constantly operating unnoticed, but only when it is, so to speak, provoked” (my emphasis). An existential crisis is argued by Kierkegaard (1987, vol.2, p. 226; 1992, vol.1, p. 622) to provide the jolt that is needed for the individual to engage in the “ambiguous art of thinking about existence and existing”. The changing of a belief depends upon one questioning the way one relates to the taken-for-granted basic concepts or meanings, that are disclosed to the self. Possibilities are only recognised as one’s own through authenticity, as one first discloses them and then chooses oneself in one’s situation.
Kierkegaard called the freedom to choose oneself a ‘dizziness’ and Sartre called it a ‘terror’, but Heidegger less dramatically stated that it could just refer to simply choosing what is before one. However it is perceived, it refers to a commitment with one’s whole existence (passion) to a sense of meaning for one’s situation. Without a crisis to make one become aware of public meanings that give sense to life, the meanings and purposes of the individual would remain essentially inauthentic and under-developed.

**CHANGING HEARTS & MINDS THROUGH THE EXISTENTIAL CRISIS**

Education is understood to be an intervention in the development of individuals. This intervention refers to a change for the better. This paper has argued that all meanings and purposes of education have unity with all other meanings and purposes that an individual has. Therefore if educational change is to be effective, the whole person, including their spiritual core which gives meaning and purpose to all of one’s life, must be engaged with. There are two clear implications from this. Firstly, as teacher educators, if we wish to clarify our own purposes of teacher education, we need to engage with our own understandings of who we are and what we understand the meaning of life to be. Secondly, if we
wish to change and develop the purposes of education that our students have, we again need to engage with their spirituality which provides the unity of meaning, and gives their lives purpose.

It is here argued that fostering authentic development of a teacher's purpose of education through the use of the existential crisis, is a most worthwhile task. As educators we may feel an urge to intervene when some student-teachers express certain purposes for education. The existential crisis is offered as being one way in which such purposes may be challenged and changed, because being existential, they are holistic and involve changing hearts and minds. So how does one use the existential crisis educationally?

The existential crisis does not require only extreme life-threatening events, like pointing a gun to the heads of students, in order to produce an existential encounter. A crisis may be made quite indirectly, as has been the method of many existential writers. What is necessary is that the students be confronted with a situation that causes them to doubt their own understandings, and consequently be motivated by an angst to question the purposes of education that they have assumed up to this point. This individualises the students by asking each of them to engage with disclosing activities which 'unconceal' and make coherent, their purposes. 'Doubt'
is considered to be “the condition that loosens rigid thinking and makes it possible to explore alternatives and clarify where we stand” (Gadamer, 1992, p. 234). Therefore if students are to develop purposes authentically, then they need to first examine exactly what their existing purposes are, and then re-evaluate these with a critical attitude.

The initial stage in this process involves students attempting to articulate what they understand to be their purposes of education, and the reasons for having such purposes. Through a crisis activity, as indicated earlier in this paper, students should begin to become aware of their own ‘spirituality’. This can be achieved quite simply through regular journal entries which address some confronting but fundamental issues, where the students examine not only their positions, but also how they relate to them. Through conducting a few of these activities with my own students, I have come to appreciate that very few adults are conversant with their own spirituality. Few are able to describe coherently who they are and the meaning and purpose for their life. However, such issues greatly influence how all personal purposes are constructed. Without involving the spiritual dimension, it is difficult to change the purposes for education that students hold.
Taking such an approach is likely to be resisted at first, because students wish to be able to demonstrate that they have the ‘right’ philosophy and purposes for education. To engage with the meanings and purposes of life, may appear to reduce the construction of any purposes to a relativist position, as there is assumed to be an uncommon values-base that is shared between individuals holding ‘opinions’ as to the meanings and purposes of a potentially inherently meaningless universe. However, it has been recognised that purposes belong to beings and not to abstract concepts such as ‘education’ and even ‘life’. So individuals need to become aware that they, as individuals (rather than identical members of a crowd) make life worth living through the making of purposes for which they become responsible.

In order to make purposes of education well grounded, they need to be understood within the interconnected unity of all the meanings and purposes that an individual has. Therefore a teacher’s purpose of education needs to be identified within her or his core spirituality, which provides an understanding of how all things ‘hang together’ as it were, and the criteria or reasons that enable evaluations to be made. Nietzsche (1978, p. 194) has argued that “He, however, has discovered himself who says, ‘This is my good and evil’”, and so student-
teachers need initially to be encouraged to make coherent to themselves, what purposes and meanings they have for life, and why these are considered to be worthwhile. The criteria that individuals use to justify which purposes are ‘good’ and worthwhile, need to become ‘unconcealed’ if any change involving hearts and minds, is to be possible.

The existential freedom to ‘create’ one’s own purpose for life and education can appear daunting, as it calls upon a commitment of one’s whole being - heart and mind - for which one is alone responsible. This existential challenge of freedom and responsibility is recognised through Nietzsche who asked –

*Can you give yourself your own evil and your own good and hang your own will over yourself as a law? Can you be your own judge and avenger of your law? Terrible it is to be alone with the judge and avenger of one’s own law.* (ibid., p. 63)

It is argued that in order to have well grounded purposes of education, individuals need to be willing to make a stand for what counts as the purposes for life and the purposes for education, and to have reasons for doing so. Taking a stand regarding matters of value, is considered as the only way to counter nihilism and meaningless (Smeyers, 1995, p. 411).

The second way in which personal purposes of education can become well grounded, is to have students engage in dialogue. This can be achieved...
through group discussions that are conducted as ‘communities of inquiry’ (Splitter & Sharp, 1995). Dialogue can also be achieved by having an ongoing personal philosophy assignment that dialogues with earlier assignments, journal entries and the assessor. The role of the teacher-educator can be most influential and helpful in changing the belief structures of students if through dialogue ‘crises’ can be created. This notion is captured through Nietzsche’s advice on friendship that can be likened to that of the teacher - student relationship, where he argued that “In a friend one should have one’s best enemy” (Nietzsche, 1978, p. 56). This idea is similar to how we understand playing the role of the ‘devils advocate’, simply to test and clarify the views of others.

In order for the dialogue to be as effective as possible, the relation between teacher and student should be an ‘I-Thou’ one. Buber (1969, p. 351) argued that the “relation in education is one of pure dialogue” which indicates that from the existential perspective, the relation should not focus so much on the epistemological account of the student with knowledge (Kerdeman, 1998, p. 243), but with the fusing of horizons between the engaged spiritualities of authentic individuals. Such an I-Thou relation in dialogue is therefore intimate (Burstow, 1983, p. 181) as participants are opening up to be understood.
in their entirety, not just as holders of epistemological matter. This could be described as a ‘Socratic dialogue’, which is understood variously, but Kierkegaard (1992, vol.1, p. 206, 247-249) argued that the important characteristic of Socrates’ success as a teacher was due to both his ability to unsettle his students in their relation to their own assumed understandings, as well as his regard that the teacher’s role of midwife is the highest relation that one human being can extend to another.

CONCLUSION

Teacher educators usually have an interest in being able to change the existing purposes of education that students have, towards something thought to be more worthwhile. As these purposes are interconnected with all the other meanings and purposes of each individual, changing a student’s purpose of education requires an engagement with their core spirituality - the unity that gives purpose to one’s entire life. This is argued to be achieved using the existential crisis, made possible through the dialogue that is available to teacher educators. The challenge is to enter into the relationships offered through dialogue in such a way that doubt and angst are able to be produced in students. This encourages them to become authentically
responsible and passionately committed to a worthwhile purpose of education.

REFERENCES


