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Education for purposeful teaching around the world

Kirsi Tirri^a, Seana Moran^b and Jenni Menon Mariano^c

^aDepartment of Teacher Education, University of Helsinki, Helsinki, Finland; ^bDepartment of Psychology, Clark University, Worcester, MA, USA; ^cSchool of Education, University of South Florida Sarasota-Manatee, Sarasota-Manatee, FL, USA

This special issue researches two themes that are gaining emphasis in teacher education in many countries: teaching *for* purpose and teaching *with* purposefulness. Pupils learn desired qualities via schooling, and teachers facilitate these pupils' learning. According to the papers in this special issue of the *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 'purpose' is a relevant concept to address the concerns of contemporary education. It is important to examine purpose during youth when its propensity for growth first emerges (e.g. Damon, Menon, and Bronk 2003). Some scholars assert the strong potential of formal education for cultivating purpose (e.g. Mariano 2011), but empirical studies show mixed results (Moran et al. 2012).

In recent years, a few scholars have turned their attention to the possibility of multicultural application of purpose for youth development and teacher education (e.g. Bundick and Tirri 2014). The papers in this special issue also support the importance of purpose in youth development, in formal education and in multicultural and multinational contexts.

Purpose may use different words or be defined differently in different languages and cultures. Thus, an aim of this special issue is to consider purpose as a framework for teaching while also exploring insights into purpose's comparative application in diverse educational contexts.

Purpose and purposefulness

In this special issue's conceptualisation, 'purpose' refers to 'a stable and generalised intention to accomplish something that is both meaningful to the self and of intended consequence to the world beyond the self' (Damon, Menon, and Bronk 2003, 121). The degree to which one may be considered purposeful rests on whether one's major life goals focus on making an impact on the world beyond only gratifying one's own needs, and engagement toward actualising those life goals (Bundick and Tirri 2014, 4). This prosocial conceptualisation of purpose extends Frankl's (1988) notions of responsibility and 'giving to the world', which emphasise the essential nature of self-transcendent goals. To this end, a purpose may function not only as a life aim, but as a 'moral beacon' which motivates individuals to commit to and engage in prosocial, generative behaviours across their lifespans.

Purpose in educational context

Teachers aim to create effective, supportive and challenging environments in which pupils can learn skills, dispositions and behaviours to direct their lives successfully. This new educational charter means that education extends beyond acquiring knowledge or increasing cognitive capacities toward developing the whole person, including emotion, motivation, volition, spirituality and sociality (Tirri 2011). This development is not limited to effectiveness within pupils' own cultures, but increasingly as part of a global arena of interwoven cultures. Teachers are particularly important for fostering life purpose among pupils (Tirri 2014; Tirri and Ubani 2013). Teachers provide encouragement, guidance, opportunities to engage and pathways (Koshy and Mariano 2011; Malin et al. 2013; Moran et al. 2012). They are role models and instructors for goal-directedness, planfulness (i.e. future planning) and consideration of the consequences of one's actions, although to different degrees depending on cultural factors (Bundick and Tirri 2014). As the world grows more interconnected through social media, it is important to understand the ways different cultures address educating for purpose.

Purposeful teaching

One of the most important bases for a teacher to have before he or she can be expected to teach for purpose is an understanding of his or her own purpose (Damon 2008). Just as teachers must have some expertise in the content area, they are instructing before they can be expected to effectively disseminate the material and engage the pupils with it, the teachers themselves should have some sense of their own most important life goals and an understanding of how they make meaning of their own lives, before engaging with intentionality in purpose development of their pupils (Bundick and Tirri 2014, 5, 6).

Teachers' visions of ideal school practices may provide ways to access teachers' sense of purpose. Vision can provide inspiration and motivation to teachers and also guide them to reflect on their work (Husu and Tirri 2007; Tirri and Husu 2006). According to Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2000), one of the most powerful predictors of teachers' commitment to teaching is a sense of efficacy, the teachers' sense that they are making a positive difference in the lives of their pupils. For teaching to be purposeful teachers need skills to teach their subject matter, regardless of what it is, in the ways that would open up its educational meaning (Tirri and Ubani 2013). The German *Didaktik* is based on the idea that any given matter can represent many different meanings, and many different matters can open up any given meaning. But there is no matter without meaning, and no meaning without matter (Hopmann 2007, 116). Meaning emerges when the content is enacted in a classroom based on the methodological decisions of a teacher; meaning making is facilitated when teachers provide opportunities for their pupils to reflect upon what is meaningful to them, and how their current engagements are related to their life goals. Through this process, the individual growth of a student is fostered and the potential for purpose development is promoted.

Purposeful teaching around the world

Purpose can be seen as a key promoter in both professional growth and resilience for teachers (Tirri and Ubani 2013). As a result, in many countries around the world, the purpose of education and the role of schools as supports for purpose development are growing as important topics of scientific research and educational debate (e.g. Shin et al. 2013). A conceptual shift is occurring in several countries: the purpose of education is becoming an education for purpose.

In this special issue, researchers around the world examine what a shift toward an education for purpose looks like across several cultures. Many of the authors of these articles are collaborators in a three-year, multinational research study, funded by The John Templeton Foundation, United States, on how educational experiences can help pupils find a strong sense of purpose for their lives. The countries involved are the United States, Brazil, South Korea, China, Spain and Finland.

This special issue is a helpful accessory to the journal's recent special issue on a 40-year retrospective of teacher education (JET 40:5) by turning our eyes to the future: How do teachers foresee their role in the development of youth not just in terms of knowledge but also in terms of their own personal life aims? How do teachers understand their influence on youth's growing 'moral beacon' to contribute something to their communities? How do teachers maintain a reflective stance toward their own professional purposes?

Teachers around the world should be explicitly educated for competencies that make purposeful and purpose-oriented teaching possible. The goal of teacher education is to educate teachers not only to teach knowledge content, but also to reflect on the purposefulness of their teaching: Why do their lessons and activities matter? What immediate impact and long-term effects do their teaching efforts have on the pupils as well as the communities in which pupils interact?

To advance the scientific study of purpose education, the papers in this special issue address several of the most pertinent themes and questions around education for purpose by teachers. How can teachers move from interest to effective action? Based on their experience in Brazil, Araujo, Arantes, Danza, Pinheiro and Garbin explore Problem-Based Learning, Project-Based Learning and Design Thinking principles for purpose interventions that make salient life's uncertainty and complexity and that help pupils realise the impact of their actions on others. In these authors' view, teachers are the 'mediators' between students' in-process purpose growth and the world by helping students create community-serving products.

A common sentiment across papers is that teacher education for purpose can and should begin with teachers' beliefs: What do teachers think about purpose? Does how they think about purpose align with what they think about teaching and about supporting pupils? How does teaching purpose relate to teachers' ethics? Moran's paper and Quinn's paper examine beliefs among American teachers, providing empirical support for what some educators have suspected: even though purpose is not integrated into the public school curriculum, it is on the radar of American teachers' instruction (e.g. Koshy and Mariano 2011). The paper by Kuusisto, Gholami and Tirri finds that the Finnish and Iranian teachers' self ratings of competence were predicted by their higher levels of ethical sensitivity, such as caring about others.

The two American studies collect data related to the specific dimensions of Damon's (2008) definition of purpose: meaning, intention, engagement and beyond-the-self impact. As Quinn suggests, this dimensional approach may be important when addressing educating for purpose because adolescents likely are at different stages of purpose development. Many may not have all the dimensions integrated yet (Moran 2009). It would be helpful for teachers to understand that these dimensions of purpose may not develop at the same time or rate. Thus, a binary view of whether teachers are or are not addressing the full purpose construct could miss important ways that teachers can address each dimension of purpose. For example, the Finnish and Iranian teachers' ethical sensitivity may be particularly helpful in developing pupils' abilities to find opportunities for beyond-the-self impact.

How well prepared do teachers feel they are to teach purpose? Three papers by Kuusisto, Gholami and Tirri, by Jiang, Lin and Mariano, and by Tirri and Kuusisto explore perceptions of teachers' competence for teaching purpose in Finland, Iran, and China. In all three countries, teaching is considered a moral profession, yet the ways teachers are educated in their profession differences in cultural focus. China has a direct and compulsory, textbook-focused curriculum for 'purpose', whereas teaching purpose is less explicit but still integrated into the philosophy of teaching in the other two countries. These differences in education impact which dimensions of purpose teachers feel most competent to address. For example, Iranians teach reflection on purpose in life and plans for the future, whereas Finnish teachers emphasise the importance and consequences of one's actions and decisions. Teachers in all of the countries rated their competence highly, but Chinese teachers considered themselves significantly *more* competent at providing purpose support to their students than their students thought they were.

Congruence between teacher competence and beliefs, teacher and pupil, teacher and subject matter, and pupil and subject matter arises in all the studies in this issue. Congruence could provide a framework for further research. In particular, can life purpose be used as a 'bridge' between pupils' or student teachers' schooling and their future lives, which can then support their current engagement in coursework (Moran 2014)? For example, Finnish teachers' own purposefulness relates to their competence for teaching purpose, and teachers' purposefulness is associated with pupils' purposefulness. Chinese students who rated their college teachers as supportive of purpose also articulated clear beyond-the-self goals for purpose.

If congruence is important, what is the role of subject matter as a venue for purpose development? Several papers prompt further questions about the relationships among subject matter, teachers' education in that subject matter and teachers' overall teaching competence in pupils' purpose development. Some researchers suggest that some subject areas may be more amenable to teaching purpose than other subject areas. For example, subject areas that address social problems, such as religion or social studies, may make it easier for teachers of these subject areas to feel more competent also teaching purpose. In contrast to mathematics and science teachers in Finland, it would be difficult to imagine religious studies teacher candidates being able to avoid contemplation of purpose and meaning in their own lives, since their subject area demands it. Yet in Finland, the overall philosophy of teacher education does not differ by subject area. And the influence of subject matter may not hold in all cultures. Whereas in Finland and China, competence in teaching purpose related to subject matter, in Iran it was not (see also Tirri 2012).

Increasingly, the development of purpose in young people is gaining traction in education as researchers and educators see purpose as an effective concept for not only academic achievement but civic engagement and good citizenship as well. The interest is not limited to one country or region of the world. This special issue offers a comparative view of teaching purpose in several countries with the hope of launching further interest in making the development of purpose a key educational goal worldwide.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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