A time to pause and ponder: Creating meaning in education

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Abstract
In this paper the authors share experiences from teacher education in the UK and Denmark. They apply methodologies for supporting teacher students from initial exposure to the classroom setting, through training programmes and into the early stages of their professional work. They use Frankl’s notion of meaning making through encountering and doing deeds as eminent ways of creating meaning in education. They demonstrate how two similar but also different methods i.e. narrative inquiry and self-study can create basis for exposing meaning-making among teacher students and teacher educators. They conclude that within education meaning is created in the engagement with the world and the persons inhabiting this world.

Key words: Teacher education, professional development, reflective learning, meaning-making, encountering, doing work, engagement.

forces beyond your control can take away everything you possess except one thing, your freedom to choose how you will respond to the situation. (Viktor Frankl, 1992. p. x).

Introduction
In this paper, two experienced teacher educators reflect on their roles and responsibilities to others in a time when the world can be viewed as increasingly unpredictable, complex, ambiguous and fragmenting. They offer case studies drawn from their work in the UK and in Denmark in order to share experiences. The experiences teacher educators consider methodologies for supporting teacher students from initial exposure to and within the classroom setting, through training programmes and into the early stages of their professional formation, as the teacher students engage in meaning-making and, it is hoped, formulate their own theories of action.

Encouraging others to embark upon a period of professional development in a new or less familiar arena demands enthusiasm, grit and resilience, mental stamina and to achieve, to comprehend and, overall, a determination to make sense of things.

Teacher students entering a classroom for the first time can encounter a scenario that appears familiar from memories of being a recipient of learning yet unfamiliar in their newly-selected role as facilitator of learning for those in their charge. Coping well with
such issues is not simply a skill anyone can acquire, however, but a way of living in the world. These ways of living in the world are not inborn, but rather are developed over time (Berger, 2002). How one makes sense of the world around us and how one's comprehension of that world changes over time is considered by a number of constructive-developmental theorists and writers (see for example Charles, 1966; Kegan, 1982, 1994; Kitchener, 1986; Baxter Magolda, 1992; Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1997; Fisher, Rooke, & Torbert, 2000; Hudson, 2000).

In this paper, the authors draw, in particular, on the writing of Viktor Frankl (1992) and his idea of “logotherapy” which focuses on helping people to find a purpose and a meaning. It is a matter of searching for meaning in an apparently meaningless world. This may appear a naïve position but we would argue it is not. It is an attempt to make it possible for teachers, student teachers and children to be guided and assisted in the realisation of such meanings possibilities that they themselves have detected (Frankl, 1992): To understand what is going on whenever this [logotherapy] technique is used, we take as a starting point a condition, which is frequently observed anticipatory anxiety (Frankl, 1992).

Here Frankl stress the awareness of anxiety as departure for meaning-making, more recent research makes his approach more general because nothing enters long-term memory unless it makes sense and has meaning. Of the two, suggest Sousa and Tomlinson (2011), meaning-making has much more impact on long-term memory than sense-making (Wormeli 2010). Lesson content, for example, must make sense in order for learning to take place, however there should not be an assumption that learning occurred because the content was understood. Ways have to be sought to make content meaningful; to ensure content or skills being taught are relevant to life. This can be done when educators draw out engaging, relevant and meaningful stories that involve students in genuine, mutually vulnerable give-and-take conversations about making meaning and constructing purpose-driven lives (Nash, 2008).

Teachers need to process rapidly, to assess what is before them and how they can take control, command and do so as soon as possible. How does the teacher student do this when they close the classroom door, when circumstance removes the opportunity to refer to others, when they relate to students outside the classroom, when still trying to ascertain or to process the rules, procedures and ideologies of the particular workplace? Our question must consist, not in talk and meditation, but in right action and in right conduct. Life ultimately means taking the responsibility to find the right answer to its problems and to fulfil the tasks, which it constantly sets for each individual (Frankl, 1992).

The writings of Robert Kegan (1982, 1994) are helpful, considering as he does the way humans grow and change throughout their lives, how they build an understanding of what is real and the way that any such understanding becomes more complex with time. Kegan talks of five “orders of mind”, or stages, through which man develops, with new knowledge transforming our approaches to and ability for meaning-making. John Dewey’s concept of “educating for meaning”, writes Nash (2008) entails a constructivist approach to education which applies the belief that “students construct meaning for themselves” (p18), where the learner is active in constructing an understanding of the world around them: teacher educators need, therefore, to “lecture less and engage students more” (Dewey, 1933, cited in Nash 2008, p.18). It is argued (Dewey 1933, Nash...
that the ultimate purpose of any educational provision is to enable learners to create meaning through direct experiential activity.

However, it becomes more complex, asserts Kegan, which helps a person deal with additional demands and that lack of certainty. Given the emphasis within teacher education of developing the “reflective practitioner” Schön (1983). Exposure to learning opportunities should be seen as transformative, where someone steps back, reflects and make decisions about it, changing: not just the way he behaves, not just the way he feels, but the way he knows—not just what he knows but the way he knows (Kegan 1994).

Knowledge of any field or profession cannot be understood without also understanding the context and conditions where such knowledge was developed. In order to be able to handle context and conditions, we will focus our discussion on two of Frankl’s (1992) ways to find meaning: (a) experiencing something or encountering someone and (b) creating a work or doing a deed. The former we relate to Kegan’s progressive steps of developing ability for meaning-making: the latter we relate to Schutz and Luckmann’s (1989) notion about action as a component of everyday life. Action that deals with objective and subjective meaning-making, where “Action, a subjective performance of consciousness, is at the same time the preconditions for the construction of the social world (Schutz & Luckmann, 1989, p. 5).

Novice teachers and teacher-educators are constantly submerged/embedded in social contexts where they have to act. In school, pupils and students expect the teacher to make decisions and conduct these decisions, so that their learning makes sense. For teacher-educators it is likewise with the teacher students they educate. Teachers and teacher-educators are constantly working with a duality of meaning-making for themselves and for their students. Actions are expected to be rational. Schutz and Luckmann (1989) define five idealistic elements of rational actions whereby the actor:

1) must know her/himself now,  
2) must be able to predict her/himself in the future,  
3) has to know the world around her/himself,  
4) must be able to choose in the actually present situation and  
5) will have to act relieved from the pressure of time and decision.  

They do however nuance this ideal: unrestricted rationality of action presupposes so much that ordinary mortals can hardly hope to achieve it (Schutz & Luckmann, 1989, p. 57).

Bringing Frankl (1992) together with Schutz and Luckmann (1989) leads us to focus on the actions – cognitive as well as practical – of student-teachers and teacher-educators: actions where they (a) experience something or encounter someone as well as where they (b) create a work or do a deed. Kegan (1982, 1994) helps us to view their actions as elements of professional development, leading to increasingly nuanced and elaborated orders of professional mind. In this process, it is important to understand how the participants frame a given situation (Levin, Hammer & Coffey, 2009) and understand exactly as a process where the teachers’ students change their focus of development away from themselves (Kagan, 1992). Findings such as those by Light (2001) confirm that when teaching for meaning is working well, there are learning patterns that become evident within and outside the classroom. Students engage actively in their learning with a keen sense of expectancy and excitement; discussions include open, problem-based questions; learning is broad and multi-disciplinary; learning and teaching are frequently
narrative-based, reflective, underpinned by trust and a variety of pedagogical approaches are used to ensure learning opportunities are maximised (Nash 2008 p19)

We as teacher educators aim to revitalise the hard-earned experiences of human meaning-making from the 20th century imbedded in the literature we build on. To conclude, we return to our responsibility for framing such meaning-making in a fragmented and unpredictable world in the 21st century.

Our cases

The presented cases were chosen for their options to observe meaning-making in the performed actions. Our cases are from two very different contexts but all with the same common development purpose: make teacher educator trainees as well as teachers students more self-autonomous in their profession (O’Shea, 2006) in their respective meaning-making. They all provide a professional development perspective that feeds our discussion of meaning-making through (i) experiencing something or encountering someone and (ii) creating a work or doing a deed.

We begin by presenting cases from teacher education in the UK, where a teacher-educator reflects on his own thoughts and actions in preparing to participate in a team-teaching activity before illustrating an interaction with a teacher student about to enter an urban school setting. These cases are focus on self-reflection where we use Sfard’s (1998) work on ‘metaphors for learning’ to address how reading and research can supplement each other, we further refer to Lave and Wenger’s (1998) notion of participation in learning in order stipulate the legitimacy of taking a specific role as educator. We then turn to teacher students working with narrative inquiry in order to investigate youth folk high schools in Denmark. In these cases, we draw on literature on the Danish folk high school tradition and on North-American literature on narrative research.

What we hope to be able to demonstrate are the common features in the meaning making of the trainees and students in their encounter with participants in their teaching work.

Cases from teacher educators in the UK

Teacher educator training in the UK is partly based on reflection and inquiry into own educational assumptions, values and practices in the context of a changing contemporary and educational world. It draws on relevant research as part of evidence-based practice (Education and Training Foundation, 2014). This creates a practice of interchanging dialogue and self-study, where journal entries become an important tool to keep experiences and perceptions. Here Author 1 present two such journal entries.

What am I so nervous of? Teacher educator reflection 1

“When I agreed to tutor on a residential weekend, it seemed a long way in the future and, if I am honest, I didn't really pay that much attention to the details of the subject matter or to the program. The outcome were clear and I know some of my co-tutors quite well. Now I am about to set off for the venue I am getting a feeling like adrenaline rush. Maybe that is simply anticipation.” Here we see Frankl’s notion (1992) of “anticipatory anxiety” in almost verbatim.
"It might also be a dread of making a complete fool of myself. What if I appear out-of-depth? Being familiar with some of the ideas and concepts that need to be covered should help remove that fear once I start. What will this be like? What will I be like? I am concerned of what the delegates and my colleagues will make of me and whether they feel I can make a valuable-enough contribution. After twenty-odd years of doing my job, I am surprised that I am so apprehensive. It feels like I am going into the unknown again....." The journal entry continues:

“I have read plenty of material in preparation for this, though and I have been looking through texts from "distant peers" about facilitation skills, acting and thinking on my feet, actively listening. All well and good but I am going to have to think about it as I start off, reflect as I act, when I do something, then sit down and think when I have a moment about what I make of it all. What have I learnt that I can build on and improve on? How can I do this better?" This journal entry revolves around the ideas of Schön (1983) and writings on the reflective practitioner.

This case relates to the applicability of Anna Sfard's “Two Metaphors for Learning” (1998), whereby experience has to be balanced equally with reading and research: over-reliance on one is less effective in practice. A focused reading and research in to the teaching task laying ahead can overcome anticipatory anxiety. This makes it clear what kind of work a teacher educator has to do in order to calm oneself and create a stable meaning of the tutoring task.

**What is he so scared of? Teacher educator reflection 2**

When the time came for the teacher students to undertake their first placement in the selected inner-city educational setting, there was an interesting, unexpected dialogue with a male teacher student. Forty-one years of age, married with two teenage sons with a background in accountancy, he had always appeared confident, aspirant and capable, grounded and well-humoured. One morning, he came to me and stated that he was worried about meeting the students for the first time. Asking him why, he disclosed his apprehension about speaking, what if I am asked about my accent? What if they want to know where I am from, originally? I had become accustomed to his quite pronounced middle-Eastern accent and inflection. This took me aback a little. I asked him why that was worrying him. I don’t want to have to explain anything or justify anything, or get challenged on my beliefs. He was convinced that this would happen and that there might be an awkwardness in the classroom interactions that would inhibit relationships and impede learning. What do I do? Do I go or not? Here the teacher student resonates the word of Frank Herbert (1965) “Fear is the mind-killer. The little death”.

I aimed to reassure, offering a number of strategies that I have used or have witnessed others use effectively. Effective reflection to assist others become more adept at decision making when their “strategic vocabulary” is limited or not readily transferable. I wanted him to cope like I would, becoming a more “legitimate participant” (Lave & Wenger, 1998). On his return to class the following week, he came to find me. He was smiling. It went really well! Much better than I was thinking it would do. Asked what methods he had employed, he explained that he had indeed been asked about his accent, as anticipated. I was ready for it. I didn’t allow the questioner any air time. I said that it wasn’t really relevant and we had better begin the session. If anyone was really interested, which I doubted anyway, I told them they might want to speak to me individually after the class. No-one did! The teacher student added that he felt he
delivered a successful learning experience and that, on reflection, he really enjoyed the teaching. He was looking forward to going back again.

Self-study bring forward meaning
Both these cases deal with Frankl’s (1992) dealing with anticipatory anxiety or finding meaning through doing work. The teacher educator as well as the teacher student finds a way through their worries about dealing with different aspect of teaching situation because they had addressed their anxiety prior to the teaching situations they were able to deal with them and work their way through them.

Cases from teacher education in Denmark
Author 2 will here present two cases from Danish teacher education; they deal with a module focusing on Danish youth folk high schools (‘Efterskole’). These schools are private boarding schools attracting youths aged 14 to 18 for lower secondary schooling. These schools are based on a pedagogic tradition that emphasises narratives as a central part in the teaching and the entire school praxis (Oettingen, 2011; Rahbek & Møller, 2015). The teacher students are to study ‘Efterskole’ praxis through narrative inquiry based on North-American tradition (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, 2000; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). This tradition places people’s experiences of everyday phenomena at the centre of the investigation with the intent to create coherent participant narratives of the everyday. The teacher students were to produce five pages’ written description of the ‘Efterskole’ and their study including method, analysis, reflection, assessment and suggestions for development. They were to present this and facilitate a dialogue on their study with peers in 20 minutes’ sessions. The idea of the module is to engage the teacher students in the youth folk high school through an investigate approach that is consistent with school forms narrative identity, rather than simply lecture them about this school form (Nash, 2008).

You cannot help laughing - community and social skills
Two male teacher students made a study on community and social skills. In an interview, a teacher tells them about how the ‘Efterskole’ structured the introduction period, where the individual youth likely knew nobody. We put emphasis on telling that everybody feels the same in the beginning, everybody has butterflies, because it is a new place with many new people. To ease the introduction to the greater community, the youth and their teachers spend the first days at the school in smaller groups of 20 youth. This makes the youth feel more comfortable in their new settings. The two teacher students use Etienne Wenger’s (1999) work to analyse how the youth participated in different communities of practice and felt themselves included. The communities of practice could be doing kitchen chores, sports, board games or just sauntering around the school in evening and chatting. A girl emphasized that joint gymnastics was very cool, that you are so many that gather for one thing and everybody is positive. If you have a bad day, then you just stand there and look silly, then you cannot help laughing.

The teacher students conclude that the youth at the ‘Efterskole’ enjoy the comfort in the small communities of practice, but they really feel the larger community during the joint gymnastics and similar activities for entire group of youth. In their study, they benefit from having both teachers and youths word on their intentions and experiences with the communities of practice.
Monday is a hard day - a story on vulnerable girls
A female teacher student was working part-time on the ‘Efterskole’ where she made her case studies, so her study was partly a self-study. The ‘Efterskole’ had a focus on vulnerable girls, and she decided to make this her focus for her study. She starts her report from the ‘Efterskole’ by telling a story from a lesson where one girl was present but not participating; she sat in the class with a disheartened expression on her face. The teacher student took the girl outside of the classroom and had a talk with her. The girl had many doubts about herself, was homesick and found it hard to give herself into the larger community. Monday is a hard day said the girl. How come?, asked the teacher student holding the girl at the shoulder to underline her attention to the girl’s situation. The problem was not just the school subjects, but also coming of age, building an individual identity in the teenage years.

The teacher student illustrates this issue by another story with another girl during a talk on her well-being at the ‘Efterskole’. This girl frequently retreated to her room. The ‘Efterskole’ had a network effort where teachers met with smaller groups of the students to create a safe harbour where the vulnerable youth could be open about their problems with participation in the large community. The teacher student was one of the teachers in this network. The large school community was outside this girl’s comfort zone I do not know where to sit. I feel it is hard. The girl had prior to starting the school year decided that It should be different here at this school. I would like to be more open. In the smaller teacher organised network community the girl found peers with whom she made relations into the larger school community.

In this self-study of her own workplace, the teacher student learned to listen and inquire into the young girls’ narratives of their experiences and meanings. She ends her written text but stating, that many of the girls wants to mean something for someone, here the teacher student refers to work of Axel Honneth (Rancière & Honneth, 2016) on recognition. At the ‘Efterskole’ the youth felt unsuccessful and vulnerable if they did not succeed in this. During the dialogue following her presentation of her study, the benefit of the narrative approach is accentuated, as it gives the vulnerable girls words on how it is hard to make intention and action meet.

Narrative inquiry bring forward meaning
As teachers, we want to learn how to act better – with others, for others, for ourselves and for the good of the common society. This will to meaning in education can find completion in educative deeds such as the two above examples illustrate. One where the will to create a sense of the entire ‘Efterskole’ community has resulted in a very well organised introduction using different communities of practice. Another where the will to create relations to vulnerable youth has resulted in supportive structures where this youth can find comfort and recognition. The application of narrative inquiry helps bringing forward human action and intentionality (Bruner, 1990, p. 52). Here students are in a process of making meaning of their coming profession and career in this process we as teacher educators can benefit from valuing their stories (Nash, 2008), but we can also qualify their stories by making them work professionally with narrative approaches. It is the mutual encounter between teacher and youth that gives the experience of community at the ‘Efterskole’.
Discussion

Departing from Frankl (1992), we will focus our discussion on the yet referred two of his ways to find meaning:

- Experiencing something or encountering someone.
- Creating a work or doing a deed.

We choose these as elements of meaning making, as they are central to building human communities like schools or teacher educations. A central part of institutional education is encounter with peers and teachers/educators, and these teachers or educators is trying to create a learning-stimulating environment through their work or deeds.

Encountering

Encountering in teacher education has several layers, it relates to meetings between teacher educators and teacher students as well as between teacher students and school students (Education and Training Foundation, 2014). In the presented cases from Bolton, UK it is the anxiety prior to the encounter that is prevalent. The recurring theme in both cases deals with feeling insufficiently prepared for meeting the teacher students or school students. One key part of a teachers’ craft is finding the right pace at which to present ideas (Taber 2001). However, focusing on likely occurring problems makes both the teacher educator and the teacher student develop ways of coping with a) a feeling of uncertainty regarding contributing to a session with teacher student, or b) a personal difficult issue, that the teacher student wants to leave in the background of his professional appearance. Here the coming encounters (Frankl, 1992) offset reflections that prepares for dealing with coming relations. Of interest, here is Yalom’s (1980) acknowledgement that, by assuming responsibility for one’s own existence, one becomes accountable for oneself and one’s actions. He also noted (1980, p. 225) that some individuals may, in fact, avoid accountability by ‘displacing’ personal responsibility onto others (O’Shea, 2006, p. 66).

Encountering is essential in the Danish Youth folk high schools as the community of the individual school is unique, demanding and supportive at the same time. The youth attending these schools, are 14-18 years meaning they are amidst their puberty and recreating themselves with a new identity (Oettingen, 2011). The idea of the schools is to create a committing community build on acceptance and individual diversity. Participating in such a community is very demanding, as you have to work on understanding your peers attending the Efterskole (Oettingen, 2011). In this environment of encounter the teacher students was learning to inquire into the experiences of the attending youth. They were instructed to use narrative inquiry as a way to understand the experience and meaning of the youth. Narrative inquiry enrols three phases: generating narrative data (i.e. interviews and observation), performing narrative analysis plus narrative communication of the findings (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). The presented cases show how the students were able to create a saturated insight in the experience and meaning-making of youth at the Efterskole. In these two cases the encounter (Frankl, 1992) are directly relational.

Such learning opportunities can be transformative, because teaching, tutoring, or social support has to occur depending on the school form, but in all the presented cases it also develops the way the participants know about the teacher work ahead of them (Kegan 1994).
Doing deeds/creating work
Our cases illustrate how the will to meaning in education can find completion in educative work/deeds such as:

A. Teacher educators performing reflection and revision of tutoring in practice.
B. A teacher student working his way around a personal characteristic, he does not want to be in forefront of his professional identity.
C. The intention of creating large and small communities of practice at an Efterskole.
D. A teacher student creating relations to vulnerable youth.

In the case with the teacher educator the work is more that of intellectual reflections, preparing the mind and awareness of the teacher educator of the coming teaching and tutoring session (Kegan, 1982, 1994). In the case of the male teacher student with a middle-eastern accent, a dialogue with his supervisor gives him tools of how to work around a likely conflict. The student experiences how his preparation makes it possible for him to focus on the meaning he wants address with the students he teach. In these two cases, the work (Frankl, 1992) is intellectual as well as relational. It leaves the learner with an optimistic feeling about coming teaching situations (Kegan, 1982, 1994).

In the case where two male teacher students are, inquiring into the practices of the Efterskole creating committing communities in order to support the overall community building at the Efterskole. They find that the youth themselves take part in creating the relation building they take part in. The youth is finding their own meaning with the different communities. In the case where the sole female teacher student is addressing the relation between an individual girl and the larger community, the teacher student is herself taking part in the deed that support this girl in taking her steps into the larger community of the entire Efterskole. The teacher student takes on the responsibility of holding part of the girl’s life in her hand and help the girl towards a more independent participation in the ‘efterskole’ community (Løgstrup, 1966). The girl performs more self-assure because of the work or deed of the teacher student. The teacher student experience herself how a deed can create meaning in being an Efterskole teacher and she is capable of retelling this story as she has inquired into the practice through the narratives she has collected and created. In both these cases, the notion of activity and work from Frankl (1992) brings forward the work and deeds that Efterskole-teachers are doing.

Teachers and teacher educators can in their daily deeds guide and assist e.g. youth and teacher students in the realisation of meaning-making and meaning-use. They can work actively with encountering other persons or experiencing subject matter. Frankl’s (1992) notion of deed and work relates in these cases well with Schutz and Luckmann’s (1989) notion about action as a component of everyday life that deals with objective and subjective meaning-making. They are all concerned with how the individual performs his or her actions or work and how these actions construct conditions for the social world.

‘... the capacity to transcend the immediate situation is not a faculty to be listed along with other faculties. It is rather given in the ontological nature of being human’ (May 1994, p.149 cited in O’Shea 2006, p66)

It is essential that educators identify the challenges and provide supports to assist new teachers (Fantilli and McDougall (2009). Fantilli and McDougall (2009) stress how novice teacher “preparatory training” must include a focus on “survival techniques”,
arguing the need for this experience to occur “in the first couple of weeks before the school year begins” (p.1). Kagan (1992) constructed a model to describe the professional growth of novice and beginning teachers, which describes pre-service and first-year teaching as belonging to a single developmental stage. In this stage novices acquire knowledge of pupils, use that knowledge to modify and reconstruct their personal images of self as teacher before developing standardised ways to proceed that bring classroom management and instructional techniques together (Kagan, 1992).

Pre-service teachers arrive with beliefs and images; write Levin, Hammer & Coffey (2009), based on their experiences as students. When they start to interact with students, novice teachers gain knowledge of students, such as varying degrees of learning-readiness, which they then use to reconstruct their image of themselves as teachers (p144). During this process, suggest Levin et al (2009), they have a tendency to focus on their own behaviours. Having “resolved” an image of themselves, novice teachers can then shift attention to the design of lessons and the analysis of what students are learning. Kagan (1992) argues the initial focus on self is a “necessary and crucial element in the first stage of teacher development” (p. 155). Of particular relevance is the point made that reducing or removing time for inward focus may prove “counterproductive”. Novice and beginning teachers need a clear image of themselves as teachers to begin the “process of reconstruction”. Indeed, Kagan (1992) reviewed several studies that suggested that novice teachers who fail to reconstruct their self-image as teacher encounter frustrations that may well result in their leaving teaching (see, for example Bullough, 1991 cited in Kagan 1992). The earliest stages of teaching are also spent developing standardised routines for combining classroom management with teaching. Only when these routines are in place can novices begin to focus on student learning (Kagan, 1992). “You can't afford not to provide processing time” suggest Jensen and Nickelsen (2008), as “too much too fast won't last.”.

So what happens when faced with the new, the unfamiliar or confusing? Levin et al (2009) talk of “Framing”: an individual or group’s forming a sense of “what is going on here?” (p146) People, they offer, are capable of multiple patterns of reasoning. How an individual thinks and experiences in one setting is not, argue Levin et al (2009), necessarily the same and may be sharply inconsistent with how that individual thinks and experiences in another setting (p146). Momentarily, we focus on understanding what is before us. In the case studies and encounters shared here, those concerned framed what was happening as something like “figuring out what it means” (Levin et al 2009 p146). By framing, they made meaning of the situations and were getting ready to act.

Trainee teachers need to “own” their actions, reactions and responses to what circumstance presents them, particularly when there is no-one to ask or offer ready guidance. Decisions need to be made and existing experience drawn upon. Some (Frankl (1986) according to O’Shea (2006)), would go as far as suggesting that they must retain some control over their attitudes and actions regardless of the difficulties experienced in life, remaining ‘masters of our own will’ (O’Shea, 2006) and should, therefore, “not let life’s circumstances or other people take control of that will” (p. 65).

O’Shea writes that Frankl continued his discourse by stating, “to relinquish one’s ‘freedom of will’ is tantamount to placing one’s fate in the hands of another. This practice, when left unchecked, results in a lack of self-worth” and, he continues “the belief that one is inferior” (p. 65). Clearly, this is to be anticipated in one’s trainees and,
wherever possible, but can be avoided through mentorship, guidance and teaching that develops a strong sense of the value of self-determination. Programmes must strive to help the individual to appreciate that he/she is not always a victim of circumstance (Corey (2001) cited in O’Shea 2006 p. 66). It is however here that Schutz and Luckmann’s (1989) reflection not to idealise – or even expect - the total control of actions of us normal mortals contributes with realism in the process of meaning-making.

Conclusion

Our deliberations echo those of Lawlor (1990) who argued the need to clarify what can best be learnt by academic study and what can be learnt only through practice (p.8).

We set out to investigate the basis for meaning-making in education. We looked at two different settings, one where we looked at teacher educators and teacher students’ self-reflection in the UK and another where teacher students trained to become sensitive towards youth experience with the Danish school form ‘Efterskole’. We used Frankl’s notion of meaning making through engagement with the world. We focused on encountering and doing deeds as eminent ways of creating meaning in education.

We hope to have demonstrated how two alike but also different methods i.e. narrative inquiry and auto-ethnography can create basis for exposing meaning-making among teacher students and teacher educators. Contemporary changes within education, putting the emphasis on constructive-developmental approaches, can be enriched by adding meaning-making that stresses acceptance and individual diversity in the encounter with other persons. Referring to Frankl (1992), meaning can be found through learning how to act better with others, for others, for ourselves and for the good of society.

This leads us to conclude that we within education also have to work with methods that hold the potential for inquiring into human experience as the basis for understanding teaching and learning. The teacher argues Taber (2001) not only has a responsibility to structure learning but a duty to enable others to learn to take responsibility for directing their own learning. With the subject-specific learning, Taber continues, this learning-to-learn must also be 'scaffolded' carefully so incremental tasks “challenge but do not overwhelm”.

“...It matters” asserts Wormeli (2010), for “knowledge changes into something meaningful for you”. Because again, referring to Frankl (1992), meaning is created in the engagement with the world and the persons inhabiting this world.

References


