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Exploration and creation of meaningful teacher educator practises in physical education teacher education

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines four teacher educators' work practices which either perceive to enhance or diminish meaningfulness in physical education teacher education. Through a community of learners, we took a narrative inquiry approach and in particular, a storytelling approach (Chiu-Ching & Chan, 2009. Teaching and learning through narrative inquiry. In D. Tidwell, M. L. Heston, & L. M. Fitzgerald (Eds.), *In Research Methods for the Self-Study of Practice*. Springer), to exploring, identifying, and examining meaningful teacher education practices. Stories (and elicited stories) were collected through recorded zoom meetings, critical discussions, and note taking. Collaborative data analysis resulted in three categories: (i) Ownership of practice as key to meaningful teacher educator practices; (ii) The influential interdependent relationships on the potential of meaningful teacher educator practices; and (iii) The power of reflection in learning from, and designing, meaningful teacher educator practices. We share considerations for other teacher educators in how they can strive towards developing meaningful teacher education practice, for example, we encourage teacher educators to engage in individual and collective reflection by being vulnerable.

Introduction

The search for and the experience of meaning is considered an important conditions that contributes positively to people's quality of life and human flourishing (Frankl, 1963; Martela & Steger, 2016). Whilst meaning in life does not guarantee positive outcomes, people who experience meaning and purpose in their lives tend to have a higher likelihood of being happier and healthier (Steger, 2012). There are many sources of meaning to be found in a person's life, such as generativity, personal development, and social commitment (Schnell, 2020). A key domain where people seek and find sources of meaning in their lives is work (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003; Rosso et al., 2010). Meaningful work research is interested in the subjective experiences of how personally significant and relevant individuals find their work to be (Martela & Pessi, 2018). This is important as it can contribute positively to a range of areas such as psychological health, organisational practices, and economic terms; meaningful work can be central in human flourishing. Work is a goal-orientated activity which can provide sources of meaning. However, while this may operate in theory, it may not play out in

practice as many people do not experience their work as meaningful (Graeber, 2018). Therefore, the wish to experience work as meaningful is not just about an individual's own concern, or to try and get individuals to work harder, but is at the core of a meaningful professional life which contributes to flourishing (Schnell, 2020).

As the four authors of this paper all work in higher education, and specifically in physical education teacher education (PETE), the aim of this research is to explore meaningful work in our roles, responsibilities, and teaching in PETE. The role of the physical education teacher educator is a varied and challenging one. Whilst not the focus of this paper, two recent reviews of PETE literature (McEvoy, McPhail & Heikinaro-Johansson, 2015; O'Sullivan, 2021) highlight this role as multifaceted. For example, physical education teacher educators' roles involve policy work, the preparation of teachers, working with schools, providing professional development, and researching their own practice as teacher educators, those of physical education teachers and also the children taught within the subject (McEvoy et al., 2015). In addition to this, O'Sullivan (2021) suggests that physical education teacher educators are faced with three distinct challenges that other academics in higher education may not need to contend with: (i) having to work across departments for research; (ii) conducting their daily work not only within university regulations but also the state or national regulator of teachers; and (iii) working with the professional networks that are linked to teaching. Whilst this study primarily looks to explore what teacher educators find meaningful in their PETE practice, it also looks to address the call for greater research from and on physical education teacher educators, particularly the work practices and experiences of those that work outside of North America (McEvoy et al., 2015). Research has been done on physical education teacher educators' enactment of meaningful physical education in PETE (e.g. Coulter et al., 2023; Ní Chróinín, Fletcher, & O'Sullivan, 2017), but, to our best knowledge, no research has been conducted on physical education teacher educators' understanding of meaningful teacher educator practices.

This research contributes to the growing body of knowledge in meaningful work and is framed by Veltman's (2016, p. 1) questions: (i) 'what contribution does work make to a good life?'; and (ii) 'what kinds of work enhance or undermine human flourishing?'. We examine our work practices which we perceive to enhance or diminish the meaningfulness we experience as teacher educators in PETE, and therefore, this research contributes to the teacher education literature in understanding what (and how) teacher educator practices are meaningful. The university is a unique workplace for employees (Riivari et al., 2020) and PETE offers a wide range of practices in teaching, research, and knowledge exchange within a range of contexts such as the lecture theatre, sports field, and local schools in which to find sources of meaning at work. We define 'practice' as all the activities in which someone engages as part of a particular profession (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009). Subsequently, teacher educator practice does not only involve teaching pre-service teachers. It also involves teacher educators fulfilling roles such as curriculum developer (Grossman, Hammerness, & McDonald, 2009), researcher (Lunenberg et al., 2014), and gatekeeper (Smith, 2007) within which their associated practices emerge in a complex interplay between curriculum, pedagogy, and research (Gallagher et al., 2011). Lunenberg et al. (2014) outlined six key roles of teacher educators; teachers of teachers, researcher, coach (mentoring), curriculum developer, gatekeeper (monitoring the access of the student to the teaching profession) and broker (connecting university-based and school-based teacher educators). Later work from Dengerink et al. (2015) added further clarity to these roles and also analysed the professional development needed within each role. In their discussion, they highlighted that teacher educators have to act in a range of roles; often these roles are adopted in contexts with competing agendas making the role of a teacher educator both complex and often demanding. Due to this, time to develop as a teacher educator is needed through a range of professional development opportunities, one of which could be reflective self-study or coaching conversations/sharing of practice with other teacher educators (as in this research) (e.g. MacPhail et al., 2014).

In this paper, we explore meaningfulness in teacher educator practices in PETE and specifically which practices enhance such meaningfulness. This contributes to the concept of meaningful work within higher education (Riivari et al., 2020). As each author works within a PETE programme

but in different universities and different countries (i.e. England, Norway, and Australia), we are looking for the similarities and differences in our work that we find meaningful. To conceptualise meaningful work, we apply Pratt and Ashforth's (2003) understanding of meaningfulness, as it is a term that suffers from ambiguity. We use this in conjunction with Martela and Pessi's (2018) tripartite conceptualisation of meaningful work to help to better answer our main objective of exploring, identifying, and examining the what, the how, and the why of meaningful teacher education practices.

Conceptualisation of the terms 'work' and 'meaningful'

The consideration of what a good life is and what contributes to it has been an ongoing activity in human history (Aristotle, 2004; Hadot, 2002). Work can provide an individual opportunity to seek out meaningful experiences which can contribute to their feeling of living a good and satisfying life (Veltman, 2016). Both the terms 'meaningful' and 'work' are ambiguous and therefore generate much debate in the meaningful work literature (e.g. Michaelson, 2019; Rosso et al., 2010). Veltman (2016) explores a range of definitions in trying to answer the conceptual question of 'What is work?'. Rather than looking to create a strict boundary around the term work (e.g. paid activity), some scholars have been drawn to broader and more inclusive notions. Ransome (1996) highlights work as a 'purposeful activity' which contributes to short term goals such as task completion and longer-term goal such as enriching one's life. In responding to Lepisto and Pratt's (2017) call for research on meaningful work to define what work is, we draw Veltman's (2016, p. 26) broad notion of 'work as purposeful, productive or goal-orientated activity' and the practices we engage in that contribute to it.

The challenge to define 'meaningful work' also extends to meaningful as it modifies work (Michaelson, 2019). This requires clarity between 'meaning' and 'meaningful'. Pratt and Ashforth (2003) distinguish them with 'meaning' referring to the type of meaning people make of their work and meaningfulness the amount of purpose and significance people find in their work. They suggest it is the individual who constructs 'meaningfulness' and propose a typology of practices at work which can foster this process – including both 'meaningfulness *in* work practices' which is about enriching the tasks people do at work and 'meaningfulness *at* work practices' which is about enriching the relationships at work and the membership to the organisation. Meaning is what work signifies, such as a wage, a calling, or something we must do; in this sense, meaning is descriptive. Whereas meaningfulness is evaluative; it is the amount of significance it holds for an individual. Through an individual's identity they can interpret and construct what is meaningful (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003). As Rosso et al. (2010) highlight, just because work may have a particular meaning attached to it, such as providing a wage, the actual experience may not be meaningful. The question about the meaning of work is different than about the meaningfulness of work and our focus is on meaningfulness, and therefore what is purposeful and significant to us rather than how we understand work more broadly (Martela & Pessi, 2018).

Meaningful work as significant, purposeful and self-actualising

Despite meaningful work's diverse conceptualisation, there is a consensus over some critical elements, such as it being a phenomenon that occurs at an individual level, that it is positively associated with an individual's work and that this positivity emerges due to the satisfaction of needs (Lepisto & Pratt, 2017). There are two potential sources of this positivity. Firstly, the realising of oneself through work, and secondly, being able to justify the worth of one's work. The usefulness of this subjective view of work, and that meaningful work is in the 'eye of the beholder', has been questioned by Michaelson (2019, p. 414). They go on to suggest that a normative definition of meaningful work is needed, which reconciles the limitations of a 'anything goes' subjective account. However, we take a subjective approach in our inquiry and draw upon Martela and Pessi's (2018) trichotomy of meaningful work conceptualisation.

Martela and Pessi's (2018) analysis of 61 articles on meaningful work found 36 separate definitions used. Based on their examination of the literature, Martela and Pessi (2018) found three critical elements of significance, broader purpose, and self-realisation that were the most frequently used within those definitions. Significance is a general overall evaluation of the work with broader purpose and self-realisation as two dimensions which can combine to make work feel personally significant for an individual. The significance of work is about finding some intrinsic value in work-related practices; that an individual's evaluation of those activities is that they are worth doing. Therefore, significance is about how much value people attach or find from their work and can be considered as having a justification for why it is valuable, worthy, and important (Lepisto & Pratt, 2017). This means that work connects to the values an individual holds, such as helping others, which leads to 'individuals seek[ing] to justify their work as possessing positive worth' (Lepisto & Pratt, 2017, p. 109). The significance of work is about finding reasons for its worth beyond an existence focused on survival, that it has inherent value and that it is worth doing, such as our research agendas aligning to the needs of our students and the challenges they face within the profession (Martela & Pessi, 2018).

A broader purpose of work is that it contributes to some form of greater good beyond an individual's own benefit. This might be work that provides opportunities for doing good for other people (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003) or making a positive contribution to the greater good (Steger, 2012). Whilst work can contribute to a wage that allows someone's basic needs of food, shelter, and accommodation to be met, and therefore this is the purpose of work to many people, it is not what makes their work purposeful (Martela & Pessi, 2018). This view of a broader purpose can be considered an 'other-orientated' perspective and comes from participating in society and contributing to a wider set of values than one's own personal beliefs (Rosso et al., 2010). Therefore, as Martela and Ryan (2016) state, this broader purpose is about making a positive impact on the wider world through one's work, whether this be grand impact on changing the education system for the better or more everyday impact such as helping a pre-service teacher develop competence in a specific area of teaching and learning.

The third critical element of Martela and Pessi's (2018, p. 7) conceptualisation of meaningful work is self-realisation which is about 'self-connectedness, authenticity and how much we are able to realise and express ourselves through our work'. Fundamentally this is about the close alignment between one's personal and professional identity and its positive impact on meaningfulness. It isn't just about being an authentic self at work (Rosso et al., 2010), but also the opportunity to experience growth and development of one's capabilities (Steger, 2012). Linked to self-realisation is autonomy and agency and that our actions at work are under our control and linked to our sense of who we are (Lepisto & Pratt, 2017; Martela & Pessi, 2018). This is especially important for those who move from teaching physical education at primary and secondary school and then transition into PETE and are trying to make sense of their new professional identity as a teacher of teachers rather than one of children.

Methodology

Through a community of learners, we took a narrative inquiry approach and in particular, a storytelling approach (Chiu-Ching & Chan, 2009), to exploring, identifying, and examining meaningful teacher education practices. Narrative inquiry is regarded as 'the best way of representing and understanding experience' (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 18), and 'story' (Chiu-Ching & Chan, 2009; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) allowed us to express such experiences by encouraging us 'to tell stories of our own lives concerning how we make personal connections and recover meaning from our lived experiences and resonate with even more stories' (Chiu-Ching & Chan, 2009, p. 23). Craig, You, and Oh's (2012, p. 281) research on narrative inquiry in school-based physical education research suggests that narrative inquiry should not be viewed solely as a mechanism for data collection or a research method, but narrative inquiry should be conceptualised as 'a way to probe teacher'

[educators'] knowledge developments'. It is this conceptualisation that gives weight to viewing the 'data' as embodied knowledge which is captured in the lived, telling and re-telling of stories (Craig et al., 2018). Dowling et al. (2015, p. 936) strongly advocate for narrative inquiry in PETE research as 'it offers a democratic and inclusive approach to knowledge production'. The authors overview of narrative research in PETE research highlighted the richness and diversity this approach contributes to the knowledge base.

For this investigation, we aim to explore meaningful work in our teacher educator roles, responsibilities, and teaching in PETE. Specifically, we looked to answer the following questions: (i) Do certain teacher educator roles allow us to express our identity more and provide us with a level of ownership over the workings of that identified role?; (ii) To what extent do relationships enhance or diminish meaningfulness in our teacher educator work? and (iii) What is the role of reflection in learning about meaningfulness in teacher educator practice? By gaining an understanding of this, we can then look to develop and enhance our practice to teach for meaningful teacher education experiences.

Participants

Our community of learners consisted of four physical education teacher educators who all teach on four different PETE programmes in three different countries (Australia, Norway and England). We range in different levels of teaching experience, but all have a similar interest in meaningful teacher education practices. As part of a broader research project on meaningful physical education in PETE in which multiple communities of learners exist, we were selected as one of these communities. Given the nature of narrative inquiry, we provide a reflexivity statement which explicates the lens we view this research through (see Table 1).

Table 1. Reflexivity statements.

Name	Reflexivity statement
Dylan	I am an early career teacher educator at Deakin University. My research interests include teacher education practices and social justice. I would consider myself a researching teacher educator (Smith & Flores, 2019). I taught on different PETE modules/unity during my PhD at University of Limerick and my post doctorate at Dublin City University and have enjoyed the majority of what I taught. My teaching philosophy revolves around student-centred approaches and viewing pre-service teachers as partners in the teaching and learning process. My interest in this work stems from a belief that if we understand what is meaningful to us as teacher educators, we can teach pre-service teachers in meaningful ways and model (and teach) meaningful practices.
Alex	I am a PE teacher educator at St. Mary's University and have been working in PETE for 4 years. Before working in higher education, I was a PE Teacher for 17 years working at both primary and secondary level. My interests are in Meaningful PE, the professional judgement and decision making of PE teachers and the use of pedagogical models within PE. My teaching of pre-service teachers focuses on the cognitive aspect of their teaching – understanding the why, what and how of their teaching approaches. As someone who advocates for Meaningful PE within PETE, my interest in this study is about process of making sense of meaningfulness in work, how to make the implicit explicit and how this may better enhance my practice of helping student teachers learn about meaningful PE.
Jordan	I am a PE teacher educator at the University of Gloucestershire and have been working in PETE for 9 years. Prior to this, I have spent 9 years working in schools as a Secondary PE Teacher and Head of PE. My research interests centre around motivational climates in PE and youth sport and how we can better use the opportunities afforded to us in these settings to encourage the adoption of a physically active lifestyle. This includes more innovative approaches to both pedagogy and curriculum design which underpins much of my work with PETE students. I am currently completing my Professional Doctorate centred on the use of lifestyle sports delivered through a meaningful PE lens within secondary school PE classes. My interest in this work, therefore, stems from an interest in preparing PETE students to deliver meaningful PE, hence I wish to model similar practices in my own work.
Mats	I am a teacher educator at the Norwegian School of Sport Sciences. My research interests include physical education and teacher education pedagogy, practices, and professional development. Before embarking on my PhD in 2014, I had three years prior experience as a secondary school physical education teacher and 11 years' experience as a semi-professional junior team handball coach. Coming from a strong practitioner tradition, I currently consider myself a researching teacher educator (Smith & Flores, 2019) that use self-study of teacher education practice to continuously improve my (understanding of) practice. My teacher educator practice is based in explicit modelling where I aim to model appropriate teaching and what it entails to be and become a teacher, while aiming to make the pedagogical rationale behind my teaching explicit, and share the accompanying feelings, thoughts, and actions (Berry & Loughran, 2005).

Data collection

We met over Zoom for one-hour meetings eight times over six months. These recorded meetings contributed to the total data set which included: eight recorded Zoom meetings; eight anecdotal circles (explained below); journal reflections ($n = 8$); and memo notes (which occurred during and after meetings). For data collection, we adopted a storytelling approach. We each put together a story on a meaningful and meaningless teacher educator practice(s) experience and we shared these stories. Each meeting consisted of sharing one story (there were a total of eight stories shared – four meaningful and four meaningless; one each per person). Journal reflections were used as the means to capture these stories in which all members wrote and reflected on prior to meeting. From the outset, we perceived stories of meaningful practices as representing positive experiences, while stories of meaningless practices indicated negative experiences. The stories were shared during zoom meetings, and in these meetings, critical discussions occurred and note taking happened before, during, and after the meetings. By critical discussion, we mean we each critically interrogated the shared story by questioning, challenging, agreeing, and disagreeing. In this interrogation, further elicited stories were shared which prompted further discussion of a critical nature.

Figure 1 shows how we captured the storytelling approach. We provide the reader with a blank template with the hope that others would like to engage in such research/reflective work and can use this template as a starting point. We adapted an approach called 'anecdotal circles' (Snowden et al., 2020) which is often used in businesses. This approach allows anecdotes, or stories, to tell us what recorded qualitative data may not. Eight anecdotes, or stories, were collected (one from each meeting). Figure 2 is a worked example of a captured story. A one sentence summary of the story would be entered into the blue box; in this case, this is Mats's meaningful story about individual and collective alignment between teaching and research. When a story was told, this would elicit meaningful and meaningless stories and we would share these on the Zoom meeting. This led to a critical discussion, and these would be captured in the white hexagons. This elicited more stories which elicited more stories and so on. The Figures continued to grow as more stories were
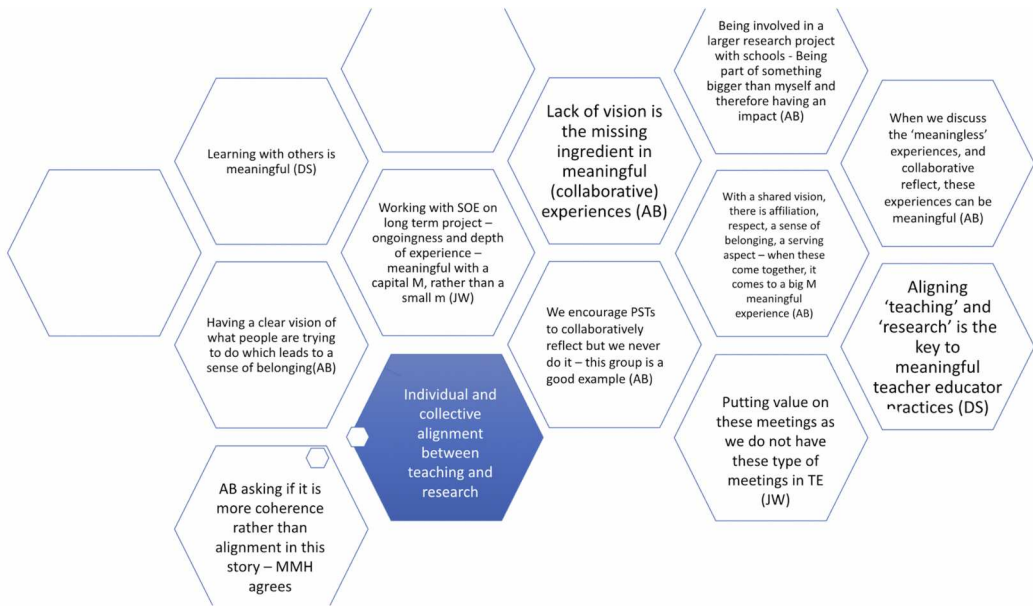

Figure 1. Storytelling approach.

Figure 2. Worked example of storytelling approach.

told. It is important to note how these hexagons are connected which demonstrates the interdependency of stories. The Figure (i.e. the outline) was created before each meeting and was completed with text during the meeting. This was once in every meeting. There were a total of eight Figures created (representing the eight stories shared). Inserting the writing was a collaborative effort as we all inserted a summary sentence of the story shared into the hexagon (please see Figure 2 for an example of this). This was verified by each other after the meeting.

Data analysis

Given the collaborative nature of the data collection, we adopted a collaborative data analysis process based on Charmaz's (2014) approach to coding. Charmaz's (2014) approach to coding involves three phases: initial; focused; and theoretical. All authors engaged in the coding process. While we engaged in traditional coding, we also conducted live coding which involved listening and watching the recordings and coding 'live' and this allowed us to capture the emotional side of the data. While live coding is relatively new in qualitative analysis, and has been used in few studies (e.g. Scanlon et al., 2024), Parameswaran and colleagues (2020, pp. 640–641) argues that it allows 'for coding of non-verbal content including non-verbal participant agreement, the visual of the participant (and their visible identities), emotion, the emphasis of certain phrases, and other paralinguistic behaviour which offered depth and preserved the voice of the participant'.

The first phase of coding was *initial* coding – this occurred through traditional coding on the hexagons, the note taking, and on the journal reflections, and live coding through the recorded meetings. For example, initial codes included 'working with colleagues', 'influence of a mentor', 'learning from colleagues', 'working with teachers', and 'working with pre-service teachers'. We each did this individually and then met as a group to go into the *focused* coding phase whereby we discussed, agreed, disagreed, and came to a consensus on our codes which resulted in statements and associated codes. Through dialogue, we highlighted the most 'fruitful' codes (Mordal-Moen & Green, 2014), i.e. rich, quality codes, in a more selective and conceptual manner. Through this process, we began to construct categories and subcategories. For example, and continuing with the example initial codes above, these (and others) were constructed to a focused category,

'the centrality of people in influencing meaningful/meaningless practices'. For *theoretical* coding, we are using theory to best explain our collaboratively constructed categories. Connections were made between theoretical frameworks/concepts (i.e. Martela & Pessi, 2018) and the constructed data. Continuing with the example shared, Martela and Pessi's (2018) work, and the interconnectedness of the elements of their framework, led us to best explain 'the influential interdependent relationships on the potential of meaningful teacher educator practices' (category 1). Live coding allowed us to capture the 'safe space' created in the data analysis by coding emotions and responses to stories, for example, relief, nervousness, comfortableness, etc.; a level of analysis which could not be possible through traditional coding. As this coding was done collaboratively and by the people who felt such emotions etc., this was qualified in the analysis through discussion of live codes at each stage of the data analysis. As a result of this coding process, three categories were constructed which will now be shared. Before this, we provide a note on the data presentation. Charmaz's (2014) approach to coding allowed for a level of detachment in the data analysis which we believed was necessary given the personal nature of the stories. This, in conjunction with the collaborative data analysis approach, somewhat ensured a level of criticality in the data analysis as it extracted the implicit and explicit key messages through a combined inductive-deductive approach (Charmaz, 2014). As a result, the findings section does not necessarily follow a story-like approach to presenting the findings. Rather, snippets of stories are shared to support the constructed data.

Results

Before sharing the three constructed categories, we remind the reader of the aim of the research: to explore meaningful work in our roles, responsibilities, and teaching in PETE, and what work practices enhance or diminish meaningfulness in PETE.

1. Ownership of practices as key to meaningful teacher educator practices

The findings of this study underscore the critical role that alignment between teacher educators' personal beliefs and interests and their teaching practices plays in fostering meaningful work. When teacher educators are able to teach in ways that resonate with their core values and passions, they not only enhance their own job satisfaction but also contribute to a more engaging and authentic learning experience for their students. The data reveal that when the teacher educators had the autonomy to shape their content and pedagogical approaches, they were better equipped to create learning environments that are dynamic, relevant, and responsive to the needs of their learners, providing greater job satisfaction and meaning for the teacher educators.

Depending on the role / identity / context, a teacher educator may lean more on a certain role (e.g. teaching / research / administration), which led us to question, do certain roles allow us to express our identity more? And therefore, is the practice associated with such role / identity more meaningful? This question was further probed through Dylan's story of teaching LGBTQ + content to pre-service teachers. Dylan discusses:

> Two of my colleagues and I put a social justice slant on a module … we introduced an assessment called the 'One Good Idea' project whereby students would choose a marginalised group in the school population and create an advocacy project – a One Good Idea – for these school students. We taught the students about a number of marginalised groups in schools, and I took this opportunity to teach about LGBTQ + matters. We discussed bullying, homophobia, transphobia, the use of pronouns etc. We used case studies where I would present a case, for example, if you had a transgender boy in your class and the issue of changing rooms, and the students needed to come up with an action plan and we had meaningful conversations around these. When it came to choosing a marginalised group for the One Good Idea project, I was happily surprised about the number of pre-service teacher groups that choose LGBTQ + students as their marginalised group and created advocacy projects for these students. One group in particular, a group of four male pre-service teachers, came up with an advocacy

project titled 'How We Can All be Allies' whereby the focus was to educate the general school population on being allies to the LGBTQ + population through the medium of physical education. It was an exceptional project … The content – LGBTQ + matters – is something meaningful and close to me and as such, I was anxious about teaching such content. But reflecting since our last conversation, maybe this is the key to the meaningful teacher educator practices puzzle – LGBTQ + is a meaningful topic to me and, possibly, without me knowing, my teacher educator practices might have become more meaningful, and therefore, the students engaged with the content more meaningfully, resulting in creating a meaningful learning experience for the teacher educator and pre-service teachers.

In response to Dylan's story, Alex commented:

> *When content, personal identity, personal experience come together, teaching is enhanced … Teaching is meaningful but when certain things align for us it becomes an even more meaningful experience for us … It's not just content we are teaching, it's our life and our experience that we are also enhancing that content with. I am teaching a course now, and I can't get excited about it. It is dry and I think the students [pre-service teachers] think that as well.* (Alex)

Alex's comment prompted Dylan to think about a shift in focus: '*[if the content is perceived as 'boring', we can rethink our teaching, for example] A move from a focus on content to pedagogy/pedagogical content knowledge can provide more meaningfulness'*. Dylan's story (and other elicited stories) made us consider how teaching what the teacher educator considers to be meaningful content may result in more meaningful practices that can result in pre-service teachers engaging in the content more meaningfully, resulting in meaningful teaching and learning experiences. This does not insinuate that what the teacher educator finds meaningful, the PSTs will also find meaningful. Rather, we suggest what the teacher educator finds meaningful produces meaningful practice which can result in the PSTs engaging with the content in more meaningful ways due to such practice. We – the authorship team – agreed that meaningful teacher educator practices are influenced by personal identity and are emotionally laden. The above conversation between Alex and Dylan (and related stories) led us to question: when content, personal identity, personal experience, *and* pedagogy (of teacher education) come together, does this create meaningful teaching experiences? We suggest that this alignment creates circumstances that heighten the possibility for meaningful experiences; however, this alignment is not the *only* requirement to meaningful experiences. Any of the above elements (i.e. content, personal identity, personal experience, pedagogy or any combination of these) can lead to meaningful experiences depending on what is meaningful to the teacher educator in question. Overall, the teacher educators' autonomy enables educators to innovate, experiment, and tailor their teaching to reflect their unique perspectives and expertise, ultimately leading to more meaningful work in the eyes of the teacher educator. The alignment between personal beliefs, interests and teaching practices is, therefore, not just a matter of personal preference but a crucial factor in the overall affection for their role.

Internationally, an academic's work allocation is generally divided into teaching, research, and service/administration. These areas of work can contribute to meaningful work. For some teacher educators, there is an overlap between teaching and research. For the authors of this paper, the introduction of research in teaching was also identified as a pathway for meaningful teacher educator practices. It was discussed how an individual and collective coherence between teaching and research can lead to a sense of belonging and meaningful teacher educator practices. We discussed that if the link between teaching and research is strong (i.e. research informed teaching), and in particular, if researching on your own teaching (e.g. self-study) and / or using your own research, practice may be more meaningful. Throughout the stories (and by collaboratively reflecting on such stories), the notion of 'ownership' was raised. By 'ownership', we mean that the teacher educator is engaged and self-directed with a level of autonomy in their actions/practices. A teacher educator's ownership of practices was dependent on the career/teacher educator stage and on the level of agency one has on such practices. In some cases, programme decision on course structure can limit one's ownership (e.g. Jordan shared a story on how a programmatic decision – out of his control – was made on the removal of his athletics module that he viewed as highly important for pre-service teachers' development both in terms of content and pedagogical knowledge), and

in others, a teacher educator can take ownership of the day-to-day teaching practices (e.g. pedagogy over content – Dylan and Alex's dialogue). Interestingly, Mats's story, which focused on the development of a new programme, resulted in a lack of ownership on such development as it did not align with his vision:

> I didn't find meaning in what we developed [on the programme due to lack of ownership]. That also showcases the complexity that if every teacher educator should have ownership in what the teacher education needs to deliver and the approaches – that is really complex, a shared vision on what to deliver. (Mats)

Mats believed his vision was not valued by others and was not embedded into the programme development. As such, he did not feel as if he had a level of ownership over the newly produced programme. We did come to a consensus that 'ownership of practices' may be one of many keys to meaningful teacher educator practices. We reflect:

> Jordan: *My self-doubt was huge and still is at times so I think if someone else has the confidence in you in what you do and however you are going to do it is going to be worthy, that was quite important for me as well. I don't know if it is similar for you?*

> Alex: *Absolutely. It is why I am still there [TE]*

> Mats: *I think you have highlighted the importance of ownership … It is meaningful to have ownership for what you are teaching.*

Overall, this category demonstrates how ownership of practices (and a level of autonomy in such processes) can be considered one of the key ingredients to developing a sense of belonging, self-worth, and meaningful teacher educator practices.

2. Influential interdependent human relationships on the potential of meaningful teacher educator practices

Throughout all the stories, the centrality of people in the narratives (e.g. colleagues, mentors, pre-service teachers) was clear, and through collaborative reflection and analysis, it was established how these interdependent relationships can promote (or hinder) meaningful practices.

Mentorship proved to be a critical influence in the development of our teacher educator identities. Jordan's story, which centred on the positive role taken on by an experienced member of management as a mentor/guide in his early career in PETE (particularly showing faith in Jordan's ability as a teacher educator), speaks to mentorship in terms of career progression (in bringing him back into teacher education and advancing him in such position). Learnings from others who reside in different silos on the teacher educator continuum (e.g. stakeholders in curriculum development, professional development, and in-service teachers) proved to be meaningful, for example, Jordan discussed this in relation to programme redesign:

> To see what we can design between us as colleagues but also think about the other stakeholders who could contribute to this redesign … colleagues in the university shared their ideas on what was important for the redevelopment … We then consulted with local heads of PE … asking what they would look for in a teacher education programme … we also talked to our current students [pre-service teachers] for student voice in the redevelopment. (Jordan)

In reflection, Jordan discussed how what made this programme redesign meaningful were the opportunities to listen to external voices and attempting to bridge that (dialogical) gap between teacher education and other spaces in the teacher education continuum (e.g. schools and school management). The result of these conversations ensured the programme content became more meaningful to the profession of a teacher and therefore, the teaching and learning practices of the teacher educators and PSTs.

The sharing of power within a department and between staff proved to encourage meaningful teacher educator experiences and practices. Alex reflects on this:

What I found really meaningful in the induction [into TE] was that they [two physical education colleagues] shared power with me immediately to make decisions, 'okay you cannot have choice in what you are going to teach because that is already in place but how you are going to teach it, that can be down to you and you can use you expertise, we are not here to tell you what to do'. I found that really refreshing coming from secondary school … There was a high amount of reciprocity so it wasn't just me doing what I wanted to do, there was observation, there was sharing of resources … there was professional dialogue from the very first moment, and I really found that development and I really felt immediately … I could make a difference and that was incredible for me. (Alex)

Alongside a sharing of power within a department, a collaboration between PETE institutions was also discussed through elicited stories. Alex alluded to a lack of collaboration between PETE providers in England. Alex discussed a story whereby a working group of physical education teacher educators from various institutions attempted to collaborate during the lockdown periods linked to the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet, the potential here was not realised as several individuals refused to share some of their content; this was met with feelings of being let down. It appears that, for Alex, working with others within and across PETE is a potential source of meaningful teacher education practices, however when attempts to collaborate are met with barriers or refusal from others, this can lead to frustration and a lack of meaning. On a more positive note, Mats was able to share a story in response which was described as a 'truly meaningful' example of working with others within a collaborative self-study project. Here visions and philosophies aligned with their teacher education practices. Mats highlighted how this is a good example of the power of collaboration when visions and philosophies align to connect both teaching and research: '*Desire to collaborate, with a shared vision*' (Mats).

'Belonging' appears to be another central aspect of generating feelings of meaningfulness within PETE practices. Alex, in response to Mats's above story, summarises this well when reflecting on a group project at [name of University]: "*[as part of this group project, I felt] part of something bigger, [a sort of] affiliation, a sense of belonging … being part of something bigger than myself … [It enhanced feelings of] affiliation, belonging, respect*" (Alex). Thus, the influential role of mentorship, power sharing, and a sense of belonging all point to the potential of influential relationships in the work environment to influence the meaningfulness physical education teacher educators find in their work.

3. Power of reflection in learning from, and designing, meaningful teacher educator practices

While we categorised our storytelling data collection into 'meaningful' and 'meaningless' stories, reflection proved to be important in transitioning meaningless to meaningful teacher educator practices. Dylan reflects on such a process:

[Teaching aquatics] and I completely forgot what it is like to teach or be in a swimming pool area where it is so loud, and you have to project your voice and you are looking down and the class of students [pre-service teachers] are looking up at you [from the pool] … and I reverted back to teaching content … teaching breaststroke … and just teaching content which is very unlike me but it is funny how I reverted back to that in my panic of students [pre-service teachers] looking up to me and me not being able to hear myself … so it was a meaningless experience but also a meaningful one because it made me reflect on what I did and what went wrong and that is when I realised I focused on content and I didn't focus on the pedagogy so the next class I went in … I focused on feedback and peer feedback … to learn the front crawl stroke through the medium of feedback and focus on the pedagogy rather than the content … while it was meaningless, it was meaningful … as it really [re]focused my philosophy on teacher [education] by reflecting on that (Dylan)

There was consensus in the group that meaningless experiences can be reflected on for meaningful teacher educator practices. Alex comments: '*Perhaps with time, and going back to both meaningful and meaningless experiences that we have in teacher education, we can still learn and better our practice*' (Alex). Dylan suggested it might be '*more than time … but relationships … talking to others … . The relationship can help turning meaningless to meaningful*'. In other words, relationships can influence such transformation, i.e. discussing such meaningless experiences with others can facilitate the move from meaningless to meaningful teacher educator experiences (Dylan). Collaborative

reflection through our community of learners provided opportunities to reflect upon and re-construct experiences to meaningful practices. Collaborative reflection allowed us to engage in meaningful learning opportunities to develop and enhance our future practice. This space – a community of learners for teacher educators – allowed us to meaningfully reflect in a collaborative manner. Interestingly, as we discussed this point, we agreed that, from our experiences, the ongoing collaborative reflection process was a rarity despite how PETE programmes preach how important reflection is. This practice, i.e. collaborative reflection, needs to be encouraged in teacher education. Jordan reflects on the power of this during our meetings:

> There was also space for silence, pauses, challenge, questions, and the expression of emotion and feeling. When listening back to the audio session, there were long pauses and [a sense] that we could speak freely and without consequence (Jordan).

In this community of learners, we constructed a safe space to process and relieve failures, difficulties, challenges, and difficult emotions. In relation to this, all of us highlighted that the time, space, and quality of relationships, which allowed us to view this as a safe space for reflection on our practice, increased meaningfulness within the group. We highlighted this by identifying the meetings as 'the highlight of the week'. Importantly, often sharing negative experiences, being vulnerable and honest allowed other group members to acknowledge their own perceived shortcomings. The ongoing nature of the reflection and collaboration was also highlighted as an important part of the reflective process. The sharing of linked stories often prompted deeper reflection from other members; using an initial story as a stimulus often prompted others to reflect on experiences that had either been disregarded or forgotten. Therefore, this research emphasises the power of reflection when conducted in a collaborative manner through a safe space in (re)designing meaningful teacher educator practices.

Discussion

We remind the reader of the aim of this research: to explore meaningfulness in teacher educator practices in PETE and specifically which practices enhance or diminishes such meaningfulness. As shared in the findings, reflection was powerful for learning from: (i) ownership of practices are key to meaningful teacher educator practices; (ii) human relationships strongly influenced the potential of meaningful teacher educator practices and (iii) the power of reflection in learning from, and designing, meaningful teacher educator practices. We now discuss these findings in relation to theoretical concepts and existing literature.

Many aspects of our stories and subsequent discussion connected well with the key areas of meaningful work identified in Martela and Pessi's (2018) research: significance, broader purpose and self-realisation. It also became clear that the three areas rarely sit in isolation as areas of overlap are noticeable in the above results. In the stories from Dylan and Alex in category one, it was evident that the significance of their practices had a direct impact on the level of meaningfulness they attributed to these experiences. They both saw these as having intrinsic value to them but were equally valued by others (including pre-service teachers and other colleagues). Because of this, the nature of their work was seen as a purposeful activity (Ransome, 1996). In contrast, drawing on the contributions from Jordan and Mats in category one, it was evident that not all work is perceived as meaningful (Graeber, 2018). This was mainly down to a lack of ownership that contradicted the need for self-realisation, in particular elements of agency and autonomy were lacking when they felt their voices were not heard by others. In addition, a sense of broader purpose was diminished in Jordan's story in category one when an element he perceived as having a sense of greater good was removed from his programme. However, where teaching and research were closely connected, this did allow a sense of personal and professional alignment that contributed to a higher feeling of self-realisation and subsequently contributed to greater feelings of meaningfulness (Martela & Pessi, 2018).

Our teacher educator roles and responsibilities vary to some degree. Interestingly, we seem to lean more towards different roles within our PETE practices (and these roles – and leaning – have changed during our careers). These roles align with the roles outlined by Lunenberg et al. (2014) in the introduction of this paper. The context and relationships we encounter influence and change our identities and largely influence what we find meaningful. In other words, the 'what' (i.e. context of the teacher educator), the 'who' (i.e. the teacher educator's relationships) and the 'how' (i.e. practice) (all underpinned by the 'why' [i.e. teacher educator philosophy and purpose] – which makes up identity) of daily teacher educator practices and interactions influences what is meaningful or not in our roles and responsibilities. Therefore, and informed by the findings shared in category one, having agency and ownership (within the context/contextual constraints) is important to create meaningful teacher educator practice.

As we move to the second category of findings, it became clear that people and relationships had a significant influence on the degree to which meaningfulness can either be enhanced or diminished. This involved relationships with colleagues, pre-service teachers, and external stakeholders, such as practising teachers or PETE colleagues from other institutions as told in Alex and 3's stories in category two. This aligns with the work of Ayers et al. (2008) who highlighted the significant impact relationships can have on the meaningfulness in work. Much of the positive impact of these relationships can be attributed across all the dimensions of Martela and Pessi's (2018) research. In terms of significance, we can see that a sense of our work being valued is extremely important to all of us. This external affirmation is important in terms of a shared vision and aligned personal philosophies. Perhaps this is best exhibited in category two in Mats's (i.e. working collaboratively with others on a self-study project) and Alex's (i.e. working on a University wide group project) stories where this allowed a deep sense of purpose and belonging to be generated and this subsequently had a knock-on impact on providing a broader purpose to our work that becomes other-orientated and has perceived benefits beyond oneself. Closely related to Alex's story in category two, i.e. the positive impact of more experienced members of his team allowing autonomy and agency, which helped aid self-realisation, is Jordan's story regarding mentorship. The belief shown by a mentor had a direct impact on Jordan's ability to grow and develop (Steger, 2012), but also allowed Jordan to begin to design course content that better aligned with his philosophy and beliefs as to what is valuable in a PETE course. Whilst initially, this allowed elements of self-realisation to happen, it also had a subsequent impact on feelings of significance (being valued) and broader purpose (seeing beyond oneself) demonstrating the interconnected influences between elements of Martela and Pessi's (2018) framework.

All four members of the group discussed the importance of external relationships in helping to generate feelings of meaningfulness. In category two, Jordan spoke about the importance of being connected with those on the frontline, i.e. practising teachers, in his story about talking to heads of physical education in programme redesign. There was a strong sense of serving those who are on the frontline of our profession (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003). This sense of influence beyond oneself and doing greater good connects well with the sense of broader purpose (Martela & Ryan, 2016), whilst the sense of undertaking work that is worth doing allowed feelings of significance to be enhanced (Martela & Pessi, 2018). Interestingly, Alex's meaningless story in category two demonstrated a lack of collaboration externally, which tellingly, had the opposite impact, failing to satisfy his desire to be other-orientated and do something for the greater good. It seems when relationships have a positive impact on meaning, they are able to amplify the feelings of meaningfulness that are experienced individually. In addition, where there was a strong sense of team cohesion and shared visions all aspects of Martela and Pessi's (2018) framework were positively impacted.

Finally, throughout the results, there were certainly elements of our work that we all found frustrating, un-rewarding, and lacked that sense of purpose that epitomises truly meaningful work (Martela & Pessi, 2018; Ransome, 1996). Perhaps in always seeking to be meaningful at work, within an evaluative social context (Veltman, 2016), we had set the bar too high. Perhaps we

needed to be realistic that we may not always find all elements of our roles as meaningful. In saying that, having the time, a safe space, and the opportunity for collaborative reflection with colleagues (i.e. this community of learners) was hugely significant in being able to generate meaningful learning from seemingly meaningless encounters. Category three highlights how reflective practice has had a strong influence in higher education (e.g. Clegg, 2000), but perhaps what allowed this reflection to be more powerful was our natural reflective mindsets (it could be argued that this is a production of the careers we are in) and our comfort with being professionally vulnerable, allowing to reflect honestly and openly without consequence. Whilst the literature around meaningful work does not explicitly delve into reflective processes in enhancing meaningfulness, we can start to see some links between reflective practice and elements associated with meaningful work. For example, simply being listened to and our thoughts and emotions being worthwhile points of discussion allowed us all to feel valued within the group. This allowed for heightening our sense of significance (Martela & Pessi, 2018), something that was not always the case within our own institutions. Listening to others and helping them navigate some of their meaningless stories to illicit learning (and meaning) allowed us to feel we were doing good for others and providing a sense of broader purpose (Martela & Pessi, 2018; Ransome, 1996). These reflective experiences also allowed us to see where and how we may need to grow and develop; this allowed all of us to experience some degree of self-realisation (Martela & Pessi, 2018). As such, our findings challenge Pratt and Ashforth's (2003) assertion that meaningfulness is solely constructed by the individual. We propose that collaborative reflective practice between colleagues can shed light on and enhance the sense of meaningfulness in work.

Conclusion and considerations

This research aimed to explore meaningful work in our roles, responsibilities, and teaching in PETE, and what work practices enhance or diminish meaningfulness in PETE. This research highlights the complexity of becoming a teacher educator. The elements that make work meaningful (or meaningless) are multi-dimensional and not something that can be reduced to a singular, universal essence. Instead, they represent personal significant experiences. Interestingly, throughout the findings and analysis, it was difficult to separate meaningful and meaningless teacher educator practices – this highlighted the complex, intertwined nature of such practices. Initially, we perceived meaningless experiences as negative – those that generated adverse feelings. However, as we shared, discussed and analysed our stories and experiences, we recognised how they provoked reflection and learning. By reflecting upon these negative experiences and discussing them with each other, it made us realise the significance of these seemingly negative or meaningless experiences. This further led us to reflect and question the notion of 'meaningless' experiences in the context of teacher educator practices – are any experiences truly meaningless if given enough time for reflection?

We found that the multiple layers of being a teacher educator adds to the complexity of developing meaningful teacher educator practice but having a level of agency and ownership within these layers can contribute to meaningful work. We provide two considerations for other teacher educators in how they can strive towards developing meaningful teacher education practice. First, we encourage teacher educators to connect the multiple roles of being a teacher educator to their preferred position (e.g. teacher, researcher, curriculum developer, etc.) (Lunenberg et al., 2014). For example, if a teacher educator finds meaning in the role of curriculum developer, that teacher educator could use their position of 'teacher' to teach about curriculum development. We found that leaning on one's preferred position provides greater meaning in that space and can enhance overall meaningful teacher educator practice. In addition to this, aligning teaching and research (e.g. conducting a self-study), allows for enhanced self-realisation and further greater feelings of meaningfulness (Martela & Pessi, 2018). Second, we encourage teacher educators to engage in individual and collective reflection centred on personally significant experiences, encompassing both negative and positive experiences. Such reflective practices have emerged as a condition

that enhanced meaningfulness in this research. Specifically, our individual and collective reflections facilitated the development of our personal and professional relationships, which lead to a safe and inclusive environment conducive to vulnerability. Our shared reflective practice, coupled with the relationships created, fostered a sense of engagement in something that made our work more meaningful. This in turn, enhanced our understanding and enactment of meaningful teacher educator practice. We acknowledge how this may not be possible for some teacher educators whose context does not encourage being vulnerable, for example, in precarious positions. We strongly advocate for employers/senior management to provide spaces, possibly through communities of learners, for teacher educators to open up vulnerably about one's own practice. This can have numerous benefits to the respective department/school, for instance, creating a sense of belonging amongst staff/teacher educators and sharing teaching practices to benefit student learning. Central to these created spaces is creating and nurturing a safe and inclusive environment to allow teacher educators to be vulnerable – this takes, and deserves, time and support, but as shown in this research, is a worthwhile process.

Disclosure statement

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