Meaning at the Margins: The Case for Meaning Education in K-12 Schooling

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Abstract: Across Canada, provincial education mandates cite intellectual development, socialization, and vocational preparation as some of the central goals of public schooling (B.C., 1989; Ontario, 1990). Within Alberta's Guide to Education (2024) yet another objective is offered, which is that schooling ought to promote the leading of "meaningful, fulfilling lives." To date, little guidance has been provided on what educating for meaning might look like, nor how to achieve this laudatory goal. This paper makes the case that meaning education can be realized through the use of the Community of Philosophical Inquiry (CPI). This is the case because this model (1) makes thinking visible (2) promotes taking ownership of one's values and behaviours (3) exposes youth to the viewpoints of others, and in so doing bolsters their emotional resilience, and (4) provides an interpersonal arena for value recalibration.

Introduction

Across Canada, provincial education mandates cite intellectual development, socialization and vocational preparation as some of the central goals of public schooling (B.C., 1989; Ontario, 1990). However, with the exception of Alberta, provinces have failed to explore *meaning* as yet another possible goal of public education. Alberta's education mandate is unique in its prescription to teach students to "think critically as they become active and informed citizens leading healthy lives of meaning" (2024). This laudable imperative raises an important question, namely: how exactly does one accomplish such a task in K-12 education?

Dewey (1930) claimed that "the ultimate aim of education is nothing other than the creation of human beings in the fullness of their capacities" (p. 289). Here, it is argued that such an aim cannot be realized if educators fail to attend to their students' need for meaning. This argument is echoed in the works of Frankl (1946) and Fromm (1941) who together argue that the modern individual is unsettled by their own capacity for self-creation, and inclined to try and "escape" this predicament through suboptimal means. In response, it is suggested that education systems ought to try and allay these anxieties by equipping youth with the tools they need for meaning-making. Communities of Philosophical Inquiry (CPIs) hold particular benefits in this regard. More precisely, this pedagogical model is uniquely equipped to cultivate the cognitive, attentive and affective capacities needed for meaning-making.

CPIs can provide students with a conceptual space in which their existing values can be both challenged as well as critically evaluated. This offers participants the novel opportunity to both refine their values or potentially revise them in light of unconsidered viewpoints. CPIs also help model the inextricable relationship between meaning-making and practical reasoning by visibly demonstrating the

power of reason to help guide and determine action. All of these processes will help students by preparing them for the interpersonal marathon, not solitary sprint, that characterizes meaning-making.

Two Senses of Meaning

Humans have a need to make sense of, and navigate, the world around them. In order to operate in the world effectively, humans must map their environment in motivational rather than objective terms, constantly evaluating what is deserving of their action and attention. Meaning constitutes what is *relevant* within this motivational interface. That is, for something to have the quality of meaning, it must have an implication for one's emotions and/or behaviours. In psychological terms, meaning is "a prism of mental representations of expected relations that organizes [people's] perceptions of the world" (Heine & Proulx 2006, p. 1), and "the configuration of interpretive schema that produces or guides action" (Peterson, 1999, p. 1). Without such a framework, one would find themselves unable to make sense of the world and incapable of taking action, i.e., the world would present itself as unintelligible chaos.

In his book *Man's Search for Meaning*, psychiatrist Viktor Frankl (1946) offers a different conception of meaning. While Frankl recognizes our inbuilt need to make sense of the world, he argues that meaning constitutes more than just a psychological mechanism for satisfying our drives (pp. 99, 103). Crucially, for Frankl, humans have a will to live purposefully in the world and achieve a "worthwhile goal" (p. 105). Frankl argues that this view of meaning is *existential* in the sense that it is "the striving to find a concrete meaning in personal existence" (p. 101). It is that constant "tension between what one has already achieved and what one still ought to accomplish, or the gap between what one is and what one should become" (pp. 104-105). Thus, for Frankl, meaning is not just about what is currently relevant within one's environment, but critically, the personal choices that make one's life worth living (p. 118).

It thus seems that there are two senses of the term meaning: the first might be termed *meaning as relevance*, while the second might be termed *meaning as purpose*.[1] Clearly our survival depends more upon the former sense of meaning than the latter, as Al Gore (2017) cheekily remarked to this end, "When our evolutionary predecessors gathered on the African savanna three million years ago and the leaves next to them moved, the ones who didn't look are not our ancestors" (p. 21). Yet, this does not discount meaning in the latter, existential sense, as it is still of fundamental concern for self-conscious entities. Critically, in order to achieve this latter sense of meaning, one is often required to resist the pull of meaning in the former sense, i.e., one is required to resist the urge of immediate gratification in the pursuit of higher level goals. It is this latter definition of meaning, which concerns searching for a "why" to live for (Frankl, 1946, p. 104), which is the focus of this paper.

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1 Karmon (2021) makes a similar distinction and terms these "meaning as understanding reality" and "meaning as significance of and reason for living" (p. 162).

The Search for Meaning is Dynamic & Intersubjective

The notion that one might suddenly discover "the meaning of life" mischaracterizes meaning as something universal and static. In reality, the search for meaning is something personal and iterative. In *Fear and Trembling,* Søren Kierkegaard (1843) refers to the 'earthquakes of existence' when describing his journey of faith. This metaphor is apt. Just like the earth itself, meaning is tectonic in nature, and must constantly shift and readjust. Such recalibration may be catalyzed by the flow of experiences, revelations, or encounters with the unknown. For instance, if one had built their life around their athletic ability, only to be permanently paralyzed by a motor vehicle accident, meaning must necessarily be renegotiated (i.e., one must revise their future plans). As Frankl writes, "the meaning of life differs from man to man, from day to day and from hour to hour" (p. 108). This is the case because the world, and one's place in it, is constantly undergoing change (Peterson, 1999, p. 238)

Frankl (1946) describes the dangers of anchoring oneself to static or fragile sources of meaning. Frankl offers the example of fellow concentration camp prisoners who hitched their hopes to the idea of being liberated and returning home by Christmas. When the anticipated day came and went and they found themselves still imprisoned, they fell into despair and died (p. 76). Importantly, Frankl suggests that it was the mindset of the prisoners that needed to change. He writes,

> ...we had to teach the despairing men, that *it did not really matter what we expected from life, but rather what life expected from us.* We needed to stop asking about the meaning of life, and instead to think of ourselves as those who were being questioned by life—daily and hourly. [...] Life ultimately means taking the responsibility to find the right answer to its problems and to fulfill the tasks which it constantly sets for each individual. (p. 77)

This passage illustrates something fundamental about the search for meaning: it requires a "reorientation," or shift in perspective, towards life itself (p. 105). Critically, this reorientation involves approaching life from a paradigm of personal responsibility, rather than a paradigm of fatalism (p. 56).

The passage above also conveys that one cannot approach life in a bullheaded manner and simply decide for oneself where meaning will come from. Instead, one must respond to the situations that life puts before them. A story that nicely illustrates this principle comes from psychologist Jordan Peterson. Peterson recalled an email dialogue he engaged in with a reader of his. The correspondent was grieving at the sudden loss of his father. Peterson saw that the man's world had fallen apart—he was in the depths of despair and understandably experiencing a crisis of meaning. Instead of merely commiserating with him, Peterson focused on something the young man might do to reclaim meaning during the tragedy— he advised him to strive to be the strongest man at his father's funeral—to be someone others might rely upon in the midst of their heartbreak. The truth is, we often do not get to decide how opportunities for meaning will manifest themselves, but we do always have a choice in how we respond to life.

A second, equally damaging misconception that surrounds meaning is that, because it is personal, it is solipsistic. In his book *Homo Deus,* Yuval Harari (2015) argues that humans "live in a triple-layered reality": the objective, the subjective and the intersubjective. While the objective level of reality exists independent of one's beliefs and emotions, and the subjective level of reality is dependent on one's

beliefs and emotions, the intersubjective level of reality exists by virtue of communication and coordination among many agents (p. 181). Money is a good example of such a phenomenon, because it only holds value due to the collective beliefs and coordinated behaviours of many individuals. Similarly, language could not exist unless multiple communicators worked together to reference something in their shared environment.[2]

In the same way that a private language is incoherent, and minting one's own private money is invaluable, solipsistic meaning is a nonstarter. Individuals subscribing to such shallow doctrines will quickly find themselves disillusioned, if only because not all behaviours are regarded as worthwhile or laudatory. To this point, Harari points out, "If somebody protests that 'The degree certificate is just a piece of paper! and behaves accordingly, he is unlikely to get very far in life" (p. 199). In a similar vein, Charles Taylor (1989) pokes fun at the idea that one might simply decide that wiggling one's toes in mud is significant, or admirable (p. 36). Taylor goes on to say that the value of our behaviours are compared against "horizons of significance" (p. 37). Crucially, such horizons are negotiated with others and not the purview of any one individual. Thus, while meaning may look different for each individual, by virtue of their unique circumstances, this is not the same thing as saying that meaning is whatever the individual decides. What will be argued later is that robust interpersonal dialogue is needed to clarify such horizons for youngsters.

The Case for Meaning Education

The meaning that was once supplied by rigid and predictable social systems has waned during modernization. As Viktor Frankl (1946) notes, for thousands of years, animal instincts and cultural scripts performed the legwork of meaning-making on humanity's behalf (p. 106). In speaking of the Middle Ages, Erich Fromm (1941) likewise observes that during this period "man was rooted in a structuralized whole, and thus life had a meaning which left no place, and no need for doubt" (p. 41). What the rigid social order of the time lacked in personal freedom and social mobility, it made up for with "primary ties" which granted individuals a strong sense of security, direction and purpose. However, as Medieval society was overtaken by the atomizing forces of industrialization and individualism, these ties were weakened and people were left to find alternative sources of meaning themselves. As Frankl (1946) points out, most of us now have the means to live but no meaning to live for (p. 140).

Fromm (1941) argues that these modern conditions have given rise to an intense sense of insecurity, helplessness and angst in individuals (p. 35). In turn, individuals have attempted to alleviate this anxiety by trying to "escape" their freedom, i.e., rather than shouldering the responsibility of self-authorship, individuals have instead sought to abandon it. In other words, the very freedom that makes personal meaning possible is often experienced as a burden rather than a gift. Stomaching the burden of one's freedom is a challenging prospect because it entails that one is responsible for their blunders, as well as all the aspirations one fails to realize or achieve (Peterson, 2021, p. 101). That is, in accepting that one could live a meaningful life, one simultaneously must accept that one is capable of squandering it.

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2 This argument can be attributed to Wittgenstein (1953).

In an effort to rid themselves of the anxiety associated with the search for meaning, individuals will often try to escape via conformism or totalitarianism (Frankl, 1946, p. 106). While this strategy may offer temporary emotional relief to the individual, it is a Faustian bargain that ultimately promises peace of mind in exchange for surrendering one's own autonomy. As Peterson (1999) notes "the price paid for absolute security is freedom and individuality, and therefore, creativity. Sacrifice of individual creativity, by choice, eventually deprives life of pleasure, of meaning—but not of anxiety or pain—and therefore renders life unbearable" (p. 378). Fromm (1946) similarly observes that by "being essentially a reflex of other people's expectations of him, he has in a measure lost his identity" (p. 203). Thus, the individual who successfully escapes their freedom is ultimately left with the worst of both worlds: nagging insecurity and a diminished self.

It might thus be argued that one reason meaning education is so pressing stems from the consequences that it has for individuals. If educators abdicate the calling to enhance meaning by leaving it to chance, or relocating it to other social institutions, they run the risk of leaving insecure youth to convenient, yet personally-costly, alternatives. These alternatives often take the form of conformity, totalitarianism, materialism and self-indulgence (Frankl, 1946, pp. 106-107). This results in a twofold negative impact: individuals are both deprived of genuine expression, and consequently, the world misses out on the valuable contributions such expression might have otherwise afforded.

A second, equally important rationale for meaning education concerns the consequences that it may have for the collective. Alluring, low-resolution ideologies promise simplicity and security but necessarily contain baked-in blind spots that lead the collective into trouble and misdirect our energies (Peterson, 1999, p. 217). More concerning yet, there may be dire outcomes if the mass movements promising reprieve from the burdens of meaning-making turn inhumane and destructive, as was witnessed repeatedly in the middle and latter half of the 20th century (Hoffer, 1951). What fuels the rise of both myopic ideologies and mass movements are the frustrated and the disaffected (p. 59). Meaning education may play a pivotal role in turning off the tap of discontent.

Educating for Meaning

Frankl (1946) argues that man's search for meaning "is unique and specific in that it must and can be fulfilled by *him alone*" [emphasis added] (p. 99). The questions facing the concentration camp prisoner differ from those facing the German guard or the American marine. By its very nature, the search for meaning resists standardization. Yet, this fact seems to stand at odds with the impersonal nature of most education systems. For the most part, these systems specialize in teaching content and skills to large numbers of pupils in a more-or-less formulaic manner. In light of this, it would seem a much more personalized intervention is in order. Indeed, Frankl advocated for precisely that: logotherapy.

While therapeutic interventions undoubtedly have value, the education system can still play a pivotal role in supporting meaning education by cultivating the cognitive, attentive and affective capacities that the search for meaning requires. Emotional resilience is needed because, as Frankl (1946) notes, there is a persistent tension that accompanies taking responsibility and searching for meaning (p. 105). Likewise, exercises built to enhance thinking and attentiveness can help ensure that one is capable

of perceiving opportunities for meaning in their environment and equipped to think through how to respond. In adopting such a goal, education can hope to become more empowering to students and future-focused. Dewey (1916) articulated a similar goal when he remarked, "The aim of education is to enable individuals to continue their education [...] the object and reward for learning is continued capacity for growth" (p. 107).

Efforts to promote meaning in education have picked up steam during the last decade (Karmon, 2021; Malin, 2018; Nash & Jang, 2014). While there is general convergence around the nature of this goal and its importance, there is a lack of consensus regarding how to best achieve this laudable objective. Educational strategies aimed at promoting meaning range from assessment design (Malin, 2018), to teacher behaviour (Karmon, 2021), and even the theoretical frameworks that guide schooling (Kizel, 2016).

In his paper *Education for Meaning: What Is It and Why Do We Need it?*, Amnon Karmon (2021) makes the case that recent societal changes have raised the need for a new educational concept. He argues that this concept should be education for meaning. Interestingly, Karmon points to the creative arts as a promising venue for meaning-education, on account of their capacity to increase self-understanding and carve out space for student choice (p. 163, p. 166). Notably, Karmon also argues that meaning education can exist outside the arts through differentiated assignments since these opportunities allow students to pursue personal areas of interest and their passions (p. 166). In order for meaning education to succeed, Karmon suggests migrating to a mentorship paradigm, where teachers function more as guides and coaches rather than as subject-experts (p. 168).

In their chapter *Education for Meaning Making* authors Nash and Jang (2014) likewise point to the possibility of educating for meaning. The two remark: "We think of *meaning-making* as a process and *purpose-finding* as a product" (p. 4). The authors contend that this meaning-making process is best pursued through storytelling and dialogue. They suggest that asking students to share their personal narratives prompts them to evaluate what holds significance for them, while simultaneously acknowledging the influence of their surrounding circumstances on their stories (p. 10). Similarly, conversations are emphasized because meaning emerges through collaborative engagement rather than in isolation (pp. 10-11).

Here it is argued that another educational strategy for promoting meaning-making exists in Philosophy for Children (P4C). P4C is a pedagogical intervention aimed at cultivating critical, creative, and caring thinking in its participants. The program teaches youngsters how to make progress on hard questions by leveraging the power of interpersonal, critical reasoning. Facilitators of the program typically use a dialogical model called a Community of Philosophical Inquiry (CPI) to achieve these aims. This model involves participants sitting in a circle and unpacking a central question while a facilitator corrects logical fallacies, clarifies muddy communication, tracks the development of the conversation, and ensures balanced participation from all those involved.

In his paper *Philosophy with Children as an Educational Platform for Self-determined Learning*, Arie Kizel (2016) notes that Lipman, the founder of P4C, originally conceived of his pedagogical model as a way of helping children find meaning. Lipman designed P4C as a means of addressing some of the deficits

in traditional education, particularly the tendencies of educational systems to demoralize and disempower students and erode at their curiosity (p. 9). Importantly, Lipman thought that the crucial ingredient that was missing from traditional education was meaning: "If children find the education they are being given meaningless, they will come to distrust it [...] The children need to be motivated—not to think, but to think in ways that increase the measure of meaning in their lives" (1973, p. 9). Lipman thought that philosophy was worthwhile for youngsters precisely because it provided the tools they needed to investigate life, and thus aided in their search for meaning (1988, p. 108). According to Kizel (2016), "Philosophy for Children is thus designed to provide students with an opportunity to embark on a search for meaning that is largely guided by self-determined learning and thinking" (p. 9).

Philosophy for Children is a powerful tool for fostering dialogue that promotes self-authorship. P4C can help cultivate self-authorship in youngsters by exposing them to forms of dialogue that are often absent in schools—dialogue which emphasizes their personhood and responsibility (Gardner & Anderson, 2015). Crucially, such dialogue focuses on asking questions "that will elucidate whether there is a discrepancy between their ideal and their current actions" (p. 4), and questions that help identify who students are "trying to become" as persons (p. 11).

Moreover, unlike the other models discussed above, P4C emphasizes the importance of critical thinking in meaning-making. Roland Case (2005) notes that Matthew Lipman, the founder of P4C, considered critical thinking and criterial thinking to be synonymous ideas (p. 46). That is, to think critically is to consider multiple criteria and to weigh the importance of each in relation to a specific problem. This type of contemplation, which requires deeply assessing the relative value of different considerations, helps one achieve what Iris Murdoch (1970) refers to as "clear vision," that is, a "refined and honest perception of what really is the case" (pp. 36-37). On this point, Frankl (1946) repeatedly spoke of the importance of "awareness," "reorientation, "consciousness, "point of view," and "perception" with regard to the search for meaning (pp. 98, 103, 120, 144). If an individual is incapable of seeing a situation from multiple angles, of considering an alternative path for themselves, then the world necessarily presents itself as a fatalistic bulwark. As Lipman correctly saw, critical cognitive strategies, such as questioning, distinguishing, and forming inferences are tools that can help individuals chip away at that bulwark, and help them perceive opportunities for meaning in their experiences (Lipman, 1988, p. 100). Critical thinking's capacity to help one remodel the world more accurately, as a space of possibility and choice, is thus integral to meaning-making.

However, while critical thinking is necessary to meaning-education, it is by no means sufficient, which is why Lipman proposed a thinking community. Left to one's own devices, individuals risk stagnated thinking, remaining shallow, missing important considerations, and falling prey to illogical missteps and fallacies. As Case (2005) notes, students "may use very narrow and dubious criteria, such as whether a course of action is easy and in their immediate self-interest, neglecting criteria such as long-term benefit, fairness to others, consistency with life goals, and safety" (p. 46). In light of this, it is essential that such thinking occur in (1) an interpersonal space and (2) be facilitated by a person on the lookout for such shallow thinking. This is where the skillset of teachers is most needed.

Communities of Philosophical Inquiry (CPIs) offer particular benefits with regard to meaning-education as they (1) make thinking visible, (2) demand that participants take ownership of their values

and behaviours, (3) expose youth to the viewpoints of others and healthy idea conflict, thereby bolstering emotional resilience, and (4) provide an interpersonal arena for value recalibration.

CPIs Make Thinking Visible

As noted earlier, a pitfall surrounding the topic of meaning is that it can become too solipsistic. Solitary attempts at meaning-making predictably result in the proliferation of shallow and underdeveloped thinking (Case, 2005). CPIs address this worry by requiring students to expound on their thinking out loud, and thereby transform what is typically *intra*personal into something visible and *inter*personal (Sharp, 1987). This is because students are meant to learn as much from their own dialogical contributions as those of their peers. This helps ensure that one is not the victim of their own self-interested delusions and is a safeguard against everyone's blind spots.

Importantly, students may benefit from seeing the thinking processes of their peers in real time. This is true in both the positive and the negative sense. By bearing witness to thinking that is structured, articulate, and clear, students can better hope to emulate such approaches. Likewise, by seeing a fellow student err in their thinking, by perhaps engaging in fallacious reasoning, students can in turn examine their own thinking for such logical missteps.

CPIs Demands That One Take Responsibility for Their Values and Behaviours

In speaking of the concentration camps, Frankl (1946) notes how many prisoners actively avoided making decisions (pp. 57-59). It seemed far easier not to choose and just to let fate take its course. However, Frankl notes that the moment he ceased doing this and began "making up his mind" he experienced a profound inner peace because he finally stood for something.

A benefit of having students vocalize their thinking is that it forces students to take ownership of their values and their behaviour. By requiring learners to articulate, explain and justify their viewpoints and behaviour to others, students naturally begin to treat themselves and other participants as being responsible for those positions. This is crucial, for as R.J. Wallace (1994) notes, a prerequisite for moral responsibility is to be *treated* as if one were morally responsible (p. 159, p. 231). CPIs create the context for such treatment.

In his book *Antifragile* (2012), author Nassim Taleb divides the world into three categories. Things that are fragile (i.e., break under minor stress), things that are robust (i.e., break under major stress), and things that are antifragile (i.e., benefit and improve under stress). For instance, a glass vase is fragile, a granite boulder is robust, but an immune system is antifragile. Taleb argues that we all ought to be trying to pursue habits that make us antifragile, as this makes us formidable in the unpredictable world we occupy.

As Fromm (1946) observes, there are negative downstream consequences when individuals, driven by a sense of fragility/insecurity, scramble for an external source of reassurance. Troublingly, Lukianoff & Haidt (2019) observe that this sense of fragility is precisely what is being promoted across American universities and secondary schools. Educators are increasingly reticent to challenge students' emotional

responses to content, and are now shying away from exposing them to ideas that might upset them (pp. 33-51). As they observe: "There's an old saying: "Prepare the child for the road, not the road for the child." But these days, we seem to be doing precisely the opposite: we're trying to clear away anything that might upset children" (p. 23). This can result in educators sheltering students from small harms that would have otherwise tempered them for higher stake events in their future (Taleb, 2012, p. 37). While such measures may create temporary peace and harmony in the classroom, they are setting students up for a rude awakening later in their lives.

While it is increasingly tempting to avoid high-stakes conversations in the classroom, this does a disservice to youngsters who would benefit from perceiving themselves as antifragile. In order to negotiate meaning, one is highly likely to experience tension (Frankl, 1946, p. 105), and to experience conflict with others. Almost all discussions worth having, and choices that need to be made, exist in contested territory. Given that fear of social exclusion ranks so highly in one's psyche, it is no wonder that tough conversations are often avoided by individuals. However, educators must recognize that while the tendency to stick with the crowd has had evolutionary benefits, it is a tendency that now must be eschewed for youth.

Part of the power of the CPI model is that it embraces discomfort and asks students to voluntarily wade into the unknown. It does this primarily through cultivating dialectic thinking (i.e., thinking that does not shy away from the conflict of opinions in social space). By CPIs exposing youth to the crucible of uncertainty, this model helps galvanize them for future exposures to similar experiences. Moreover, by equipping youth with the tools to repeatedly expose themselves to unpredictability, CPIs send the message meaning is not a one-and-done phenomenon.

CPIs Facilitate Value Refinement Through Exposure to Critical, Interpersonal Dialogue

The interpersonal nature of CPIs plays a key role in value recalibration. Ideals and values are intersubjective phenomena that are shaped by both our biology and culture (Harari, 2015), but given this fact, intensive communication is required to make sense of their implications for behaviour in a given context. This idea is spelled out in Jürgen Habermas's (1981) *Theory of Communicative Action*, in which he argues that the power of reason is located in the power of social rather than solitary thinking. Critical interpersonal dialogue helps facilitate the collision of worldviews, counteracting the blind spots of each, overcoming subjectivity and bias and, in the process, helping stabilize normative validity.

CPIs provide students a venue to both test and question their values, as well as the chance to consider if their behaviour is consistent with their professed ideals. While such an exposure to the "other" and their thoughts can sometimes temporarily threaten one's sense of meaning (Peterson, 1999, p. 249), it ultimately helps challenge one's own makeshift understandings, thereby igniting the process of reconstruction and landing participants with "more truthful descriptions" (Harari, 2015, p.195). As an added benefit, an exposure to the viewpoints of others may allow participants to expand their own internal audience after they depart the CPI (i.e., they may be able to conjure up perspectives other than their own in later intrapersonal dialogue).

A Guide for Facilitators

Facilitators Should Keep CPIs Focused on Practical Reason

CPIs, in and of themselves, are insufficient for meaning-education, as one could have a CPI about any number of specious or irrelevant topics. Therefore, the content of CPIs must remain focused on topics relevant to students' lives and related to their behaviour. Inquiring whether everyone is living in a simulation, or whether Zeno's Paradox can be resolved may be cognitively engaging but ultimately has little bearing on one's life. Worse yet, exercises that only stimulate theoretical reason may unintentionally backfire. As Peterson (1999) notes, "the capacity for rational thought *is* a dangerous force, without doubt, because it is a powerful force—and the conditions under which thinking plays a purely destructive role are not well comprehended" (p. 313). Facilitators should thus prioritize the use of reason for evaluating viewpoints and behaviors, rather than simply promoting reasoning for its own sake.

As a starting point, educators might get students to consider the forces that interfere with meaning in their lives, such as those that disconnect them from the world surrounding them. For instance, teachers might use thought experiments such as Nozick's (1974) experience machine or novels, such as Huxley's (1932) *Brave New World,* to open up a relevant topic facing students in their everyday lives: the amount of time they spend on screens. In both written works, individuals spend the majority of their time in altered states of consciousness. Teachers might have students calculate their total screen time across devices and then divide the resulting sum by the number of waking hours in their days, forming a percentage that represents their time spent in digital environments. Teacher and students could then inquire as to whether it is meaningful to be spending so much time in cyber space.

Stories are another vehicle that facilitators might use to great effect. In speaking about the search for meaning, Charlotte Bühler (1971) remarks, "All we can do is study the lives of people who seem to have found their answers to the questions of what ultimately human life is about as against those who have not." Studying stories to help students achieve meaning is a promising entry point for those teaching English and History. An added benefit might be that this approach is slightly less personal, since the discussion is centred around the narratives of others. There are many poems, novels and films that are ideal candidates for this task. As an example, consider the following moment from a recent film:

In David Lowery's (2021) cinematic adaptation of *The Green Knight*, the final sequence centres on Gawain, the protagonist, facing a supernatural knight in a chapel. Gawain is ready to honour the deal he made with the knight a year prior and be beheaded. As he is about to meet his end, Gawain succumbs to cowardice and flees. The narrative continues and follows Gawain back to his life at the castle, where this act of cowardice permeates every facet of his existence—eroding at his relationships and undermining his leadership. Just as everything falls apart, the film suddenly shifts perspective and returns to Gawain at the chapel: the viewer realizes that the castle sequence was not real—they have witnessed Gawain's projection into a hypothetical future, a stark imagining of who he would become should he betray his own values. In a moment of realization, Gawain undergoes a profound transformation and revises his decision, bows his head, and prepares to meet his end.

A moment such as this is ripe for discussion. The class might discuss Frankl's (1946) claim that man is sometimes even able to "die for the sake of his ideals and values" (p.99). Students could then inquire about whether Gawain's chivalric honour was something he should die for. This conversation could then be used as a springboard to have them reflect upon what values they hold most dear.

Facilitators Should Be Active in Dialogue

During dialogue, facilitators can tactfully interject, drawing students' attention to the way thought is developing. This might look like pointing out fallacies (e.g., false dilemmas), conceptual moves (e.g., agreement, disagreement, reframing), and even model the development of the conversation using a whiteboard by charting the arguments. By providing this structure, it helps ensure that students are aware of progress in thinking and come to see it as worthwhile instead of a waste of time. This runs counter to some suggestions that facilitators ought to fade into the background during CPIs (Kennedy, 2004).

Facilitators Should Reframe Dialogical Contributions in Agentic Language

Students will often be tempted to speak about themselves in a deterministic, bad faith manner (e.g., "Sarah *makes me* so angry"). However, in order to educate for meaning, it is essential that students view themselves as agents—as free and responsible for not only their behaviour, but their values and attitudes. A facilitator can assist with this by reframing statements (e.g., "So what you mean is that *you've decided to be angry with Sarah* because of her behaviour").

Facilitators Should Keep Dialogue Focused and Moving

Conversations can easily become sidetracked, devolve into semantic debates, or drift into other, equally-interesting topics. Moreover, conversations can become paralyzed by political correctness, emotional outbursts, inflammatory language, or false consensus. Facilitators can help overcome these roadblocks by playing devil's advocate when needed, supporting unpopular opinions, and strategically bracketing tangential ideas for revisiting later.

Facilitators Should Conclude CPIs with Lily Pads Not Limbo

The capacity to subject one's behaviour to critical reasoning is a double-edged sword. While this can solidify ownership over one's decisions or facilitate one changing their mind, such dialogue is also capable of paralyzing the agent, as excess consciousness can result in endless analysis and cascading doubt (Peterson, 1999, p. 264). The benefit of CPIs comes in modelling how to encounter chaos—represented here as the destabilizing viewpoints of others—and transform that chaos, via dialogical synthesis, back into something coherent and actionable. Thus, it is paramount that inquiry drives towards implication for behaviour, and does not conclude in an entangled state. To this end, having students fill out sheets that track their viewpoint prior to, and after, an inquiry can help them perceive progress. Alternatively, have students complete reflection exercises that ask them to identify the points that shifted their view or made them think.

Facilitators Should Avoid Placing Their Thumb on the Scale and Beware Indoctrination

Fromm (1941) observed that individuals are constantly tempted to slough off responsibility and all the headaches it causes, often by seeking a strongman or mass movement they can lose themselves in. Psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan countered such tendencies in his therapy patients by trying to shatter their romanticized views of authority. He did this in bizarre ways, such as by cutting his therapy visits short and still demanding full payment, or by arranging his office into bizarre configurations, with the phone sitting in the middle of the floor (Allouch, 2009). Importantly, Lacan wanted to disrupt his patients' longing for a messiah figure and have them look to themselves instead.

CPI facilitators ought to have a similar ideal in mind: they should be wary of being mistaken for a shaman or spirit guide and instead always direct students back to themselves. In order for this to work in practice, it is essential that facilitators stay neutral in inquiry. It will be a constant temptation for facilitators to present their own worldviews to pupils in the process of facilitating CPIs. However, this can be dangerous, for the aforementioned reason that the goal is not the adoption of any one particular vision of the world, but instead to provide the tools students need to take responsibility for their own views and behaviours. While being up front about one's own biases and present understandings is encouraged, meaning education is not character or moral education, and should not be confused with them. To ensure this remains the case, facilitators ought to focus their own dialogical contributions on the *structure of communication* and less on policing, or offering commentary, on *what* is being communicated.

Conclusion

If Brad is perfectly content smoking weed and playing video games with his pals most of the time, and Olivia is perfectly content scrolling social media and performing TikTok dances with her girlfriends, then why disrupt a good thing? What is the point of rousing happy sleepers? After all, educators have limited bandwidth and perhaps their job should just be to concern themselves with imparting the relevant content; that is, teach the youth that the mitochondria are the powerhouse of the cell, instruct them on how to perform algebra, equip them with the skills they need to write a spiffy essay and relay the importance of civic participation.

Here it has been argued that the reason to educate beyond the textbook is in fact meaning. In our short and limited time on this planet, we ought to make sure that life has not lived us, but that we have lived life. This means that we must depart from a paradigm of fate (Frankl, 1946, p. 56), where we are hapless victims riding the roller coaster of life, to one of agency, where we take ultimate responsibility for the lives we lead.

Neil Postman (1996) lamented that "Without meaning, learning has no purpose. Without a purpose, schools are houses of detention, not attention" (p. 7). For far too long, meaning has sat at the margins of education. In all likelihood this has stemmed from a misunderstanding regarding what meaning is, and a lack of guidance regarding how to cultivate it. Here it has been argued that meaning education necessarily requires more than the accumulation of facts, and must include, as part of its

program, engagement in critical, interpersonal dialogue. In turn, it has been argued that Philosophy for Children's CPI model offers particular benefits with regard to achieving this goal.

Sadly, there is no shortage of meaning "service providers" ready to do the legwork of meaning-making on our behalf. These prepackaged programs—whether they be found in crowds, mass movements, or hedonism—often market themselves as cheap, expedient, and come highly reviewed by friends and family. What's more, there is something romantic and desirable about adopting a single vision that will serve you the rest of your days, which is why so many have fallen prey to such a promise. Educators face an uphill battle if they wish to gift their students meaning, because it requires that they ask students to take the road less travelled and, in turn, equip them for the comparatively more difficult task of facing the unknown. But maybe an uphill battle is exactly what any worthwhile education should be.

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