
Original Paper

Purpose in Life and Educators

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Abstract

Teachers and educators are a different breed, uniquely equipped to handle the diversity of students and the array of educational challenges they encounter. This study investigates the sense of purpose in life among pre-service and in-service teachers, using the Purpose in Life Test, a tool rooted in the ideas of Viktor Frankl. By analyzing the scores of these educators, the research aims to understand how their sense of purpose influences their ability to cope with the demands of the teaching profession. The findings offer insights into the traits that sustain educators over time and suggest ways these traits can and should be nurtured and developed.

Introduction

Educators play a crucial role in shaping the minds and futures of students. Given the complexity and demands of the teaching profession, understanding what drives and sustains teachers is essential. This study explores the concept of purpose in life among teachers, drawing on Viktor Frankl's theory and using the Purpose in Life Test. Teachers/Educators are a Different Breed. They have different traits, and characteristics, that enable them to educate children, adolescents, and students with special needs. These traits sustain them over the long haul. These traits can be nurtured and SHOULD be.

Literature Review

Frankl (1964) was a prisoner in the German concentration camps at Auschwitz, Dachau, Bergen Belsen and Theirenstadt and what he found in those experiences was that the survivors of those experiences had a meaning or a purpose in life, which sustained them through the brutal experiences of World War II.

Since then, many research studies have explored and examined the construct of purpose in life and meaning. The Purpose in Life Test was constructed by Crumbaugh and Maholick (1969) and has been used extensively in many research studies.

Methodology

Participants

The Purpose in Life Test was administered to 75 students enrolled in a teacher education program at Eastern New Mexico University, spanning freshmen to graduate levels.

The Instrument

The Purpose in Life Test comprises 20 items rated on a 7-point Likert scale, with some items reversed to prevent response bias. Participants provided basic demographic information before completing the test.

Procedure

Data were collected via Qualtrics, and the responses were analyzed to determine the participants' sense of purpose and meaning in life. The directions were "For each of the following statements, circle the number that would be most nearly true for you. Note that the numbers always extend from one extreme feeling to the opposite kind of feeling. Neutral implies no judgment either way Try to use this rating as little as possible."

The questions are:

1) I am usually :

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Completely bored

Neutral

Exuberant/ enthusiastic

2) Life to me seems:

7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Always exciting

Neutral

Completely routine

3) In life I have :

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

No goals or aims at all

Neutral

Very clear goals and aims

4) My personal existence is :

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Utterly meaningless without purpose

Neutral

Very purposeful and meaningful

5) Every day is :

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Constantly new and different

Neutral

exactly the same

6) If I could choose , I would:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Prefer never to have been born

Neutral

Live 9 more lives just like this one

7) After retiring I would

7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Do some of the exciting things

Neutral

loaf completely the rest of my life

I have always wanted to

8) In achieving life goals I have:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Made no progress whatever

Neutral

Progressed to complete fulfillment

9) My life is:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Empty filled only with despair

Neutral

Running over with exciting good things

10) If I should die today, I would feel that my life has been :

7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Very worthwhile

Neutral

Completely worthless

11) In thinking of my life: I

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Often wonder why I exist

Neutral

Always see a reason for my being here

12) As I view the word in relation to my life, the world:

| | | | | | | |
|------------------------|---|---|---------|--------------------------------|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Completely confused me | | | Neutral | Fits meaningfully with my life | | |

13) I am a :

| | | | | | | |
|---------------------------|---|---|---------|-------------------------|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Very Irresponsible Person | | | Neutral | Very Responsible Person | | |

14) Concerning man's freedom to make his/her own choices, I believe man is :

| | | | | | | |
|------------------------------------------|---|---|---------|-------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|
| 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| Absolutely free to make all life choices | | | Neutral | Completely bound by limitations of Heredity and environment | | |

15) With regard to death, I am :

| | | | | | | |
|-----------------------|---|---|---------|---------------------------|---|---|
| 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| Prepared and unafraid | | | Neutral | Unprepared and frightened | | |

16) With regard to suicide, I have:

| | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|---|---------|---------------------------------|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Thought of it Seriously as a way out | | | Neutral | Never given it a second thought | | |

17) I regard my ability to find a meaning, purpose or mission in life as :

| | | | | | | |
|------------|---|---|---------|------------------|---|---|
| 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| Very great | | | Neutral | Practically None | | |

18) My life is:

| | | | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|---|---------|----------------------------------------------------|---|---|
| 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| In my hands and I am in control of it | | | Neutral | Out of my hands and controlled by External factors | | |

19) Facing my daily tasks is:

| | | | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|---|---------|---------------------------------|---|---|
| 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| A source of pleasure and satisfaction | | | Neutral | A painful and boring experience | | |

20) I have discovered

| | | | | | | |
|-------------------------------|---|---|---------|-----------------------------------------------|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| No Mission or purpose in life | | | Neutral | Clear cut goals and a satisfying life purpose | | |

Please note that some of the questions were reversed (2,5,7,10,14,15,17,18,19) so as to prevent a "mindset" on the part of the examinees.

Results and Discussion

Demographic Information

The Purpose in Life Test was administered to entering freshmen, sophomores, juniors, seniors, and graduate students via Qualtrics. There are 20 questions on a 7-point Likert Scale, and some are counterbalanced to prevent the establishment of a "mindset".

| Subject | Percentage | Number |
|-------------------|-------------------|---------------|
| Male | 20% | 15 |
| Female | 77.33% | 58 |
| Non-Binary | 2.67% | 2 |
| Prefer not to say | 0% | 0 |
| Total | 100% | 75 |

| Year in School | Percentage | Number |
|-----------------------|-------------------|---------------|
| First-year student | 38% | 28 |
| Sophomore | 6.9% | 5 |
| Junior | 20.8% | 15 |
| Senior | 15.2% | 11 |
| Graduate | 18.0% | 13 |
| Total | 100% | 72 |

| Ethnicity | Percentage | Number |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------|---------------|
| White | 59% | 44 |
| Black or African American | 6.76% | 5 |
| American Indian or Alaska Native | 4.0% | 3 |
| Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander | 1.35% | 1 |
| Other | 20.27% | 15 |
| Prefer not to respond | 5.4% | 4 |
| Total | 100% | 72 |

Results:

Q1:

I am usually-----

1) Completely bored----- 0

2) 0

3) 11.27-%

4) 23.94%

5) 30.99%

6) 23.94%

7) Exuberant and enthusiastic 9.86%

Significant mean scores will be provided for some of these questions. In this instance, the mean was 4.97 with a standard deviation of 1.2

Q2

Life to me seems:

7 Always exciting 15.7%

6 16.44%

5 28.77%

4 Neutral 19.1%

3 15.07%

2 4.11%

1 Completely Routine 1.37%

Given that these students are enrolled in a teacher education program, their lives may at this point in time seem mundane and less than exciting

Q3

In life I have:

1 No goals or aims at all -0%

2 1.39%

3 0%

4 Neutral 6.94%

5 12.5%

6 38.89%

7 Very clear goals and aims 40%

The mean score here was 6.08 with a standard deviation of 1.01 indicating that this group is clearly focused on becoming a skilled professional educator.

Q4

My personal existence is

1 Utterly meaningless and without purpose 2.74%

2 0.00%

3 6.85%

4 Neutral 9.59%

5 16.44%

6 19.18%

7 Very purposeful and meaningful 45%

Mean here was 5.75 with a standard deviation of = 1.5

Q5 Every day is:

7 Constantly New and Different 17.81%

6 12.33%

5 27.40%

4 Neutral 16.43%

3 12.33%

2 2.74%

1 Exactly the same 10.96%

Q6 If I could choose I would:

1 Prefer never to have been born 5.48%

2 4.11%

3 4.11%

4 Neutral 23.29%

5 21.92%

6 26.03%

7 Live 9 more lives just like this one 15.07%

Mean = 4.9, standard deviation = 1.5

Q7 After retiring I would

7 Do some of the exciting things I have always wanted to 61.64%

6 13.7%

5 12.33%

4 Neutral 5.48%

3 5.48 %

2 0%

1 Loaf Completely for the rest of my life 1.3%

Q8 In achieving life goals I have

1 Made No progress whatsoever 2.7%

2 1.37%

3 1.37%

4 Neutral 12.33%

5 42.47%

6 27.40 %

7 Progressed to Complete Fulfillment 12.33%

Mean = 5.22, standard deviation = 1.2

Q9 My life is:

1 Empty filled only with despair 2.82%

2 2.82%

3 4.2%

4 Neutral 16.90%

5 33.80%

6 22.54%

7 Running Over with Exciting New Things 16.90%

Mean = 5.11, standard deviation = 1.3

Q10 If I should die today, I would feel that my life has been

1 Very worthwhile 24.66%

2 23.29%

3 16.44%

4 Neutral 17.81%

5 10.90%

6 0%

7 Completely worthless 6.85%

Q11 In thinking of my life I

1 Often wonder why I exist 13.70%

2 0.00%

3 6.85%

4 Neutral 8.22%

5 19.18%

6 13.70 %

7 Always see a reason for being here 38.36

Mean = 5.14, standard deviation = 2.05

Q12 As I view the world in relation to my life, the world

1 Completely confuses me 10.9%

2 4.11%

3 20.55%

4 Neutral 19.18%

5 16.44%

6 10.96%

7 Fits meaningfully with my life 17.81%

Mean = 4.3, standard deviation = 1.86

Q13 I am a

1 Very irresponsible person 0.00%

2 1.37%

3 4.11%

4 Neutral 16.44%

5 15.07%

6 27.40%

7 Very Responsible 35.62%

Mean = 5.7, standard deviation = 1.2

Q14 Concerning man's freedom to make his or her own choices I believe people are:

7 Absolutely free to make all life choices 28.77%

6 26.03%

5 13.70%

4 Neutral 23.29%

3 2.74%

6 4.11%

7 Completely bound by limitations of heredity and environment 1.37%

Q15 With regard to death I am

7 Prepared and unafraid 20.55%

6 13.70%

5 16.44%

- 4 Neutral 17.81%
- 3 6.85%
- 2 6.85%
- 1 Unprepared and frightened 17.81%

Q16 With regard to suicide I have

- 1 Thought of it as a way out 9.72 %
- 2 5.56%
- 3 13.89%
- 4 Neutral 13.89%
- 5 11.11%
- 6 16.67%
- 7 Never given it a second thought 31.94%

Mean = 4.89, standard deviation = 2.02

While there were a few outliers on this question- the to-be teachers overall have not “given it a second thought.” This is an interesting realm for future research- to ascertain if COVID has brought some gloom and despair to the current generation.

Q17 I regard my ability to find a meaning, purpose or mission in life as:

- 1 Practically None 0.00%
- 2 1.39%
- 3 2.78%
- 4 Neutral 18.0%
- 5 19.44%
- 6 27.78%
- 7 Very Great 30.56%

Q18 My life is:

- 1 Out of my hands and controlled by external forces 2.86%
- 2 1.43%
- 3 2.86%
- 4 Neutral 22.86%
- 5 17.14%
- 6 25.71%
- 7 In my hands and I am in control of it 27.14%

Q19 Facing my daily tasks is:

- 1 A painful and boring experience 6.94%
- 2 1.39%
- 3 4.17%
- 4 Neutral 25.00%
- 5 23.61%
- 6 22.22%
- 7 A Source of Pleasure/satisfaction 16.67%

Q20, I have discovered

- 1 No mission or purpose in life 1.41%
- 2 1.41%
- 3 1.41%
- 4 Neutral 8.45%
- 5 21.17%
- 6 36.62%
- 7 Clear cut goals and a satisfying life purpose 29.58%

Mean = 5.7, standard deviation = 1.2

Summary and Conclusions:

In this exploratory study, an attempt was made to investigate the meaning and purpose in life of to be teachers or pre-service teachers. We obviously want to recruit and retain those individuals who have a clear, exact, precise idea as to their meaning and purpose in life. In this instance – it is educating and helping others to learn. It is a life-long calling for many. It also calls for perseverance, patience and emotional stamina over the long haul. The results were reviewed and analyzed.

This study highlights the importance of purpose in life for educators, suggesting that those with a clear sense of meaning are better equipped to handle the demands of teaching. Future research should explore how these findings can inform teacher training programs to enhance retention and satisfaction among educators.

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