A time to pause and ponder
- will to meaning in education

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Political global trends

Worries on globalisation is causing
- Isolationism
- Protectionism
- Populism
- Post-factualism
- ...

- *Democracy has committed suicide*
  - (Carsten Jensen, Danish author, 2016)

What is the responsible educational response

- Teachers and teacher educators can not take a dystopic position.
- They must attempt to make it possible for pupils and students to be *guided and assisted in the realisation of such meanings that they themselves have detected* (Frankl 2004).
- Europe has experience with atonement:
  - the Berlin wall went down,
  - peace came to Northern Ireland,
  - ...

In search for meaning in a changing world

The importance of defining meaning in times of uncertainty

- It is not surprising that we are inclined to reduce uncertainty given its negative impacts. Uncertainty is linked to increased stress, role ambiguity, job turnover, negative health effects and poor decision making.

- Uncertainty can lead to poor performance and people often define their meaning and worth through their performance. As such, we can be left searching for meaning in uncertain times.

http://www.sidewaysthoughts.com/blog/2013/05/the-importance-of-defining-meaning-in-times-of-uncertainty/

The relation between meaning and reflection

Donald Schön lex Andrew Castley, University of Warwick:
- conscious reflection: recall empathy and experience
- critical analysis: objective analysis of cause and action
- new perspective: synthesis and evaluation, adding concepts, applying literature
- implementation and action through a change
  - (i) in technique, or
  - (ii) in attitude or
  - (iii) in value (belief) system

https://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/ldc/resource/evaluation/tools/self/learnreflection.pdf

John Dewey according to Carol Rodgers (2002)
- Reflection is meaning-making and deepening understanding
- Reflection is systematic thinking
- Reflection needs interaction with others
- Reflection must value personal and intellectual growth
  - wholehearted
  - open minded
  - direct
  - responsible

Chris 1
Taking an auto-ethnographic approach

- Self-study is research (Lewison 2003, Clarke & Erickson 2004).
- Self-study "as professional development - Looking for the meaning in one's own activity - methodology characterised by examining role of the self in research projects - "the space between self and the practice engaged in" (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001)
- Self-study is “a generally agreed set of insider research practices that promote teachers taking a close, critical look at their teaching and the academic and social development of their students” (Lewison 2003)
- Self-study “involves classroom teachers in a cycle of inquiry, reflection and action...teachers question common practice, approach problems from new perspectives, consider research and evidence to propose new solutions, implement these solutions and evaluate the results, starting the cycle anew” (Lewison 2003) (our emphasis).

Chris 2
How to be self-reflexive?

Focus
- on one's own teaching & one's students' learning while engaging in scholarly practice. (Kitchen 2006)
- the “analysis of one's own practice with all the attendant challenges and celebrations associated with such scrutiny” (Clarke & Erickson 2004).

Approach
- “narrative-biographical research” (Swennen et al 2008)
- journals, diary, notes, emails, video recording, feedback, peer observation...
- Dialogue as a search for meaning - learning conversations (Laurillard 2002)

Outcomes
- any perceived outcomes seen as teacher knowing - one's practice is always evolving, rather than teacher knowledge - where one's practice is pretty much fixed or static. (Clarke & Erickson 2004).

Impact
- we “need to understand and recognise that ideas and aspirations may not be matched by teaching practices” (Whitehead 1993)
Chris 3

**Action research by a teacher educator:**
- Classroom activity fails to have full impact on learning
- Narrative in journal entries
- Writing the action research report is empowering (Bullock 2007)
- Dialogue with peers and learners seeking meaning (Whitehead 1993)
- Espoused theory vs. theory in use (Argyris & Schön 1974)
- Reflect on inputs, activity, context, etc.
- Plan and implement effective action.

To find meaning in what we do
- “confront, re-examine and possibly reinterpret … past experiences in the light of new experiences” (Lomax, Evans & Parker, 1998),
- “closer scrutiny of an individual’s pedagogy in teaching about teaching” (Loughran & Northfield 1998).

Peer 1

**Narrative inquiry in Danish teacher education**

- Inquiry in general is gaining momentum in teacher education:
  - Connect to local community, (Nicholas, Baker-Sennett, McClanahan, & Harwood, 2012)
  - Curricular modelling, (Oliver et al., 2015)
  - Address teacher student concern, (Salerno & Kibler, 2015)
- Narratives bring forward:
  - Experience
  - The individual perspective and meaning
  - Setting sensitive
- **Efterskole [Youth folk high school] course**
  - 10 ects
  - 6 weeks fulltime course
  - Including 2 week stay at an ‘efterskole’
Peer 2
How narrative inquiry?

- Oral narrative as genre – 15 minutes presentation
- Identity as narrative (Sfard and Prusack, 2005)
  - Who is telling the identity of who to whom
  - Whose meaning is valid
- Address (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007)
  - Narrative documentation
  - Narrative analysis
  - Narrative communication
- Task
  - Description, analysis, reflection, assessment and suggestions for development
  - 5 pages written documentation of method
  - 20 minutes presentation and dialogue

Peer 3
A case observed by a teacher student:
- A girl retreats to her room repeatedly.
- The girl wants to more open and learn to make friends.
- The large school community is outside her comfort zone.
- This ‘Efterskole’ has a network effort where teachers meet with smaller groups of the students.
- In this smaller community the girl finds peers with whom she makes relation into the larger school community.

Some perspectives
- Teacher student learn to listen and inquire into youth narratives of their experiences and meanings.
- *Narrative deal with human action and intentionality* (Bruner, 1990, p. 52)
Meaning and action

• **Meaning** comes from engagement in the world (Frankl, 1956)
• We act within a world we create
• Action (or inaction) provokes a response
• We strive to understand our actions, our own responses and those of others
• We want to know what it means
• We want to learn how better to act – with others, for others, for ourselves and for the good of society

Approaches that creates space for personal meaning to be ascribed value

• Will to meaning can be compensated by will to power and/or will to pleasure
• *true meaning of life is to be discovered in the world* (Frankl, 1959/2014, p. 103)
• Frankl further accentuates that meaning can be found in three different ways:
  – Creating a work or doing a deed
  – Experiencing something or encountering someone
  – Taking an attitude toward unavoidable suffering
Conclusion

• Will to meaning in education can find completion in educative deeds such as:
  – Teacher students creating relations to vulnerable youths.
    • Applying narrative inquiry
  – Teacher educators performing reflection and revision of teaching in practice.
    • Applying auto-ethnography
• 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.

Where now?

Joint initiatives are welcome
- Exchange visits
- Student exchange
- R&D projects
- Joint writings
- ...

Send me - pd@via.dk - or Chris - C.Spencer@bolton.ac.uk - an email or let’s have coffee ...
Questions - discussion

• How can we promote meaning-making in teacher education and teaching?
  – Self-reflection
  – Narrative inquiry
• Which meanings are responsible within teaching and teacher education?
  – Dystopic,
  – Realistic,
  – Hopeful,
  – Optimistic,
  – Naive,
  – ...

References - Peer

References - Chris

- Bullock & Prevege, 2005, p. 35 died in Kitchen 2006
- Richardson, V (1999), Conducting research on practice. Educational Researcher, 24, 5, pp 5-13