

Existential meaning-making of MBO students

The perception and needs of MBO students regarding existential meaning-making in educational spaces

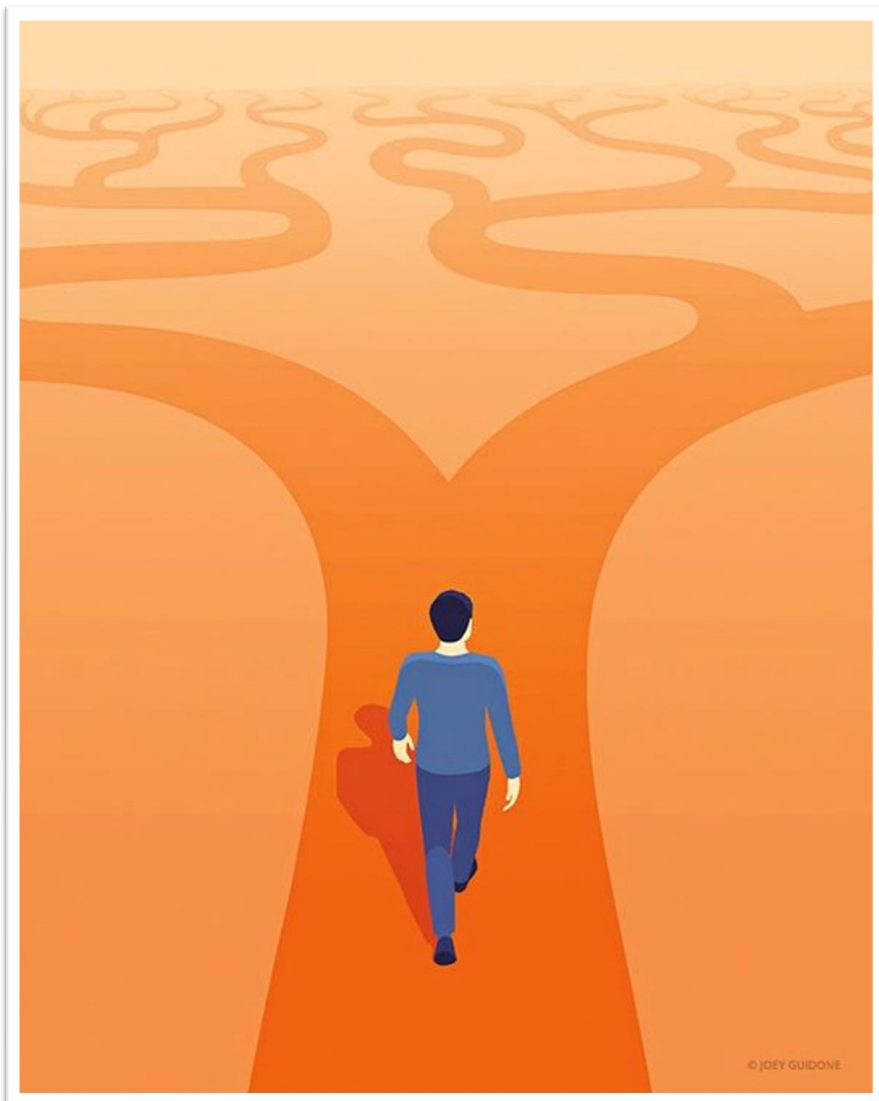


Image: Pinterest. (n.d.) Retrieved 6-26-2024, from <https://nl.pinterest.com/pin/52706258126784819/>

Master thesis

University of Humanistic Studies

Student: Minke van der Meulen

Student number: 1036572

Master: Humanistic studies

Thesis supervisor: Neha Miglani

Second reader: Abdelilah Ljamai

Coordinator: Annemiek Schilpzand

Date: 06-28-2024

Word count: 18080

Preface

The subject of this master thesis, existential meaning-making among MBO students, holds personal significance for me. During my adolescence, but also in my early 20s, I wondered a lot about my direction and purpose in life and how I wanted to contribute to the world. This search was often paired with confusion, shame and sometimes loneliness. At the age of 24, I started with my master study Humanistic studies at the University of Humanistic studies. There, I learned about life questions and existential inquiries, and suddenly realized that it was not odd to have these questions but that it is a natural part of life. This realization sparked my curiosity and I started to wonder what existential meaning-making would have meant for me at the age of 16. My personal goal with this master thesis is to bring attention to the existential dimension within MBO education. Through various conversations and meetings, I have already obtained this goal.

This master thesis marks the end of my student era. The past 10 years (yes, really 10 years) have been focused on studying, finishing assignments and taking exams. An era in which I had the opportunity to study abroad, meet new people and learn more about myself. An era in which I have worked hard to accomplish where I am standing as of today. My hard work has only been a small part of the equation to have this success. Because claiming that solely my hard work has gotten me so far, would undermine the effort of those who have worked just as hard, if not harder, but did not get so lucky. For those not being so fortunate: I see you, I hear you, and I think of you.

I have been lucky to be both psychically and mentally healthy. I got lucky with a loving and supportive family, who have been there with me every step of the way. Lucky to be surrounded with a big group of amazing friends. The friends, who were always there for me to cry with me about disappointments but also were there to party and dance with me when I succeeded. Lucky to have a loving boyfriend, who always encourages me to strive for more. I guess, I just want to say that I do not take this life for granted and that I am entirely grateful.

I want to express my gratitude towards HOP for providing the opportunity to find respondents within their project. A great thank you to all my respondents for their willingness to talk to me and their openness. I also want to express my gratitude to my thesis supervisor, Neha Miglani, who has given me a lot of significant comments throughout the thesis process. Lastly, I want to thank my second reader Abdelilah Ljamai. - Minke van der Meulen.

Summary thesis

This master thesis is based on empirical research focussing on the perception of MBO students on existential meaning-making in the context of educational spaces. The research is situated around the existential life experience of quitting your study and reorientating towards a new study and what challenges this experience brings with it. By conducting in-depth interviews with MBO students it is identified what the relevant existential meaning-making needs are, how these needs are met or not within their education and what role they allocate to education to address existential meaning-making. The method of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is used to focus on the 'lived experiences' of the students. Literature review has revealed that existential meaning-making appears when we place meaning-making within a bigger picture of our own existence, this happens after a critical moment. It has been highlighted how integrating existential meaning-making into education could possibly help students navigate critical moments and transitions, develop a better understanding of their identity and purpose which could possibly foster a better overall well-being (Bertram-Troost, 2021).

The research shows that students who are facing existential life experiences, such as quitting and reorientating towards a new study, encounter ontological uncertainty and struggle with future direction and self-identity. The key existential meaning-making needs include: (i) relationships/connectedness, (ii) personal development, (iii) coherence, (iii) community, (iv) self-efficacy and (v) recognition/competence. Students express a desire for talking about existential meaning-making and are missing opportunities to talk about it at school. The forms they suggest for integrating existential meaning-making, differs. Within these forms, they emphasize the importance of keeping the material practical and reckon emphasis on the individual needs of students. Students desire freedom and autonomy within education to discover themselves and their life goals in the world.

Inhoud

| | |
|---|----|
| Introduction | 7 |
| 1.1 Background | 7 |
| 1.2 Problem statement | 8 |
| 1.3 Research questions | 9 |
| 1.4 Research objectives | 9 |
| 1.5 Relevance | 10 |
| 1.6 Proceeds from the research | 12 |
| 1.8 Reading guide | 12 |
| Theoretical framework | 14 |
| 1 Meaning making | 14 |
| 1.1 Existential meaning making | 14 |
| 1.2 Existential Life experiences | 15 |
| 1.3 Existential meaning making among youngsters | 16 |
| 1.4 Existential meaning making needs | 17 |
| 1.5 Existential meaning making in education | 19 |
| 2 The believed role of education | 19 |
| 2.1 The believed role of education throughout history | 20 |
| 2.2 Current state of education | 21 |
| 2.3 The role of education according to Biesta: Becoming human | 22 |
| 2.4 More space for existential meaning making in education | 22 |
| Methodological justification | 23 |
| Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) | 23 |
| IPA applied in the research design | 24 |
| Research population | 24 |
| Research method | 25 |
| Analysis | 26 |
| Empirical chapters | 28 |
| Section 1: Existential life experience | 28 |
| Feelings around existential meaning making | 30 |
| Concept of failure | 31 |
| Section 2: Relevant existential meaning making needs MBO Students | 32 |

| | |
|--|----|
| 1 Relationships/connectedness..... | 34 |
| 2 Personal development..... | 35 |
| 3 Coherence..... | 36 |
| 4 community..... | 37 |
| 5 Self-efficacy..... | 38 |
| 6 Recognition/competence..... | 39 |
| Section 3: Existential meaning making in education..... | 40 |
| Space for existential meaning making in education..... | 41 |
| Finding the right words for what they mean..... | 43 |
| Mental health struggles..... | 44 |
| Section 4: Role of education meeting existential meaning making needs..... | 45 |
| Importance existential meaning making according to students..... | 45 |
| Integrating existential meaning making..... | 47 |
| Concept of freedom within education..... | 48 |
| Conclusion..... | 50 |
| Answering the main research question..... | 52 |
| Discussion..... | 53 |
| References..... | 56 |
| Appendix..... | 59 |
| Appendix 1: Informed consent..... | 59 |
| Appendix 2:..... | 60 |
| Appendix 3: Original Dutch quotes..... | 61 |

Introduction

1.1 Background

We are living in an ever-changing society where the facts from yesterday can be passé today. The world is not the same as it was 50 years ago, and changes have accrued on every single level of society and changes happen quickly. Rosa (2016) describes how we are currently living in times of acceleration, wherein everything needs to go quicker and be more efficient. Bauman (2000) speaks of 'liquid modernity' wherein we are living. This 'liquid modernity' has to do with the rapid social changes which are occurring in our life. It is hard for people, especially youngsters, to constantly adapt and relate to these changes and to gain a feeling of control (Bauman, 2000). Previously, this feeling of control was found in the believe of a God. This way, changes but also unbelievable or horrifying events could be placed within a bigger framework, because this was God's work – the people believed. In his book, 'A secular Age', Charles Taylor (2007) describes how the Christian religion was central to Western society for a long time and how this has shifted towards a secular society wherein all different philosophical beliefs coexist. Where previously, the Christian values and norms dominated, during secularization there is suddenly space for people not believing in a god and to pursue other beliefs and world views. Consequently, people constantly have had to learn to relate to life and keep searching for that feeling of control. People in modern society have to give meaning to their own existence (Taylor, 2007).

Referring to Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (2002), Bertram-Troost (2021) discusses 'Homo optionis', which refers to human beings living in a world with multiple options. With having all kinds of options, it is one's own responsibility to make the right choices. While, for some people this is a great opportunity to form and build their own life as they wish. For others, this might also be a big burden. Especially for youngsters, making the right choices regarding their life, can be a huge challenge. Bertram-Troost (2023) mentions in her article what kind of effect these social changes have upon education and especially on youngsters in education. She describes how the process of individualisation, secularisation and globalisation has changed the cultural and philosophical diversity in the Netherlands which has resulted in a low-trust society which is facing an increase in polarization, a decline in social cohesion, loss of social capital and many more social issues. One of the other social issues is the mental health and well-being of youngsters.

Often when problems and difficulties appear in society, society looks upon education as the solution. A pressing societal issue is that of the mental health and well-being of youngsters. Multiple research institutions show that mental health issues are getting worse among youngsters in the Netherlands and are still significantly pressing (CBS, 2023; Nuijen et al., 2023; RIVM, 2023; Trimbos, 2021). For instance, Nuijen et al. (2023) published a new education monitor wherein they conclude that half of the students experience impairment due to their mental health issues. Nuijen et al. (2023) describe how the mental health of students has improved slightly in comparison to 2021. However, these changes are so small that they do not qualify as meaningful progress. Bertram-Troost (2023) refers to two psychiatrists, Fenema (2022) and Wachter (2021), who associate mental health and especially the concept of existential loneliness with neoliberal society and feasibility thinking. Existential meaning-making occurs when the existing meaning-making of an individual is no longer possible due to a critical event in life. The meaning of life might be missing, and one needs to reevaluate and reorientate in life (Alma et al., 2012). During adolescence the processes of personal development and thus reorientating and reevaluating life accelerate (Van den Berg & Scherer-Rath, 2023). These processes can have an enormous impact on the predictability, self-coherence and control of youngsters, what eventually can cause an **existential meaning-making crisis** (Dweck, 2017 in Van den Berg & Scherer-Rath, 2023).

Commented [N1]: Nice context

1.2 Problem statement

There have been multiple initiatives to give more attention to mental health in education to reduce the mental health issues among youngsters. From giving psychology lessons in high school and MBO institutions to creating special support groups within the school to talk about your own mental health with peers. While in essence the development of giving more attention to psychology and mental health in education seems positive, solely giving attention to psychology and mental health in education does not necessarily resolve the existential meaning-making crisis. **The danger in solely giving more attention to psychology in schools, is the 'psychologization' of everything and everyone.** Madsen (2014) speaks of a "therapeutic turn", with which he refers to how psychology has entered the Western society to resolve every single problem that occurs. Madsen (2014) explains how simply turning to psychology as the solution, may put more burden on the individuals instead of looking at the structural problems underneath. Bertram-Troost (2023) vouches to give some more guidance in life via education. She emphasises the role of education to give youngsters philosophical education

Commented [N2]: Yup. Nice way to bring attention to your core topic

which focusses on personal development and existential meaning-making. She describes how education revolves around what educational pedagogue Biesta has said about how students appear as people in the world and how they want to relate to that world, shortly said: education is about how to become human. How to become human includes someone's view on humanity, view on life and someone's philosophy of life. Could spending more attention to existential meaning-making in education resolve the existential meaning-making crisis and improve the mental health/well-being of youngsters in society?

1.3 Research questions

This study aims to answer the following main question: How do MBO students perceive existential meaning-making in the context of educational spaces?

And the following sub-questions:

1. Which existential meaning-making needs do MBO students find relevant?
2. What are some of the ways in which these existential meaning-making needs are met or not in their education?
3. How do MBO students see the role of education in meeting their existential meaning-making needs?

1.4 Research objectives

Societal goal

The societal goal of this research is to explore the existential meaning-making crisis among youngsters, through examining the unique existential meaning-making needs and experiences of MBO students. The research aims to identify the perspective of MBO students on existential meaning-making within education. This perspective might potentially contribute to an improved mental health and a more meaningful life for youngsters.

Scientific goal

The scientific goal is to fill the research gap of existential meaning-making within education with a particular focus on MBO students. This study aims to provide empirical data about the perception and lived experiences on existential meaning-making within education for MBO students. The findings of the research aim to complement existing research and give more

insights for further research on the integration of existential meaning-making within education.

Humanistic goal

The humanistic goal of this research is to stimulate human dignity and focus on love for unique individuals (Derks, 2015). Through the method of Interpretative Phenomenological analysis, the focus has been laid upon given attention to the 'lived experiences' of MBO students, to really put their perceptions to the centre of the research. Eventually, the aim with the research is to contribute to a more just and caring society.

1.5 Relevance

Societal relevance

By describing what the phenomena of existential meaning-making means to students and identifying what role they attribute to education in this process, my research can possibly contribute to getting more insights on existential meaning-making among MBO students and what role education can possibly play in this. For the future, my research can possibly contribute to finding a solution to the social issue of existential meaning-making crisis of youngsters and possibly add insights to resolve the issue around the growing number of mental health problems of youngsters.

Scientific relevance

In addition to the social relevance of the research shown above, literature search has revealed that there is some academic research on existential meaning-making among youngsters, but little research on existential meaning-making among students within education. There is some academic research around the theme of meaning-making within the Dutch context, this is often carried out among adolescents at high school (Michael et al., 2018; Van den Berg & Scherer-Rath, 2023). Besides this, there is some research available on existential meaning-making among young adults, but this is not within an education setting (Lundvall et al., 2022; Steger et al., 2009). Some more research is available on existential meaning-making within the study of nursing, midwives and social work (Attard, 2015; Van Leeuwen & Cusveller, 2004; Van Leeuwen et al., 2009; Van Leeuwen et al., 2020). This research is particularly focused on recognizing existential meaning-making issues/questions of clients or the best ways to support clients with their existential meaning-making. In the article by Leeuwen et al. (2020) a small part is about your own existential meaning-making, but this is especially in

relation to helping your clients in the best way for the future. There is no extensive attention for existential meaning-making for the students themselves. All the previously mentioned articles were particularly focused on HBO students or university students. The implementation project of Palliaweb (2021) focuses on embedding attention to meaning-making in curricula of healthcare courses, do focus on MBO students beside HBO students. But this is also the only one. This shows a research gap of how little attention there is for existential meaning-making in other studies and in particular among the population of MBO students. Literature indicates a need to explore existential meaning-making for students in education. Although there is no specific source that identifies MBO students as distinct group with this need, MBO students are part of the broader category of students. Therefore, it is important to gather more information on existential meaning-making in general and in specific among MBO students and what role they allocate to education to integrate existential meaning-making.

Another research gap arises when looking at the topic of existential meaning-making among students from the emic perspective. The academic research available from an emic perspective, solely focusses on adolescents at high school (Michael et al., 2018; Van den Berg & Scherer-Rath, 2023) or young adults outside the setting of education (Lundvall et al., 2022; Steger et al., 2009). The research on existential meaning-making within the context of the study nursing, midwives, social work and health care courses are all from the etic perspective (Attard, 2015; Palliaweb, 2021; Van Leeuwen & Cusveller, 2004; Van Leeuwen et al., 2009; Van Leeuwen et al., 2020). Professionals and educators talk about how existential meaning-making might be beneficial for students, but barely any perspective from the students themselves is included. By describing an emic perspective of the MBO student, the aim is to complement existing research on the topic of existential meaning-making in education. Additionally, by providing more insights by doing empirical research on this topic, the aim is to reach more comprehensive information on this topic. By describing existential meaning-making from the emic perspective, a better understanding of the topic can be met in order to do proper follow-up research on for example evaluating what more attention on existential meaning-making in education can mean for the existential meaning-making crisis and if it can be used to improve the mental-health/well-being of youngsters in society.

Humanistic relevance

The research at the University of Humanistic studies, inspired by humanism, tries to optimize opportunities for people to live a dignified and meaningful life in a just and caring society. Main subjects include existential meaning-making and humanization (Alma & Lensevelt-Mulders, 2010). The research focuses on the existential meaning-making of MBO students, exploring their perceptions and evaluating what role they allocate to education in this process. These insights can possibly contribute to a solution to the social issue of existential meaning-making crisis of youngsters in society what can possibly contribute to a more meaningful life for these youngsters. Derkx (2015) identifies human dignity and the love for unique individuals as key characteristics of humanism. These two characteristics appears in the choice of doing in-depth interviews with students and using the method of Interpretative phenomenological Analysis (IPA), putting emphasis on the lived experiences of MBO students.

1.6 Proceeds from the research

This study is based on empirical research focussing on the perceptions of MBO students on existential meaning-making in the context of educational spaces. The research shows that students who are going through existential life experiences, such as quitting and reorientating towards a new study, encounter ontological uncertainty and struggle with future direction and self-identity. The key existential meaning-making needs include: (i) relationships/connectedness, (ii) personal development, (iii) coherence, (iii) community, (iv) self-efficacy and (v) recognition/competence. Students express a desire for talking about existential meaning-making and are missing opportunities to talk about it at school. The forms they suggest for integrating existential meaning-making, differs. Within these forms, they emphasize the importance of keeping the material practical and reckon emphasis on the individual needs of students. Students desire freedom and autonomy within education to discover themselves and their life goals in the world.

1.8 Reading guide

The research commences with a theoretical framework wherein an exploration of the main concepts of existential meaning-making and the role of education will be discussed. This is followed by the methodological justification of the research. Next, the sub-questions will be explored and answered in the empirical chapters. The sub-questions are concisely answered,

to eventually form an answer to the main research question in the conclusion. This study finishes with a discussion, wherein limitations and critical remarks upon the study can be read.

Commented [N3]: Well introduced. Good job.

Theoretical framework

In order to answer the main- and sub questions of this research, it is important to explore the concepts of existential meaning-making and the role of education to come to a clear definition that forms the (theoretical) basis of this research. First, the concept of existential meaning-making will be illustrated, following with an exploration of what role existential meaning-making plays or should play within education. To execute proper qualitative research, a theoretical review is needed in order to gain a deep understanding of the concepts used.

1 Meaning-making

Meaning-making is a concept which plays a(n) (important) role in every single human being's life. Meaning-making is a concept which has been extensively covered by Baumeister (1991). He describes meaning-making as a connection and communication between things and people. Meaning-making ensures that people are able to make better choices in light of their goals (Baumeister, 1991). Baumeister et al. (2013) describe what the difference is between living a happy life and a meaningful life, which has in essence also to do with meaning-making. They describe how happiness is mostly present oriented, while meaningfulness involves also the past and the future. "Put another way, humans may resemble many other creatures in their striving for happiness, but the quest for meaning is a key part of what makes us human, and uniquely so" (Baumeister et al., 2013, p. 516). In addition, Baumeister et al. (2013) define meaning-making as meaningfulness, which they describe as life being consistently rewarding in some type of way, even if this way is not completely clear.

1.1 Existential meaning-making

A distinction can be made between everyday meaning-making and existential meaning-making. Everyday meaning-making has to do with everyday activities which give structure to the day (Jacobs, 2020). As human beings we are not constantly aware of these everyday activities and are therefore self-evident (Smaling & Alma, 2010). Everyday meaning-making becomes existential meaning-making when we place meaning-making within a bigger picture of our own existence (Smaling & Alma, 2010). Questions such as: why we are here as human beings, what is my purpose as a human being on this planet and what are my goals in this life, can be labeled as existential meaning-making questions (Smaling & Alma, 2010). Smit (2015) defines existential meaning-making as: "The process in which human beings relate to the world" (p.70). Existential meaning-making explicitly appears when the existing meaning-

making of a person is no longer possible because of a critical moment in one's life. Everyday meaning-making can suddenly be experienced as meaningless in light of the bigger questions in life or contradictory, can help to bear and endure these life questions (Jacobs, 2020). Reorientation and reevaluation in life is needed to explore the (new) meaning of life (Alma et al., 2012).

1.2 Existential Life experiences

Existential meaning-making becomes explicit often after certain life experience. Jacobs (2020) describes how existential experiences confront us humans with our insignificance and vulnerability in the world, not knowing how to live or the opposite the experience of wholeness and the realization that life is 'good' or 'beautiful' (p.12). Lundvall et al. (2022) mention how certain life experiences such as a sickness, confrontation with death or another person's illness can trigger existential concerns and questions. These existential concerns and questions can also become more explicit during phases of transition in life. Such phases let us think about our existence and the meaning of life on a deeper level (Lundvall et al., 2022). Within these transitions of life, a certain role a person has taken on fades away and the goal to fulfill is no longer there. The existential meaning-making of the person in the transition phase get seriously affected and one starts to question the meaning of life (Leijssen, 2004).

Jacobs (2020) makes a distinction in four types of existential life experiences which can form a trigger for existential concerns or questions, namely rupture/contrast experiences, social boundary experiences, ontological uncertainty and moral tensions. She describes that these four types of existential life experiences have in common that they change the everyday of being and acting, which causes a situation of change and transformation which makes human beings extremely vulnerable (Jacobs, 2020, p. 32). Within these four types of existential life experiences, Jacobs (2020) makes a distinction between two categories of experiences. The first category of experiences occurs because of the inherent nature of what being human, and living is, vulnerable and uncontrollable which is linked by Jacobs (2020) to rupture/contrast experiences and ontological uncertainty. The second category of experiences which is linked to social boundary experiences and moral tensions, has to do with inhumane situations and practices which in essence can be prevented (Jacobs, 2020). Within this research, the focus lies on the transition phase and existential life experience of youngsters which can be placed within the first category. Therefore, only the first category, rupture/contrast experiences and ontological experiences, will be elaborated extensively.

Rupture/contrast experiences occur when aspects which are self-evident disappear. These experiences only exist when it results in a new attitude of openness wherein one sees or does not see new opportunities in life (Alma, 2018). Think of sickness, the passing of a loved one or a divorce for example. All these experiences ask for existential (re)orientation in life. These experiences can also have the consequence for people to turn their life around and make certain changes in their life because what they want in life becomes clearer and more visible. Ontological uncertainty is described by Jacobs (2020) as a: “profound experience of uncertainty that life prevails” (p.35). Jacobs (2020) speaks of intersections in humans their life, they have to make a choice which will be determinative for the rest of their life. Some examples of these intersections are marriage, the choice of having children, changing or quitting a job, taking an exam, choosing a study or quitting your study. All of these decisions are a threat to the ontological security because the self-evident bubble of life has been broken (Jacobs, 2020). This ontological uncertainty can have a massive effect on one's identity.

1.3 Existential meaning-making among youngsters

Phases of transition and existential life experiences such as rupture and contrast experiences as well as ontological uncertainty, frequently occur during adolescence. Lundvall et al. (2022) note Arnett (2001) in their article, who explains how young adults, between the age of 18-29, are emerging into adulthood. This emerging into adulthood is a transition in life where lots of different changes are happening and lots of choices have to be made. The coming of age with all its sexual, social, mental and physical changes and challenges can have a huge effect on one's existential meaning-making. An adolescent tries to create meaningfulness in life, but at the same time feels pressure to become independent and deal with various events in life (Kinnunen et al., 2010 in Lundvall et al., (2022). Van den Berg & Scherer-Rath (2023) mention how personal development accelerate during adolescence and how these reorientation events (or other disturbing events) can have an enormous influence on the way adolescents perceive themselves, their environment and their lives. These events can possibly disrupt the perception of control, predictability and self-coherence which eventually can cause an existential meaning-making crisis (Dweck, 2017 in Van den Berg & Scherer-Rath, 2023).

This disruption of existential meaning-making is exactly what is happening to the respondents within this research. The respondents, MBO students from HOP, are not satisfied with their particular choice of study or find their study too difficult, and therefore have to reorient towards a different study choice within the re-orientation program. This study choice

might be a representation of the bigger existential questions in life: Who am I, what do I want to do with my life, what is my purpose as a human being on this earth?

1.4 Existential meaning-making needs

The search for existential meaning-making is very personal and can vary greatly per person. Every person has different needs in order to decide for themselves what makes life meaningful and to regain control of their lives after an existential meaning-making crisis. The significance of importance and depth per existential meaning will differ per person. Three authors, Baumeister (1991), Smaling & Alma (2010) and Leijssen (2014), have written extensively about existential meaning-making needs. The insights from these authors on existential meaning-making provide a comprehensive framework to analyze the perceptions from the MBO students. Existential meaning-making is not explicitly mentioned during the interviews with the students, but forms a framework to analyze their perceptions. By mapping which needs are relevant for MBO students, how these needs are met or not in education and what the perceived role of education is in meeting these needs, we can gain a better understanding of how to better support MBO students with existential meaning-making within educational settings. In the following section, the meaning-making needs with their explanations are summed up per author.

Baumeister (1991) has divided meaning-making needs into four sub-categories and argues that these needs are the ingredients for experiencing a meaningful life, and a lack of one of these ingredients stands in the way of this.

1. Purpose is meant as goals for the future or the outlook on certain goals.
2. Self-efficacy is the feeling that your presence in the world is worthy, that you as a person have impact and influence in the world.
3. Self-worth is positive thinking about yourself.
4. Values for justification have to do with the actions you are taking, correspond with the values that you find important.

Smaling & Alma (2010) have divided personal meaning-making needs into nine sub-categories.

1. Purposefulness: similar to Baumeister's "purpose", has to do with goals, targets and orientation to give life a certain direction to strive for.
2. Value: defined as both extrinsic value and intrinsic self-worth, the value of external things and the value of oneself as worthy and compassion.

3. Competence: has to do with the feeling of being competent and in control of your own life.
4. Recognition: has to do with literally being seen by others and recognized for your competences, autonomy and individuality to name just a few. Part of this meaning-making need is also recognizing oneself (Smaling & Alma, 2010, p. 22).
5. Coherence: has to do with your place in the world in order to make the world more “comprehensible and manageable” as Smaling & Alma (2010) note it.
6. Connectedness: is described as something like coherence, but the emotional aspect is of more importance for the concept of connectedness. Connectedness is highly personal and is essential in many different social relations.
7. Transcendence: has to do with transcending the self, the everyday life, the straight forwardness and reaching for something beyond oneself which is sometimes new and different. A difference is made between horizontal, vertical and immanence transcendence.

The following two meaning-making needs are not necessarily a predicament for a meaningful life but argued by Smaling & Alma (2010) might be an outcome of living life meaningfully.

8. Motivational effect: being motivated to create your own life.
9. Well-being: has to do with feeling satisfied and fulfilled.

Leijssen (2004) multiple existential meaning-making needs in her article, which she believes are central to people making sense of the world and finding significance in their lives. In order to have a clearer view of the different existential meaning-making needs viewed in Leijssen (2014), I have categorized them into six sub-categories.

1. Relationships: the need for belonging and a sense of connection can be fulfilled by connecting with family or friends.
2. Personal development: individuals striving for goals and satisfaction in work, hobbies, physical health, well-being and understanding themselves and how they can fulfill their personal potential in life.
3. Creativity: find meaning and fulfillment in engaging in creative activities.
4. Nature: nature and the environment can be a source for individuals to give meaning to life and give them fulfillment.

5. Community: the desire of individuals to feel recognized and valued within a bigger group of people. Caring and looking out for others in this community is also a big part of giving meaning to life
6. Transcendence: seeking answers to existential questions and believing or searching for something greater than oneself.

1.5 Existential meaning-making in education

In the chapters above, the concept of existential meaning-making and the relation with youngsters have been extensively covered. But what is exactly the affiliation between existential meaning-making and education? The phases of transition into adulthood and life experiences where youngsters are going through as mentioned above, are most likely happening while at schools. During these phases of transition existential meaning-making, problems or even crises can occur. Van den Berg & Scherer-Rath (2023) describe how it could be helpful to offer youngsters guidance around the theme of existential meaning-making in order for them to deal with these transitions more easily. Besides offering guidance at schools, Van den Berg & Scherer-Rath (2023) also suggest offering classes in personal development. Within these classes, there should be space for students to think about their life and what they want their life to look like in order to develop into adulthood (Van den Berg & Scherer-Rath, 2023). Bertram-Troost (2023) is also someone who vouches for having more space for existential meaning-making within education. In her article, Bertram-Troost (2023) emphasises the role of education to give youngsters philosophical education which focusses on personal development and existential meaning-making. But is this the role of education? And are students prone to the idea of having more time and space for existential meaning-making at school? Within the following chapter, the concept of education will be further explored and what role existential meaning-making could possibly play for students in education and within a wider context namely, society.

2 The believed role of education

In order to understand properly what 'the role of education' includes, it is important to understand what exactly is meant by the term 'education'. The CBS (2023) defines education as: "Organized communication of a non-incident nature with the aim of transferring knowledge, increasing insight and/or learning skills". Biesta (2022) refers to education as form of intentional action that educators do (p.4). Both these definitions will be used as basis to further explore the role of education. In the following chapter the work by educational

pedagogue Gert Biesta and Professor of religious education Gerdien Bertram-Troost will be used to substantiate my work.

Biesta (2022) brought up the work of Bernfeld (1973) who suggests that education is society's response to the 'fact of development' (p.4). Biesta (2011) specified how education is positioned as an instrument to deal with social problems such as social inclusion, lifelong learning, the knowledge economy, European citizenship, intercultural understanding and a sense of shared feelings, to name just a few (p.5). Society dictates its problems to education, where education has to function as a solution. Society evolves and so education also has to evolve. Biesta (2022) refers to the concept of natality by Arendt (1977) as; "toward the fact that we have all come into the world by being born and that this world is constantly renewed through birth" (p.196) and links this to education. Biesta (2022) puts the concept of natality into the context of education and formulates the following question as the directory of education: "What shall we do with the children?" (p.5). The role of education is, and will probably always be, a topic that often emerges and where every single soul has an opinion about. Biesta (2011) describes how the role of the educator is extremely visible in modern society, because almost every single soul has had the opportunity to experience and observe his or her own teacher throughout the years, and therefore has an opinion about it. One can argue that the same applies when it comes to the believed role of education.

2.1 The believed role of education throughout history

As described above, when society evolves, sooner or later, education also has to evolve. In order to give some historical awareness, within the following sub-chapter the main agenda of education throughout history will be explored on the basis of Biesta (2022) his work in 'world-centred education'. The historical awareness forms a base of my theoretical framework because it reveals how societal needs and educational priorities have shifted over time. Mapping these shifted priorities throughout history helps to build a foundation from where current educational practices and existential meaning-making in that regard can be analysed.

Biesta (2022) starts with the example of paideia in ancient Greece, where education was meant to strive for civic excellence. During the reformation, making sure that everyone could read the bible, and thus literacy, was the main agenda of education. While during the enlightenment, people should learn to not only be dependant of faith and should be allowed – and learn - to think for themselves. Critical thinking was the main focus of education during

this time. Thereafter, repositioning the end of the nineteenth century equal chances and inclusivity became an important focal point. Equal opportunities within education is still a highly accurate theme in the Netherlands as of today (Agirdag et al., 2021, Leijgraaf et al., 2021, Elffers 2022, Notten et al., 2022, Van den Bergh et al.,2020. As shown in this section, historically, various educational paradigms have addressed the existential dimension to some extent. This existential dimension in education varied depending on time era and cultural context.

Biesta (2015, 2021) but also Bertram-Troost (2022, 2023) argue that the main focus of education is currently upon having the highest score and ranking the highest compared to other education systems. Biesta (2022) describes the imbalance in education between performing according to the needs of society versus education as a place for youngsters to explore themselves within the world. This argument shows how current education to the utmost extent focuses on the performing function which is at the expense of addressing existential meaning-making.

2.2 Current state of education

Biesta formulates the purpose of education in three domains: qualification, socialisation and subjectification. Qualification is about teaching knowledge and skills and qualifying people (Biesta, 2011). In addition to the qualification function of education, it also has a socialisation function, which refers to how people become familiar and part of political, social and cultural orders (Biesta, 2011). Besides the aspect of qualification and socialisation, Biesta identified a third aspect called 'subjectification', which is explained as orientating oneself in the world to become human. Biesta articulates the importance of focussing on all these domains in education, because they always have a direct or indirect effect on each other. According to this multidimensional view on education of Biesta, one has to consider at all times how to keep the right balance. In the current state of education, according to Biesta (2022) there is an imbalance between the three domains and there is too much focus on qualification. The focus on qualification has been more priority in education, because it is measurable. Biesta (2022) describes how we are living in the "age of measurement", where the priority is focusing on every single learning outcome. By focusing on measurement in education, the pressure for students to perform well intensifies. What gets lost in giving priority to qualification, is the opportunity for youngsters to develop in other eras. This has dehumanizing tendencies and stands in the way of giving youngsters an opportunity for leading a meaningful life.

2.3 The role of education according to Biesta: Becoming human

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, Biesta emphasises the importance of having a multidimensional view on education because all the three domains have influence on each other. Biesta's threefold framework of qualification, socialisation and subjectification provides a lens to better understand the current imbalance in education. Biesta (2022) elaborates on the concept of subjectification, which is - according to him a concept for which there is no space in current everyday practice of education. Subjectification symbolizes the existential dimension of education, it confronts students with the existential matter of life; how do you want to exist as subject of your own life? Subjectification in education is about helping students to realize their possibility of their existence as subject in the world (Biesta, 2022). Subjectification is tied with freedom, giving students the opportunity to explore their freedom in connection to the world. Exploration takes time and can hardly be measured. How Biesta (2022) describes this comprehensively:

"I have tried to suggest that we need such a space or place in order to give the new generation an opportunity to meet the world and themselves and, most importantly, to meet their desires vis-à-vis the world and themselves, and to be given the time to "work through" what they meet there. And this is important so that they can begin to come into a relationship with their desires rather than be determined by them. This is the school as place and space but perhaps first and foremost the school as time – as the time we give to the new generation to try, to fail, to try again ... and to fail better, as Samuel Beckett once put it" (p.23).

Subjectification is by no means to replace qualification or socialization in education, but rather emphasizing to put the subject-ness of the student in the center of educational attention. The emphasis of subject-ness is deeply tied to existential themes, as it requires students to reflect upon their relationship with the world and how they wish to exist in the world. Education can foster this existential meaning-making by giving students support more time and space to explore how they want to engage with the world in a meaningful way.

2.4 More space for existential meaning-making in education

Bertram-Troost (2022, 2023) highlights Biesta's view that the centre of education should be about how students present themselves in the world and choose how to relate to it. In essence, education is about becoming human. She expresses how to become human includes someone's view on humanity, view on life and someone's philosophy of life. Bertram-Troost (2023) argues that the philosophical aspects and the pedagogical aspects are inextricably linked. Bertram-Troost (2021) referred to Stevens et al. (2018), who make the association of

Commented [N4]: This is really the highlight of your section on education. Isn't it?

the poor mental health of youngsters with them having difficulties answering existential questions. The question can be raised, why there is need for education to make space for the existential dimension. Bertram-Troost (2021) voiced the Dutch Education Council's Report: Education forms (2011) who suggested two ways in which schools can contribute to helping pupils finding their way in life. First, they describe how offering knowledge to youngsters is needed for them to form their own moral identity. Examples they mention to include in this knowledge are multiple worldview traditions, existential insights and moral understandings. Second, they emphasize the importance of encouraging youngsters to have conversations about this existential dimension, in order for them to discover and relate to what is meaningful for them.

Commented [N5]: Nice. The literature review section is well organised. I know that the context of the study is very Dutch, but I would have still liked to see more international works that were relevant to your research.

Methodological justification

Within the following chapter the methodological justification of this research will be set out. I will start with an exploration of the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, followed with a description of how this method is used in this research design. This will be followed by an explanation of the research population including justification for choices made for sampling. Thereafter, a description of the interviews and the observations executed will be given. I will end with a description of the methods used for the analysis of the data collection.

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA)

With Interpretative phenomenological analysis researchers are able to make a detailed examination of how individuals give meaning to their life experiences (Pietkiewicz & Smith (2012). IPA is a qualitative research approach which puts the 'lived experience' of its research participants central to the study (Alaze, 2017). IPA, and phenomenology in detail can be described as a method which focuses on the way things appear to individuals in experience (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). Phenomenology thus focusses on how individuals perceive certain objects, others or events. By many researchers, IPA is viewed as the most 'participant oriented' qualitative research approach, because it shows lots of sensitivity and respect towards its research participants (Alaze, 2017). Below in picture 1. the work of Nizza et al. (2021) can be viewed. They have introduced four key quality indicators of IPA in order to illustrate what good IPA research in practice looks like. All four will be incorporated to present my data.

Picture 1. Nizza et al., (2021). P.371

Box 1. The four quality indicators of good IPA.

| Quality indicator | Brief description |
|---|---|
| Constructing a compelling, unfolding narrative | The analysis tells a persuasive and coherent story. The narrative is built cumulatively through an unfolding analytic dialogue between carefully selected and interpreted extracts from participants. |
| Developing a vigorous experiential and/or existential account | Focus on the important experiential and/or existential meaning of participants' accounts gives depth to the analysis. |
| Close analytic reading of participants' words | Thorough analysis and interpretation of quoted material within the narrative helps give meaning to the data and the experience it describes. |
| Attending to convergence and divergence | Idiographic depth and systematic comparison between participants creates a dynamic interweaving of patterns of similarity and individual idiosyncrasy. |

IPA applied in the research design

This research is focused on the perspective of MBO students regarding existential meaning-making within the context of educational spaces. The research includes an empirical qualitative study. Within this research, the focus is laid upon describing the phenomena of existential meaning-making and evaluate if MBO students think it is worthwhile to include existential meaning-making in their education. This phenomenon is analyzed from a phenomenological point of view by using the method of Interpretative phenomenological Analysis. The perspective and experience of the students is central to the study. The phenomena of existential meaning-making is highly personal, unique, emotional and has a high existential account. Therefore, it is of importance to focus on the 'lived experience' of the students in order to get the best research results. Hence, by using IPA an in-depth focus on the 'lived experiences' of participants in their unique, personal and individual context can be guaranteed (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012).

In order to do phenomenological research, it is crucial that the researcher is reflexive at all times during the research process. It is further important to be highly conscious of one's own perceptions and interpretations. As mentioned by Alaze (2017) the researcher must develop a deep understanding of the 'lived experiences' of the participants, a way to achieve this is to truly emerge oneself in the dataset and put oneself in the shoes of the participant (p.12).

Research population

The theoretical research population consists of MBO students in the Netherlands. The operational research population will be MBO students who are part of the new (re)orientation program within the school of MBO Utrecht. This new (re)orientation track has been set up by MBO Utrecht in order to guide students who are unable to decide or have made the wrong

study choice in their own opinion. The study choice for the students mentioned as the latter have been proven too difficult or does not match their expectations and needs when it comes to their education. In order to make a (better) choice for their (next) study, students are in need of (re)orientation. This program allows students to explore what they really aspire in a study and wherein they need to develop as a person in order to make their next study choice a success.

In total, 10 participants of the (re)orientation program have taken part in this research. The method used to obtain respondents is called convenience sampling (Cresswell, 2022). Within convenience sampling participants volunteer to be included in a study or are recommended by others (Cresswell, 2022). Convenience sampling was most appropriate in this case because the participants were all part of a specific program and therefore could be easily contacted through their teachers and their email. Also, by using this method, students who have firsthand experience with the reorientation project are included. All students of the (re)orientation program at MBO Utrecht have received an e-mail with all the information about the research, with the question if they wanted to partake in the research.

One quality indicator for good IPA research mentioned by Nizza et al. (2021) is close analytic reading of participants' words. In order to comply with this quality within the time frame set for this research, it has been chosen to include 10 participants. By only using 10 participants, it was possible to do more in-depth exploration of the participants 'lived experience'. When adding more participants this would have been too time-consuming and not been possible within the time given. By including less than 10 participants, the quality indicator of 'convergence and divergence' mentioned by Nizza et al., (2021) would have been at stake. In order to guarantee multiple experiences and not only put focus on individual 'lived experiences', 10 participants seem the perfect balance between not too little but also not too many participants.

Research method

The research methods used are in-depth interviews and observations. In order to get a complete view of the perception of the students, I have chosen two research methods. First, two observations have taken place of the (re)orientation program. By conducting these two observations of the class, I aimed to get additional context of the program and to build a rapport with the students. Better understanding the students also enabled me to adjust my interview questions as necessary and thus get richer data. It was therefore important to do this

before actually carrying out the interviews. Also, youngsters are not familiar with existential meaning-making. Therefore, it was important to get a feeling of their level and their way of expressing themselves in order to adapt my language to get the best results. Besides that, through my observation's participants got familiar with my face. As a result, I was not a complete stranger before starting the interviews. Because the phenomena of existential meaning-making is highly personal and emotional, I found it important to build up some familiarity and trust before conducting the interviews. In addition, in order to comply with the quality indicator of 'developing a vigorous experiential and/or existential account' mentioned by Nizza et al. (2021), it was important to dive into an existential level with the participants of the research. This is, in my view, only possible when a certain relationship is built up.

Secondly, the method of semi-structured, in-depth, one-on-one interviewing has been used. The interviews were semi-structured, and the questions were open-ended. The interviews ranged from 45 minutes up to 1 hour in total. As a result, there was enough room to catch the 'lived experiences' of students in the best possible way and there was some room to ask for clarification or go more in depth about certain aspects when needed. Before asking the complex questions, a little small talk with the respondents took place. As mentioned by Pietkiewicz & Smith (2012) the small talk functioned as a little 'warm-up' to reduce the interviewee's tension and get them ready to speak about more personal and sensitive topics. With the consent of the respondents, the interviews were recorded. In general, respondents were very open and responsive to answering the questions. Respondents sometimes struggled with expressing themselves, which led to a lot of follow-up questions and clarification questions from my side. In the empirical chapters, I will further expand on this matter. In order to be able to answer the research questions at the end of the interviews and not wander off too much during the interviews, an interview guide was made. This interview guide is included in the appendix. During the interviews the guide was followed, but not very strictly.

Analysis

All the data from the interviews have been translated from Dutch to English, transcribed, and prepared for analysis. The respondents have been anonymized to guarantee their privacy and have been labeled as students 1 through 10 in order to keep a clear overview of the data. First, in order to completely immerse oneself in the data and try to step into the participants shoes (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2020), the transcripts have been read and listened to multiple times. This was a time-consuming process, but it was necessary to include 10 participants to guarantee 'convergence and divergence' as mentioned by Nizza et al. (2021). If less than 10

participants had been interviewed, the quality indicator of ‘divergence’ would not have been passed due to the lack of multiple experiences. By including 10 participants, there was still enough time to focus on the individual lived experiences. Thereafter, the process of writing down the most notable themes of all the transcripts, called thematic analysis, took place. A thematic analysis focuses on overshadowing patterns and themes (Boeije, 2005). Some overshadowing patterns that emerged from the data were for example coherence, having a hard time finding the right words, the allocated role of education. Thereafter, the phase of inductive coding started. Starting with open coding, axial and finally selective coding (Boeije, & Bleijenberg, 2019). Open coding stands for all the codes that arrive from the data, during axial coding you put the groups in smaller groups wherein selective coding you combine the codes (Boeije, & Bleijenberg, 2019). When writing up the analysis, the words of the participants in the form of direct quotes have been used to show the data. Pietkiewicz & Smith (2020) give two reasons to do so: (i) the reader is able to follow and judge the interpretations of the researcher and (ii) the voice of the participant is central to the study which places the personal experience and the emic perspective of the participant up front. The direct quotes are followed by several levels of interpretation of the researcher. These levels of interpretations might vary from highly detailed with theoretical connections to low-level interpretation (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2020).

Commented [N6]: Overall the section is pretty good. The only thing I would add would be around how did respondents perceive you? How did you navigate these perceptions, perhaps.

Empirical chapters

Consistently, to answer the main research question, the sub-questions need to be answered. The empirical chapters have been divided through expending one chapter for every single sub-question. The sub-questions revised:

1. Which existential meaning-making needs do MBO students find relevant?
2. What are some of the ways in which these existential meaning-making needs are met or not in their education?
3. How do MBO students see the role of education in meeting their existential meaning-making needs?

Every single empirical chapter starts with a short summary with the main findings. Adding up the summaries of the sub-questions will eventually give an answer to the main research question. Section 1 starts with an exploration of the feelings around and the experience of the existential life event of the students to quit their study and choose another study. Section 2 revolves around the six existential meaning-making needs MBO students find relevant. Section 3 has explains whether students have experienced (sufficient) space for existential life experiences in their education. Besides this, the theme of students expresses themselves and mental health is explored. Lasty in section 4, it is described what role MBO students allocate to education in meeting their existential meaning-making needs and how the students would like to see the integration of these needs. In order to show the voices of my participants in the best way possible, a lot of direct quotes are used in order reflect their thoughts and opinions regarding existential meaning-making in education.

Section 1: Existential life experience

Summary chapter

The central insight of this chapter is that students going through existential life experiences, such as quitting and reorienting towards a new study, encounter ontological uncertainty and struggle with future direction and self-identity. The students express that they are confused, feel tired and feel like a failure towards their surroundings and themselves. The phase of emerging into adulthood is paired with a lot of decision making and self-discovery, which leads to pressure to become independent and achieve success. This then, leads to emotional and existential challenges. In the following section, I will get into the details.

Within the theoretical framework, the concept of existential life experiences has been described. An existential life experience changes the everyday of living which revolves into a transformation which makes human beings vulnerable. The distinction has been made between rupture/contrast experiences and ontological uncertainty. Rupture/contrast experiences occur when something in life which was previously self-evident, disappears (Alma, 2018). Whereas, ontological uncertainty, speaks of certain intersections in life where one has to make a choice which can be determinative for one's life (Jacobs, 2020). The disruption of this existential meaning-making is close to what is happening to the respondents within this study.

The first theme that was addressed during the interview, was the decision of quitting their previous study and the process of re-orientating themselves towards a new study. Thoughts, feelings and beliefs have been questioned regarding this event. Multiple students expressed how they have difficulties with making a study choice, because they do not know what they want in life (yet). In the three quotes shown, students talk about their existential life experience of orientating towards a new study and the decision of quitting their study.

***Student 10:** "Well. There are so many options... I'm only 21... and I now have to choose what I would like to do for the rest of my life. And I just find that very difficult. Then I am thinking, whatever I don't know[...] That I now think that yes, I don't even really know who I am yet, let alone that I now have to decide for that person what I want to be later. So yes, I experienced that as difficult. I think that, and I think that applies to most people, you are still developing yourself so much in those years of your teenage years and then you have to decide what you want."*

***Student 9:** "Yes, just that you don't know what you want. And that you are actually forced to choose between two paths."*

***Student 2:** "What I might really enjoy doing. Yes, I still find that difficult. I don't know if I want to keep doing it forever, so to speak."*

***Student 2:** "Yes, it was a difficult choice that I had to make, because then it is kind of.. Shouldn't I just finish those two years and then be done with it, so to speak."*

The quotes from the students included above show that their existential life experience can be best scaled underneath ontological uncertainty. The students describe the process of making the decision to quit their study and the choice they have to make between one or more

studies. Both these decisions have been mentioned by Jacobs (2020) as an intersection, wherein one has to make a choice. The students feel like these decisions are a determinative factor for the rest of their career and life. All of these decisions are a threat to ontological security (Jacobs, 2020), suddenly life is not self-evident anymore and students have to think about what they want their life to look like. They express how they struggle with making this choice, because they do not know what they want to do in life yet - let alone know what study to choose. Lundvall et al (2022) refer to Arnet (2001) who describes that young adults between the ages of 18-29 are emerging into adulthood, which is a transition in life where lots of changes are happening and many choices have to be made. The coming of age is paired with lots of developments on sexual, social, mental and psychical level which can have a huge impact on the existential meaning-making. Most students within this age range are busy with discovering themselves on one of these levels. The students do not know themselves well enough yet and therefore find it hard to make a deliberate career choice.

Feelings around existential meaning-making

Besides describing the existential life experience of quitting and choosing a different study, the emotions that came up regarding this existential life experience have been extensively covered. Below are some of the statements students made regarding their feelings.

Student 1

“I don't really have any particular feeling about it, just tiredness. Yeah, I don't know. I don't really know what emotion I really feel. It's not a happy feeling, let's put it that way. Not a positive thing.”

Student 3

Student: “A little confused.”

Researcher: Confused. And confused about what?

Student: “Just about yes. About what I want to do. Or just what I want to follow or what I want to do later.”

Student 2: *“Yes, it does vary. Then I think about it. And wonder is it not a shame that I stopped. Shouldn't I have just finished it? When I think about it, I think yes, that it is actually a good thing. I think it's fine this way.”*

Students found it hard to exactly pinpoint what they were feeling, and it was therefore necessary to ask a couple of follow-up questions to discover what they were actually feeling. Besides pinpointing what they were feeling exactly, they also found it hard to find the right words to express their feelings. Eventually, students shared that they were having mixed feelings about the existential life experience. These mixed feelings were leaning towards negative feelings, as students express how they feel tired, confused and have doubts about making the right decision. It seems like they feel a bit lost and therefore are also not sure what they feel and do not know how to express themselves. Some students mention the feeling of relief when they finally made a decision and told their parents that they wanted to quit their studies.

Concept of failure

Another aspect which was striking while looking at the data, was the concept of failure. Multiple students have mentioned the word failure in regard to quitting one's study. The students mentioned how they felt like they were failing. They further described how they felt like disappointing themselves and that they experienced fear of disappointing people around them.

Student 9 and 7 expressed how they felt like disappointing their parents because of quitting their study.

Student 9

“A kind of fear of choosing the wrong thing again. Yes, and also to disappoint my parents, of course. Because they have clearly said, we will still pay this year. And if you stop again, we won't pay anything anymore. Which I also understand very well. Because of course it's just a waste of money.”

Student 7

Student: “If not this, what then must it be? Because I like a lot of things. I am someone who sees something in everything. I also really like the catering industry, but I have already said that I don't want anything in it, say for training, because you can always work in it. But yeah, I don't know. Then it was mainly with my parents the relationship with my parents was on the edge, so to speak, sharpened.”

Researcher: Okay, because how would you describe that? What happened then?

Student: "Just very angry, just very disappointed in me that I really noticed that they looked at me and thought, oh yes, she stopped. Like why she can't do it, very disappointed."

As described earlier, the students within this research are emerging into adulthood. Consequently, a lot of changes are happening with and around them. While young adults try to give meaning to their life, they also feel the pressure to become independent (Kinnunen et al., 2010 in Lundvall et al., (2022)). The quotes above show how this pressure comes from parents within this context. Students do not want to disappoint their parents and want to show that they can be independent. Below, student 6 describes how she felt like a failure and that she had disappointed herself.

"So, then, yeah, I don't know like I said, it felt a bit like I had failed, because it's something that you've obviously worked on for a whole year and almost a whole year after that. So yeah, I don't know, I was a little disappointed, too."

The longing to be independent is also visible in this quote. Also, it seems that some sort of parental expectation or outer world expectation to be independent or successful has been reinforced in oneself.

Section 2: Relevant existential meaning-making needs MBO Students

Summary chapter

The main takeaway of this chapter revolves around the key existential meaning-making needs. These include: (i) relationships/connectedness, (ii) personal development, (iii) coherence, (iii) community, (iv) self-efficacy and (V) recognition/competence. These key existential meaning-making needs provide students with belonging, emotional support, sense of growth, stability, being impactful and autonomous. Students express how they are longing for freedom and autonomy within education, but that the rigid education system does not have space for that. This highlights a query to what extent guidance is needed and how much freedom students need in order to foster personal growth and lead a meaningful life.

The previous chapter described what the existential life experience of quitting one's study and choosing another one meant for the students. The chapter showed how difficult they

found it to choose a study which feels for them a determining factor for the rest of their lives. The chapter also described the feelings that students experience during this process and how they feel like a failure towards the people around them, but also towards themselves. This existential life experience of re-orientating oneself can have a big impact on the way adolescents perceive themselves, their lives and their environment (Van den Berg & Scherer-Rath, 2023). The students expressed doubts and insecurities about their lives, which were brought into focus during or after the existential life experience. They are experiencing ontological uncertainty, because their evident bubble of life has been broken (Jacobs, 2020). Now that their evident bubble of life has been broken, existential life questions emerge.

One immediate life question that appeared a lot in the data was: “What study am I going to choose?”. Suddenly, students seem to realize (again) that they actually have a choice in what they want to study. This choice also makes them insecure and a bit lost as shown above. The realization of having a choice in what study they want to follow is tied together with an overarching aspect of reorientation in life. The existential life question of: “What do I want with my life?” appeared a lot in the data. Because of the ontological uncertainty, all options are open, and the students have to reevaluate their life and reorientate what they want in life. Suddenly, everyday meaning-making becomes existential meaning-making because students see themselves within a bigger picture of their own existence (Smaling & Alma, 2010). What existential meaning-making needs do MBO Students have in order for themselves to decide what makes life meaningful for them? And what existential meaning-making needs do they have in order to regain control of their lives after experiencing an existential life event (or crisis)? As mentioned earlier in the theoretical framework, the significance of importance and depth per existential meaning-making need can vary highly per individual.

After talking to the students about the existential life event and the life questions that emerged from this event, the subject of existential meaning-making needs was discussed. I did not literally take the words of ‘existential meaning-making need’ into the conversation, but while talking with the students and asking deeper questions, ideas about existential meaning-making naturally flowed. While analysing all the data the students mentioned most frequently the following existential meaning-making needs, in this order:

1. Relationships/connectedness
2. Personal development
3. Coherence

4. Community
5. Self-efficacy
6. Competence/recognition

The first two existential meaning-making needs of relationships/connectedness and personal development, were often literally mentioned by students. Relationships/connectedness as existential meaning-making need has been mentioned by almost all students. Personal development has been mentioned by a lot of students. Personal development did include different things for different students. The existential meaning-making needs of coherence, community, self-efficacy and competence/recognition were not literally named by students but have been interpreted from the words students expressed. Below, I will discuss each of these needs in detail and why they were important for my respondents.

1 Relationships/connectedness

The existential meaning-making need of connectedness described by Alma & Smaling (2010) and the one of relationships mentioned by Leijssen (2004) in the theoretical framework are very similar and have matching components. Also, both existential meaning-making needs have been mentioned by students in relation to each other. Therefore, the two are put together within this category. Connectedness has to do with feeling emotionally connected to others (Alma & Smaling, 2010). It can be argued that relationships described by Leijssen (2004) as bonds with family and friends consists out of this connectedness. These relationships and connectedness can provide a sense of belonging and thus provide meaningfulness in life. In the following quotes students express how much value they attach towards relationships and the feeling of connectedness in order to lead a meaningful life.

Student 9

“Yes, just friends. That you also pull each other through it a bit. Of course, we’ve all had moments. And everyone has had their relationship end at some point. Or that you were in the dark again for a moment. And family for that matter, yes... I haven’t had any contact with my father for a few months now. But I notice that I really like the side of the family of my mother... That I find that very important. To maintain that. That I really think... I’m giving them an extra big hug today. Because that could be your last.”

Student 10

“But I suffered a lot from loneliness. In fact, from the age of eleven until now, I have dealt with a lot of loneliness. Because I just didn't really have any close friends until then. And people are just, well, animals that just need to live in company. Because otherwise the loneliness is almost dead. So that bothered me a lot. And that's why I think it's so important. Because I just know how bad it is, so to speak. So yeah, I just don't wish that on people.”

Student 5:

“To be happy. Having people around you who care about you.”

2 Personal development

Leijsen (2004) has mentioned several existential meaning-making needs in her article. Within the theoretical framework, I have categorized these into six sub-categories, personal development is the second sub-category. The existential meaning-making need of personal development is comprehensive, in the sense that it describes an individual's striving for goals and satisfaction in hobbies, work, health, well-being and thus to fulfill their personal potential in life. In the following quote of student 5 it is visible how personal development plays an important role for them in shaping life into a meaningful experience.

Student 5

“Always keep doing things and keep learning and it doesn't have to be something big. Oh, a bachelor's or master's degree. It could also just be normal. I want to learn to embroider or something and then just keep learning or if you have problems, keep going to a therapist. Or I just want to ask for help from other people. Instead of just suck it up and that's just how life is... While in the meantime you're like, ugh, I don't feel good.”

Researcher: So, is self-development important to you?

Student: “Yes, self-development and keeping yourself physically and mentally healthy.”

For this student, personal development involves learning and growing as a person on different levels. The student does not necessarily want to strive for big goals but has smaller everyday goals such as learning a new hobby or a new skill. The student's perspective on life, where personal development is an important part of ties into existential meaning-making as it shows the student's involvement in shaping a meaningful life through personal growth. The student

highlights how she always wants to strive to improve herself by going to therapy, instead of just forgetting about it and sucking it up. This shows how the student desires to live a life according to her values and aspirations. This creates a sense of purpose which is essential to live a meaningful life for the future.

3 Coherence

The existential meaning-making need of coherence has been previously mentioned in my theoretical framework as the fifth aspect of meaning-making according to Alma & Smaling (2010). Coherence is about your place as a person in the world in order to make your life coherent and manageable. The following quotes from students show how students are longing for this coherence in their life for the future and how this is currently not yet the case.

Student 9:

“Because money doesn't necessarily buy happiness. But... My goal is definitely just... Having my life settled. When I finish my training here. Then just work with this training. Buy a house. And then just slowly the house, tree and animal. And a bit of the stereotypical Dutch family. That's just my goal really.”

Student 7

“And now you are, of course, also in a bit of an uncertain phase with everything. So yes, actually having everything neatly in its place. Not necessarily that everything Of course, always goes well. That's certainly not the case, but more just that I have a little more rest and a little more holding on, something like that.”

Student 2

Researcher: And what does being happy mean to you?

Student: “Yes. That is also difficult. I Just have to think about it for a second. Yes, just being able to be with friends and family and just having my life on track.”

The quotes of students show how they are longing for coherence in life. Words such as: “settled”, “everything neatly in place” and “life on track” indicate this. For them, coherence

involves having a certain amount of stability, overview and being able to manage life to a certain degree. This longing of coherence shows how students prefer a life that is structured and predictable. This way, students are able to have control over their life. This need for coherence ties in with previous or possible future choices. The existential life experience of quitting your study and reorientating towards a new study might give a feeling of lack of coherence. Therefore, the longing for coherence might have grown after the existential life experience in order to achieve a meaningful life. Hence, coherence seems to be a crucial existential meaning-making need in order for students to give meaning to life.

4 community

The existential meaning-making need of community has not been mentioned by Baumeister nor Alma & Smaling but has been illustrated by Leijssen (2004) as the desire for a person to be part of a bigger group of people and to take care of others and being taken care of. In the following section students express their longing for feeling and being part of a community.

Student 4

“Feeling at home. It's very abrupt. And I cannot immediately say what that does, whether it is the training, or whether it is the form or whether it is the people. It's just a feeling that comes up the moment you walk into a place.”

Researcher: But do you think it is important to feel part of something bigger?

“Definitely yes, I don't like it when I walk somewhere and have the feeling that I know that if I were to leave here it wouldn't do anything. The idea that me. I want to have the feeling that when I am inside or when I am there that I am in my place.”

Student 5

Researcher: And what makes you think it is important to be with like-minded people?

Student: “Connection, that you can work well together. If you are a bit like minded, you can often work better together even if you don't like each other that much. Can you treat each other better. You'll probably find more like-minded people that can become your friends. And you're all doing something you all enjoy. It's a bit of a communal thing.”

Both students express a certain desire to belong to a community. The words “feeling at home” and “connection” indicate a certain longing for a feeling to belong, which a

community might provide. Also, the words; “[...] if I were to leave her it wouldn't do anything” from student 4 and “It's a bit of communal thing” voiced by student 5, reflect their need for affirmation and recognition by a community. These students express how feeling and being part of a larger group of people is a fundamental part of their existential meaning-making.

Commented [N7]: How is this different from connectedness?

5 Self-efficacy

The existential meaning-making need of self-efficacy is explained as one of the ingredients to a meaningful life by Baumeister (1991). He describes self-efficacy as the feeling that you as a person with your presence have impact and influence in the world around you. This need was expressed strongly by student 8 and 4 in that they are still searching or aiming for self-efficacy in their life for the future.

Student 8:

Researcher: What are the values in your life that you strive for?

Student: “Family, friends, money. To accomplish something. Maybe contribute something to society. Maybe I can also add something to society. That would be nice.”

Researcher: Beautiful, what would you like to add?

Student: “I just think... Suppose I were, say... Financially free. If I have achieved success. Then I would like to give it to other people too, so to speak. To pass it on to others, actually.”

This student expresses how he would like to give back to society in the future when he is financially able. He describes how he finds it important to accomplish something and that if he has achieved (financial) success, he also wants to share this with other people. Self-efficacy within this context is the process of aiming to give back to society in order for your presence as a human being to have impact and influence in the world around you. This aim of becoming financially free and then possibly giving back to society is for this student a way of giving meaning to life.

Student 4

“You suddenly feel very bad about it. What am I good for? That idea of what, what am I good for? Because what can I do? Is only nursing something for me? [...] That you

are seen. Not that you're some kind of cog in a machine. I think that is a bit of an unnecessary form of training."

Student 4 is talking about self-efficacy in the sense that he is scared of not being able to find a larger meaning in life. He really wants to add something to the world and have the feeling that his presence matters. For him, self-efficacy is an important existential meaning-making need to enjoy a meaningful life.

6 Recognition/competence

Within this category I chose to combine the two different, but related existential meaning-making needs of recognition and competence termed by Alma & Smaling (2010). They describe recognition as being seen by others but also by the self - as an individual who is recognized for his or her competences and autonomy. Competence, as existential meaning-making need, has been defined as having the feeling of being competent and in control of your own life. One could argue that aspects of competence can also be included within the bigger existential meaning-making need of recognition.

Within the context of this chapter, recognition and competence is interpreted as having trust in the student. Multiple students mention how they want space and time to figure out for themselves what works for them and what they want in life. This can be viewed as very practical as in curricula wise. So, for example, choosing your own subjects and how much time you want to spend on each subject. But it can also be interpreted from the existential meaning-making need of being recognized as a worthy and autonomous person. Students express how they do not feel recognized by teachers and/or the school system. Below I have included a direct quote from student 1 in which this emerges.

"But I just don't think you should just say you have to be here at a certain time and then there at a certain time. But that they just let you go a bit more, and that you have the space to do your own things. That's what freedom means to me."

Researcher: Do I also hear a bit of trust on the student in that? Did I hear that right?

Student: "Yes, trust in you. That everything will be fine and that everything will work out."

Researcher: Yes, I understand. I would have wanted that as well at that age, I think.

Student: “These people do not really see that. If you are still 17, then you are still young and then they think, you still need guidance. But I think, just leave me, never mind.”

The words of student 1 reflect a desire for autonomy and trust. The words “they think, you still need guidance” shows how she feels competent enough to figure it out on her own and that she wants to be trusted and recognized by teachers to do so. This ties into the existential meaning-making need of recognition and competence. But what does competence mean within this context? While the student voices a strong belief in her own competence, external evaluations from parents/teachers and educational systems might not align. Adults might judge the competence of this student differently and see a potential danger and therefore believe that guidance is still necessary. But what is the right balance between autonomy and guidance when it comes to education? The student expresses the desire for more trust, autonomy and thus freedom. The desire from the student matches with the view of Biesta (2022) to focus more on subjectification in education. Subjectification, according to Biesta (2022), has to do with helping students to realize their possibility of their existence as subject in the world. This ‘subjectness’ is tied to giving students time and space to explore their freedom in connection to the world. Often educational systems are designed around rigid systems, where there is no space for personal deviations as expressed earlier in my theoretical framework by Biesta (2015, 2022). Students are expected to develop and find themselves within these rigid systems. **There is no time for wrong choices or space for exploring yourself and your future. The rigid system might possibly undermine the student's sense of competence and recognition.**

Commented [N8]: Indeed.

Section 3: Existential meaning-making in education

Summary

MBO students express a desire to talk about existential meaning-making, in particular discussing life goals and values. Students are missing opportunities at school to talk about this. Most students struggle to articulate these thoughts due to lack of vocabulary and experience. The students who are able to express themselves better have had mental health issues and have benefited or are still benefiting from therapy. Integrating existential meaning-making within education could enhance students’ development and emotional health what could potentially prevent poor mental health.

In the preceding chapters the first sub-question has been discussed. As a result, the existential meaning-making needs among MBO students have been mapped. In order to effectively cater for the existential meaning-making needs among MBO students, it is important to determine if, and if so to what extent, these needs are *currently* catered for in MBO education. As such, within this chapter, the second sub-question will be discussed, which is: what are some of the ways in which these existential meaning-making needs are met or not in their education? Again, the quotes of the students will be central in this chapter.

Space for existential meaning-making in education

After mapping the existential meaning-making needs, it has been asked within the interviews whether the students experience that there is space and time for such needs within their education. Out of the 10 participants, 7 students have explicitly answered that there is not enough space for existential meaning-making within education according to them. One student just answers the question and does not really have anything to add. Four students mention SLB in their answers. SLB in Dutch means ‘studieloopbaan begeleiding, which can be best translated in English as ‘educational career guidance’. Students mention how during SLB, some of these topics have been mentioned by their teachers but that they missed talking about it with someone on a deeper level. As student 2 describes:

“Not really, actually? No, it's not like we really delved into it or anything. Yes, for example, with SLB we talked about where I am now and so on, but they have not really looked into it. Not the bigger picture.”

With student 3, I had a wonderful conversation about his goals in life and why he had those goals. During the interview, I noticed that he was not used to profound questions around existential meaning-making. He really liked talking about it and he mentioned after that he learned something about himself and his existential meaning-making. When asked if there is space for existential meaning-making in his education, he referred to the conversation we were currently having and his experience with SLB:

“For example, that conversation such as what you did with me? My SLB'er has never done anything like that before. Well, something like that, but not really that on our feelings and if so.”

He explained that he has a desire to talk more about profound feelings and that in previous conversations with his teacher (SLB'er) he did have some conversations on what he wanted in life and his goals but never got asked why those were his goals.

Furthermore, three students mentioned how education in their eyes revolves especially around going to class, passing your exams and just doing what teachers tell you to do. They express how they would like to see it differently. In the words of student 7:

"You don't have a lot of space to be yourself, because of course you have to have an ideal image of a nurse. You also have to present yourself neatly as a nurse and you can't really be 100% naturally yourself there. Yes, school for me has always been very much about passing your tests, making assignments and doing what the rest does. Yes, we don't really care about that, I've always had that exact feeling."

Student 10 portrayed what her day at school looked like and described how she would have liked to pay more attention to the theme of values, so she could have started earlier to live according to her values.

"No. That's just very businesslike. You go from subject to subject. You learn what you need to learn. You have your tests; you have your exams. And then you continue. [...] But I think that is a really important aspect. When I notice where I am and stand now, I wish I had lived my worth and according to my values sooner. And what I need. So yes, I would have liked it if more attention was paid to that."

Student 4 describes how he misses time within education to reflect upon his study choice because now it just feels like a driving train which you cannot stop:

"It feels very much like getting into a moving train. You can't really think about whether you made the right choice. You get in and you start. Over the period you decide whether you like it or not, and I don't think that's a good system."

This result matches the aspect of "age of measurement" by Biesta (2022) present in education described in the theoretical framework. Within the age of measurement, the priority is on measurable learning outcomes. The problem with solely focusing on these measurable learning outcomes, is the lack of focus on learning outcomes which are harder to be measured such as the aspects mentioned by students above: exploration of the self, values and reflection

on the self and life. Students desire school to be a place where there is also space to explore themselves.

Finding the right words for what they mean

Something that stood out while talking with the students about existential meaning-making, was how many students struggled with finding the right words for what they meant. It was noticeable that some had consciously or unconsciously thought about existential meaning-making in their mind but had little experience with expressing these thoughts. For some students, it was noticeable that they had barely thought about these themes and that it was the first time for them to think about this let alone talk about it with someone else. Because this was sensed during the interviews, I decided to ask students what their opinion was on the interview and if they struggled to answer the questions. Below is a quote from a student, which shows the process of finding words.

“I have something in mind then. What is it, and then I’m busy for a moment with okay, yes, how do I express that? How can I visualize that, also because they are such big questions.”

The same student describes how the question is not necessarily a problem, because he has already formed an answer/opinion in his head. But giving words to what is in his head is difficult.

“But the question itself is not necessarily difficult. I often already have an opinion in my head of what I think of it. Then it takes a moment to think about okay, how can I say that?”

The same goes for student 1, who expresses that, in her mind, she knows what she feels and thinks, but struggles to find the right words and to express herself.

“Yes, I know it in my mind, but I don’t really know how to explain it.”

One could argue that the fact that students have difficulties with expressing themselves regarding existential meaning-making, already says something about how little time is spent on these themes within education. It was noticeable that these themes most definitely played consciously or unconsciously a role in their mind and life. It shows that students have little vocabulary to articulate their values and ethics they find important in life. This highlights a significant gap in their educational experience.

Commented [N9]: Yes, nice.

Mental health struggles

The previous part described how many students find it hard to find words for what they mean when talking about existential meaning-making. Some students had less struggles or no struggles at all in voicing themselves. These students were able to express their feelings, their values and what they thought was important in life. During the interviews, I discovered that all students who were able to express themselves well, have had or still have mental health issues. As noted before, all who were able to express themselves better also have been talking or still are talking to therapists, psychologists or other specialists. For three students the mental health issues, started during or after their existential life experience of orientating themselves towards a study and/or quitting their study. They described how talking to a specialist helped them a lot to untangle thoughts in their mind and that they wish other students also had the chance to untangle their thoughts with a specialist. Student 10 voices this in the following quote:

Researcher: And how did you discover that these are actually your values? Beautiful. You manage to name them very quickly, which is quite impressive.

Student: "So I am in quite intensive therapy. There you are also working on your values. So that's why I can list them well. It's tough, but I learn so much about myself. I almost just grant people or not almost, but people to, not have to experience anything negative, but just someone to talk too, shouldn't even have to be therapy but something of a self-development process. That you become more self-aware. Because that helps me so much now to understand things about myself. How I stand in something, how I see things. Actually, live your life better too. And to gain a better understanding of who you are, so to speak."

By giving students the chance to talk to a specialist, they are not forced to handle their thoughts on their own but instead get the chance to clarify their thoughts with someone.

This outcome matches with the idea of Bertram-Troost (2021) to pay more attention to the existential dimension in education. The mental health issues that arose for four students during or after their existential life experience of re-orientating, confirms the that link Bertram-Troost (2021) makes between the poor mental health of youngsters and the difficulties of answering existential questions. As earlier mentioned in section 2 of the empirical chapters, the existential experience of re-reorientating oneself can have a big impact on the way adolescents perceive their lives, their environment and themselves (Van

den Berg & Scherer-Rath, 2023). The students are experiencing ontological uncertainty, because their evident bubble of life has been broken (Jacobs, 2020). Students find it hard to reorientate themselves again towards a meaningful life and might develop poor mental health during or after this process. More space for the existential dimension in education could potentially help students to find support and find an answer to their life questions before developing poor mental health. Therefore, I would argue that paying attention to the existential dimension within education could potentially work preventive for students to fall into a poor mental health.

Section 4: Role of education meeting existential meaning-making needs

Summary

Most students believe that education should address existential meaning-making in some kind of form. The forms and means to realise this differ per student. Examples of these suggestions are (i) individual conversations, (ii) involving parents, (iii) integrating it into citizenship education, (iiii) creating a specific subject and (iv) making it an elective. Within these different forms, they emphasize the importance of keeping the material practical by using lots of assignments and present varied ways to discuss existential meaning-making to take into account individual needs. A reoccurring theme, previously also mentioned in section 2, is freedom. Students desire freedom in completing their assignments and time to explore themselves and their life goals. These desires reflect an overarching need for a different educational environment with more freedom.

In the last chapter, it has been concluded that seven out of the ten participants in the research find that there is no space for existential meaning-making in education. In the following chapter will be explored what kind of role education should play in meeting existential meaning-making needs according to students. The following sub-question will be answered: How do MBO students see the role of education in meeting their existential meaning-making needs? This question is two folded. First, do students allocate a role to educational spaces to talk about existential meaning-making. Secondly, if so, what way would suffice according to them?

Importance existential meaning-making according to students

First, eight out of ten participants allocate a role to education to talk about existential meaning-making. To what extent they allocate a role to education varies per student. Five

students express how they think existential meaning-making is something which is important for everyone to talk about, and that there should definitely be place for this within education. Student 2 voices this exactly in the quote below.

"I think so. I think that is actually important for everyone. Yeah, who are you anyway? What do you stand for?"

Student 4 tells about his experience with these themes and that he speaks a lot about it with his parents. He expresses how he thinks that every student, in some way, struggles with themes around existential meaning-making, but does not always talk about them. He also recognizes that maybe not every student has a place to talk about these themes and how education could facilitate this.

"But I think every student stumbles in some form with the idea of where they want to be in life. And coincidentally, I'm really into it. Oh, I talk a lot. I actually talk to my mom and dad about issues every day because of what I have chosen and so I find it easy to talk about that. But there are also a lot of people who don't do that and just swallow it."

Two students mention how the space for existential meaning-making should only be available when students visibly struggle or if they ask for help. As student 5 voices:

"But I think, especially if something goes wrong, with the question; what do I want? And you want help with that question, that it is available."

Two other students explicitly mention how they see no role for education regarding existential meaning-making. The students describe that the focus within professional education should first and foremost be about the profession itself. As student 6 expresses:

"Yes, I think, just on the training itself, I think, you have chosen that yourself, then you should really just work towards that profession, I think."

They both express how they would prefer to explore these themes in their free time. As student 8 voices.

Researcher: What if you can't really find room for it at school. Or talk about it. Then where should you find the space?
Student: "In your own free time."

Researcher: Free time. And how?

Student: "Reading books, gaining knowledge. You can always find somewhere."

Integrating existential meaning-making

The previous chapter shows that eight out of ten participants allocate a role to education to talk about existential meaning-making. But how do students envision the integration of existential meaning-making within education? Again, answers varied per student in how they envisioned the role of existential meaning-making within education. A few ways that have been mentioned by students are (i) individual conversations with specialist, (ii) make it part of citizenship education, (iii) educate parents on what existential meaning-making involves and talk about this with parents and students on parent evenings (iii) compose a special subject which revolves around existential meaning-making (iv) make existential meaning-making an elective (v) invite a guest speaker to speak about existential meaning-making.

Generally, students were able to express themselves relatively quickly when it comes to their vision on the role of education to integrate existential meaning. However, when probed further on the content of the form, students started to struggle. Three aspects about the content and the form emerged very clearly. First, instead of lessons which are very theoretical, where students have to sit and just listen, they emphasize the importance of practical assignments. Student 9 expresses how pro-active assignments can ensure that students are not distracted, and the attention and interest stay high.

"Yes, also assignments. Because that way you get a bit involved. Because if you sit and listen to someone for an hour... after half an hour you drift off. And for example, you do an assignment, or you answer a question... or a kind of Kahoot quiz-like. Or, for example, Google Forms. That they can put whatever they want."

Second, participants voice very clearly that there is not one method that fits all. They express that it is important to always listen to students wants and needs, especially when it comes to existential meaning-making. Student 10 expresses how every single student has a different attention span and therefore it is important to consider different ways of including existential meaning-making in education.

"I think a bit of both. It should not become too businesslike because then students will also lose their concentration. Because every person has a different way of paying

attention. And how long that attention span is and what interests them. I think that's why it would be really important to do it in varied ways. Because one person likes to listen to someone giving a workshop. And the other person likes to do something and can achieve much more if they put something into practice. Or to talk about it in a very casual way. So, I think the most important thing would be that it would be done in different ways."

Concept of freedom within education

Third, almost every participant has mentioned the word 'freedom' at least once during the interview. Freedom, as how students themselves express it, has been shown by the data as extremely relevant for the students when it comes to education. Even though not a single question was asked about this, students were compelled to bring it up on their own. Therefore, the following section will dive deeper into this self-identified need by students towards their existential meaning-making.

How students perceive freedom in relation to education differs slightly. Multiple students mention how they would like to have more freedom in choosing how to finish a class or finish an assignment, for example by having the choice between finishing the assignment with a presentation or with a written piece. In the quote below, student 1 expresses how she likes to have freedom choosing how she wants to complete the assignments. She also links this freedom to ways of dealing with life questions, and that handling these life questions might be different for everyone.

"Yes, I think an assignment is fine, but perhaps the students can also choose in what form they will complete those assignments. So, whether they give a presentation or whether they are going to make a report or make a poster or whatever. I think that when it comes to life questions, I think that they are also very important, because that is also something very big. A teacher cannot decide for a group of students how to best answer these, but those students can show themselves in their own way."

Freedom has also been mentioned a lot by students in relation to time and space. They describe how they wish there was more time and space for them to explore what they want in life and who they are and who they want to be. Student 7 describes how she wishes there was more freedom in education to explore who you really are.

“And I have the feeling that schools should look at that a little more. Who is the person? And not just give the lesson and do just that. More freedom for people to be able to discover themselves. To discover who they are. I think they should pay more attention to this within education. More freedom.”

Student 10 expresses how she has the feeling that she constantly has to fit within the box, and that there is barely any time to explore. And if you make the choice as a student to explore, you will be held accountable for this.

“Nowadays I get the idea that it's always just running, flying, jumping. And you just have to draw within the boxes. That you hardly have the space to explore anymore. And if you do that, it is often wrong.”

The longing for freedom in various forms expressed by the students corresponds with what has been described under the section of space for existential meaning-making in education, which is that students feel that there is only time and attention for passing classes and exams. This result matches with the argument voiced by Biesta (2022) that there is too much focus on qualification in recent education because this is measurable, and not enough focus on subjectification. This focus on qualification, brings pressure on students to perform well. As shown by the quote of the student above, she has the feeling that if she does take space to explore what she wants, she steps outside the box that is made for her. Stepping outside this box, is wrong. ‘The box’ in this quote represents the aspect of qualification. Students are constantly trying to keep up with assignments and passing exams in order to stay within the box. What gets lost while being forced in the box, is the opportunity to explore oneself in relation to the world, and thus **subjectification**.

Commented [N10]: Given that the concept of freedom comes out so significantly in your results, it would be interesting to dig back into the literatures on freedom (or even structured freedom) within schools. How is it conceptualised etc.

Conclusion

The following research question is central to this master thesis: How do MBO students perceive existential meaning-making in the context of educational spaces? In the following chapter, the sub-questions are concisely answered to eventually form an answer to the main research questions.

Before answering the sub-questions, it is important to revisit and emphasize the context of this research: the existential life experience of quitting and reorientating towards a new study is summed up. The data shows that every single student struggled to different degrees with making this choice. The feelings of ambivalence, confusion, disappointment and failure exemplify the difficulty of making a decision. Students feel that they have to make a decision which is determinative for the rest of their life and therefore feel a lot of pressure and uncertainty towards the future. This choice is a threat to the ontological security of students, because the self-evident bubble of life has been broken, as Jacobs (2020) puts it. The students are experiencing ontological uncertainty which can have a massive effect on students' self-coherence, perception of control and predictability which eventually might lead to an existential meaning-making crisis (Dweck, 2017 in Van den Berg & Scherer-Rath, 2023). The two existential life questions that arise from the existential life experience of re-orientating oneself are: "What do I want with my life?" and "What study am I going to choose?".

The first sub-question is as follows: *Which existential meaning-making needs do MBO students find relevant?* Six existential meaning-making needs have been mapped, which seem to represent what makes life meaningful for the students or which they need in order to regain and maintain control of their life after experiencing an existential life event or crisis. These are: (i) relationships/connectedness, (ii) personal development, (iii) coherence, (iv) community, (v) self-efficacy and (vi) competence/recognition. In chapter 2, it was shown in detail and with direct quotes of the students themselves, how the significance of importance and depth per existential meaning-making need might vary highly per individual.

The second sub-question is: *What are some of the ways in which these existential meaning-making needs are met or not in their education?* Most students answered that, according to them, there is not enough space for existential meaning-making within education. Some students have mentioned SLB, where themes around existential meaning-making have been mentioned sporadically, but students miss talking about this more profound level. Besides

Commented [N11]: Yes. This is good. It would also be interesting to see how these inform the existing literature? Are the needs of MBO special/ different from the ways in which other people (mentioned in your literature) have mapped these needs? Why or how? In other words, how do you inform theory/ literature based on your findings?

insufficient time for discussing existential meaning-making on a profound level, students express how education especially revolves around going to class, passing exams and doing assignments. In other words, too much time is spent on qualification and not enough time on subjectification, as also mentioned by Biesta (2022). While a lot of time is spent on qualification, students would prefer to spend some more time on exploring their values and reflecting upon themselves and their choices.

What was noticeable during the interviews with the students, was how many of them struggled with finding the right words for what they meant when it comes to existential meaning-making. The direct quotes show how they have difficulties with expressing themselves. One could argue that the fact that students struggle with articulating themselves regarding existential meaning-making, already says something about how little time is spent on these themes within education. It was noticeable that these themes played a role in their mind and life – consciously or unconsciously.

Where a lot of students had struggles in articulating their feelings and thoughts, a couple of students were able to express themselves better. Those students who were able to articulate themselves better, have in common that they all had past or present mental health issues and were receiving professional help. Their mental health issues all began during or after the existential life experience of re-orientating themselves towards a new study. The students mention how speaking to a specialist significantly helped them to untangle their thoughts and tell how talking to a specialist might also be one of the options for other students to untangle their thoughts. This could imply that there was not enough space at school to talk about existential meaning-making and that this gap was filled by their therapist. The absence of space, time and or resources for existential meaning-making in schools might leave students without necessary support. This lack of time and space for existential meaning-making could possibly be related to poor mental health among students. This outcome matches with the idea of Bertram-roost (2021) to pay more attention to the existential dimension in education. The mental health issues which arose for some students during or after their existential life experience of re-orientating confirms the link Bertram-Troost (2021) makes between the poor mental health of youngsters and the difficulties of answering existential questions.

In chapter four, the third sub-question has been explored. *How do MBO students see the role of education in meeting their existential meaning-making needs?* Most students allocate a role to education to talk about existential meaning-making. To what extent they allocate a role to

education and how they envision this role, varied per student. Multiple forms were mentioned, such as: (i) individual conversations with specialist, (ii) making it part of citizenship education, (iii) educate parents on what existential meaning-making involves and talk about this with parents and students on parent evenings (iii) compose a special subject which revolves around existential meaning-making (iv) make existential meaning-making an elective and (v) invite a guest speaker to speak about existential meaning-making.

Three main aspects of the content and the form were expressed by students. First, students emphasize the importance of practical assignments, to keep attention and interest high. Secondly, students voice very clearly that there is not one method that fits all students. A variety of methods to deal with existential meaning-making is best to take into account different needs of students. Thirdly, the concept of freedom has been shown to be extremely relevant for students concerning their education. Freedom in relation to education has been mentioned in multiple ways. Freedom in choosing how to finish a class or assignment by having a choice in making a presentation or writing a piece. But also, freedom in relation to time and space has been mentioned a lot. The students express how they have a desire for more time and space to explore who they are and what they want in life. This desire for freedom in multiple ways can also be traced back to students feeling that there is too much attention for assignments and exams. From this data it can be concluded that according to students, there is a misbalance within education when looking at the three dimensions mentioned by Biesta (2015, 2022). According to the students within this research there is too much attention for qualification and not enough space for subjectification. Subjectification, according to Biesta (2022) is namely tied together with freedom, giving students the opportunity to explore their freedom in connection with the world.

Answering the main research question

What the research has revealed, is that MBO students experience significant struggles and uncertainties when it comes to quitting their study and reorienting towards a new study. These lead to existential struggles and sometimes even existential crises which unfold for some students into a poor mental health. Two main existential questions come to the fore: “What study am I going to choose?” and “What do I want with my life?”. Students express having difficulty with articulating their feelings and thoughts around the topic of existential meaning-making. The students who are able to articulate themselves better have had or are still receiving mental health support in some kind of form. These students suggest that talking to a specialist could benefit others in managing their existential concerns. The lack and

absence of dedicated space, time, or resources for existential meaning-making in schools might leave students without necessary support. This lack of time and space for existential meaning-making could possibly be related to poor mental health among students.

The research identifies six existential meaning-making needs for the respondents in MBO: relationships/connectedness, personal development, coherence, community, self-efficacy, competence/recognition. However, students express that they feel that there is insufficient space within education to explore these needs deeply. Most students allocate a role for education to talk about existential meaning-making, opinions on the form and the extent vary per student. Suggestions to integrate existential meaning-making include individual conversations with specialist, making it part of citizenship education, educating parents, compose special subject, making an elective and inviting guest speakers. Within the integration emphasis should be on practical assignments, varied methods and providing freedom to make education a place for exploration of the self in regard to the world.

Circling back to the main research question: *How do MBO students perceive existential meaning-making in the context of educational spaces?* Students perceive existential meaning-making as an important yet underrepresented aspect of their educational experience. Students express how they feel that in their current educational practices, there is too much focus on qualification at the expense of personal exploration in connection to the world around them. Students desire more space and time within education to explore their own values, choices and goals in life. Including the existential dimension alongside the academic achievements might ensure a better balance for students to develop themselves as confident human beings.

Discussion

The findings of the research suggest that students facing an existential life experience, such as quitting and reorientating towards a new study, encounter ontological uncertainty and struggle with future direction and self-identity. The key existential meaning-making needs found are: (i) relationships/connectedness, (ii) personal development, (iii) coherence, (iii) community, (iv) self-efficacy and (v) recognition/competence. These key existential meaning-making needs provide them with belonging, emotional support, sense of growth, stability, being impactful and autonomous. Students express a desire to talk about existential

meaning-making more and are missing opportunities to do this at school. Integrating existential meaning-making within education could enhance students' development and emotional health what could potentially help to prevent poor mental health. Most students believe that education should address existential meaning-making in some kind of form. The forms they suggest are varying, but they emphasize to keep the material practical and take individual needs of students into account. A reoccurring and overarching theme throughout the data was the longing for more freedom within the educational environment.

Commented [N12]: This sounds a bit repetitive. I would liked to see more 'implications' of research here.

Limitations and suggestions for further research

Despite delivering valuable insights, this study also has some limitations. The study was focused on MBO students because there is a general need for more research on existential meaning-making among students in education, which likely includes MBO students as well. Vocational education is very practical and usually involves younger students compared to higher education (HBO and university students are often one or two years older when they start studying). Therefore, existential meaning-making needs and the perception of existential meaning-making in educational spaces might differ from HBO and university students. The contextual factors are important to consider and therefore further research is needed to understand whether there are significant differences in existential meaning-making between MBO-, HBO-, and university students.

Within this research, the choice has been made to do phenomenological interviews and focus on the perception of 10 participants. Therefore, the obtained data is very detailed but does not fully represent the entire MBO student population. Therefore, a suggestion for future research would be to include a larger group of MBO students from various schools across multiple areas. This way, the findings are more representative for the entire population to gain a deeper understanding of the perception of existential meaning-making according to MBO students across the country. In addition, no particular analysis have been made between the differences based on gender. Gender could potentially play an important role when looking at existential meaning-making. Accordingly, paying specific attention to gender would be interesting for follow up research.

Commented [N13]: Or any other demographics?

Furthermore, within this research, a lot of focus has been on how to possibly support individual students with existential meaning-making quests and issues. This individual-centric solution might imply that individuals have to solve systematic societal problems on their own. Instead, it would be more effective to tackle the root causes of these societal

issues. Addressing these underlying problems would reduce pressure and the burden on individuals.

References

- Agirdag, O., Biesta, G., Bosker, R., Kuiper, R., Nieveen, N., Raijmakers, M. en Boogaard, M. (2021). Kaders voor kansen. Naar een beoordelingskader kansengelijkheid voor het funderend onderwijs. Verdiepende studie Wetenschappelijke Curriculumcommissie.
- Alase, A. (2017). The Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA): A Guide to a Good Qualitative Research Approach. *International Journal of Education and Literacy Studies*, 5(2), 9–19.
- Alma, H., Derkx, P., Suransky, C. (2012). Zingeving en humanisering wetenschappelijk doordacht. In: Alma, H. & Lensvelt-Mulders, G. red. (2012) *Waardevolle wetenschap. Zingeving en humanisering in het wetenschappelijk onderwijs*. Utrecht: Universiteit voor Humanistiek pp. 168-178.
- Alma, H. (2018) *De Kunst van Samenleven. Een pleidooi voor een pluralistische samenleving*. Brussel: VUBPRESS
- Attard, J. (2015). The design and validation of a framework of competencies in spiritual care for nurses and midwives: A modified Delphi study (Doctoral dissertation). University of South Wales, UK.
- Bauman, Z. (2000). *Liquid Modernity*. Polity
- Baumeister, R.F. (1991). *Meanings of Life*. The Guilford Press: London
- Baumeister, R. F., Vohs, K. D., Aaker, J. L., & Garbinsky, E. N. (2013). Some key differences between a happy life and a meaningful life. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 8(6), 505–516. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2013.830764>
- Beck, U., & Beck-Gernsheim, E. (2002). *Individualisation. Institutionalized Individualism and its Social and Political Consequences*. London: Sage.
- Bertram-Troost, G. (2021). The alleged absence of attention to existential questions in citizenship education programs: Towards a better understanding of the possible relation between existential needs of youngsters and staff, worldview diversity and citizenship
- Bertram-Troost, G. (2022). *Menswording in een laag-vertrouwensamenleving: Kansen en uitdagingen voor onderwijs*. Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam.
- Bertram-Troost, G. (2023). *Meer aandacht in onderwijs voor zingevingsvragen: Voorbij pedagogische en levensbeschouwelijke verwaarlozing*. *Tijdschrift voor Orthopedagogiek*, 62(5), 36-43.
- Biesta, G. (2011). Het beeld van de leraar: Over wijsheid en virtuositeit in onderwijs en onderwijzen. *Tijdschrift Voor Lerarenopleiders*, 32(3), 4–11.

- Biesta, G. (2015). Resisting the seduction of the global education measurement industry: Notes on the social psychology of PISA. *Ethics and Education*, 10(3), 348–360. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449642.2015.1106030>
- Biesta, G. (2021). *World-Centred Education: A View for the Present*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003098331>
- Boeije, H. (2005). *Analyseren in kwalitatief onderzoek. Denken en doen*. Uitgeverij Boom onderwijs.
- Boeije, H. & Blijenbergh, I. (2019). *Analyseren in kwalitatief onderzoek: denken en doen*. Boom uitgeverij Amsterdam.
- CBS. (December, 22, 2023). *CBS jaaroverzicht 2023*. Retrieved March 10, 2024, from <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/nieuws/2023/51/cbs-jaaroverzicht-2023>
- Creswell, J. W. (2022). *A Concise Introduction to Mixed Methods Research*. SAGE Publications
- Derckx, P. (2015). The future of humanism. In: Copson, A. & A. C. Grayling. *The Wiley Blackwell Handbook of Humanism* 1st ed. New York: John Wiley and sons. Pp. 426-439.
- Dohmen, J. (September, 29, 2023). *Geef jongeren uitzicht op een zinvol leven*. NRC. Retrieved February 24, 2024, from <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2023/09/29/geef-jongeren-uitzicht-op-een-zinvol-leven-a4175794>
- Elffers, L. (2022). *Onderwijs maakt het verschil*. Kansengelijkheid in het Nederlandse onderwijs. Walburg Pers, Zutphen.
- Frankl, V. E. (1984). Beginselen van de logotherapie. In: Frankle, V.E. *De zin van het bestaan*. Rotterdam: Wetenschappelijke uitgeverij Kooyker p. 121-146
- Jacobs, G. (2020). *Zin in geestelijke verzorging [Oration]*. Retrieved from <https://research.uvh.nl/ws/portalfiles/portal/14763585/Full+Text.pdf>
- Leijssen, M. (2004). Zingeving en zingevingproblemen vanuit psychologisch perspectief. In *Wetenschappelijk denken: een laboratorium voor morgen? Lessen voor de eenentwintigste eeuw* (pp. 241-268). Leuven: Universitaire Pers Leuven
- Leijgraaf, M., Gaikhorst, L., & Volman, M. (2021). *Kansengelijkheid in het onderwijs: een*. Tijdschrift voor Lerarenopleiders, 42, 4.
- Lundvall, M., Palmér, L., Hörberg, U., Carlsson, G., & Lindberg, E. (2022) *Finding an existential place to rest: enabling well-being in young adults*. International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being, 17:1, DOI: 10.1080/17482631.2022.2109812

- Madsen, O. J. (2014). *The therapeutic turn: how psychology altered western culture* (Ser. Concepts for critical psychology: disciplinary boundaries re-thought). Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.
- Madsen, O. J. (2021). *Deconstructing scandinavia's "achievement generation" a youth mental health crisis?* Palgrave Macmillan.
- Michael, K., Solenko, L., Yakhnich, L., & Karnieli-Miller, O. (2018) *Significant life events as a journey of meaning-making and change among at-risk youths*. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 21:4, 439-458, DOI: 10.1080/13676261.2017.1385748
- Nizza, I. E., Farr, J., & Smith, J. A. (2021). Achieving excellence in interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA): Four markers of high quality. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 18(3), 369–386. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2020.1854404>
- Notten, N., Kieft, M., Samenleving, L. G., & Zwolle, H. W. (2022). Kansenongelijkheid in het onderwijs: met de blik op het oosten.
- Nuijen, J., Verweij, A., Dopmeijer, J., Van den Brink, C. (2023). *Mental health and substance use among students: Higher education monitor 2023* (Nr.AF2140). National Institute for Public Health and the Environment; Trimbos instituut. Retrieved March 10, 2024, from <https://www.trimbos.nl/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/AF2140-Higher-Education-Monitor-2023.pdf>
- Palliaweb (2021, December 14). *Zin in onderwijs (toolkit)*. Retrieved on June 15 2024, from [https://palliaweb.nl/onderwijsmaterialen/zin\(geving\)-in-onderwijs](https://palliaweb.nl/onderwijsmaterialen/zin(geving)-in-onderwijs)
- Pietkiewicz, I. & Smith, J.A. (2012) Praktyczny przewodnik interpretacyjnej analizy fenomenologicznej w badaniach jakościowych w psychologii. *Czasopismo Psychologiczne*, 18(2), 361-369.
- RIVM. (November, 30, 2023). *Mentale gezondheid jongeren*. Retrieved March 11, 2024 from <https://www.rivm.nl/gezondheidsonderzoek-covid-19/kwartaalonderzoek-jongeren/mentale-gezondheid>
- Rosa, H. (2016) *Leven in tijden van versnelling. Een pleidooi voor resonantie*. Amsterdam: Boom
- Smaling, A. & Alma, H. (2010). Zingeving en levensbeschouwing: een conceptuele en thematische verkenning. In: Alma, H. & Smaling, A. red. (2010). *Waarvoor je leeft. Studies naar humanistische bronnen van zin*. Amsterdam: Uitgeverij SWP pp. 17-39
- Smit, J. D. (2015). *Antwoord geven op het leven zelf: Een onderzoek naar de basismethodiek van de geestelijke verzorging*. [Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam].
- Smit, J. D. (2015). Praktijk. Begeleiding. Methode, methodiek, methodologie. Het verhoopte doel: Levensfunctionaliteit. Basismethodiek in beeld. In J. D. Smit, *Antwoord geven op het*

leven zelf: Een onderzoek naar de basismethodiek van de geestelijke verzorging (pp. 37-47; pp. 296-301). Delft: Eburon.

Steger, M.F., Oishi, S., & Kashdan, T. B. (2009) *Meaning in life across the life span: Levels and correlates of meaning in life from emerging adulthood to older adulthood*. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 4:1, 43-52, DOI: 10.1080/17439760802303127

Taylor, Ch. (2007) *A secular age*. Cambridge / Massachusetts / London: Harvard University Press.

Trimbos. (November, 11, 2021). *Terechte zorgen over mentale gezondheid en middelengebruik studenten*. Retrieved March 10, 2024 from <https://www.trimbos.nl/actueel/nieuws/terechte-zorgen-over-mentale-gezondheid-en-middelengebruik-studenten/>

Van den Berg, M. C., & Scherer-Rath, M. (2023). *Zingeving en contingentie in het levensverhaal van adolescenten: Een kwalitatief pilotonderzoek naar betekenisgeving bij adolescenten in het voortgezet onderwijs*. *Religie & Samenleving*, 18(2), 104–132. <https://doi.org/10.54195/RS.14875>

Van den Bergh, L., Denessen, E. & Volman, M. (2020). *Werk maken van gelijke kansen*. Didactief Onderzoek. Berchem.

Van Leeuwen, R., & Cusveller, B. (2004). Nursing competencies for spiritual care. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 48, 234-246. doi: 10.1111/j.1365.2648.2004.03192.

Van Leeuwen, R., Tiesinga, L. J., Middel, B., Post, D., & Jochemsen, H. (2009). *The validity and reliability of an instrument to assess nursing competencies in spiritual care*. *Journal of Clinical Nursing*, 18, 2857-2869. doi: 10.1111/j.1365-2702.2008.02594.

Appendix

Appendix 1: Informed consent

Existentiële zingeving in het MBO onderwijs

Leest u a.u.b. de tekst en vink vervolgens elk hokje aan!

Voor de deelnemer:

- Ik heb de informatiebrief gelezen. Ook kon ik vragen stellen. Mijn vragen zijn goed genoeg beantwoord. Ik had genoeg tijd om te beslissen of ik meedoe.

- Ik weet dat meedoen vrijwillig is. Ook weet ik dat ik op ieder moment kan beslissen om toch niet mee te doen met het onderzoek. Of om ermee te stoppen. Ik hoef dan niet te zeggen waarom ik wil stoppen.
- Ik geef de onderzoekers toestemming om mijn gegevens te verzamelen en te gebruiken. De onderzoekers doen dit alleen om de onderzoeksvraag van dit onderzoek te beantwoorden.
- Ik begrijp dat de verzamelde onderzoeksgegevens worden hergebruikt voor vervolgonderzoek dan wel onderzoek in hetzelfde werkveld of onderwijs. Deze gegevens zijn niet herleidbaar naar mij.
- Ik weet dat voor de uitvoering van het onderzoek sommige mensen al mijn gegevens kunnen inzien. Die mensen staan in deze informatiebrief. Ik geef deze mensen toestemming om mijn gegevens in te zien voor deze controle.
- Ik wil meedoen aan dit onderzoek.

Mijn naam is (deelnemer):

Handtekening:

Datum : __ / __ / __

Voor de onderzoeker

Ik verklaar dat ik deze deelnemer volledig heb geïnformeerd over het genoemde onderzoek.

Als er tijdens het onderzoek informatie bekend wordt die de toestemming van de deelnemer zou kunnen beïnvloeden, dan breng ik hem/haar daarvan tijdig op de hoogte.

Naam onderzoeker (of diens vertegenwoordiger):

Handtekening:

Datum: __ / __ / __

Appendix 2:

Opzet vragenlijst

Eerst een introductie geven over het onderzoek.

Mijn onderzoek gaat over de zingevingsbehoeften van MBO studenten. Daarbij leg ik de focus op het perspectief van de studenten zelf. Gedurende dit interview zal ik vooral vragen gaan stellen over zingeving en welke rol onderwijs daar volgens jou in kan/zou/moet spelen. Zingeving gaat over wat er voor jou toe doet in het leven. Denk daarbij aan; doelen die je hebt in je leven, wat je gelukkig of blij maakt in het leven, over voldoening of over een god of religie.

Wat voor opleiding deed je voor dat je het HOP project volgde?

Wat maakte dat deze opleiding niet iets voor jou was?

Hoe kwam je bij het HOP project terecht?

Wat vind je tot nu toe van het HOP project?

Wat hoop(te) je te vinden bij het HOP project?

Je zit nu midden in een (her)oriëntatie proces, hoe ervaar je dat?

Tegen welke problemen loop je aan?

Is er iets wat je mist in het heroriëntatie project? Zo ja, wat mis je?

Welke vragen komen er bij jou omhoog gedurende dit (her)oriëntatie proces?

Wat betekenen deze vragen precies voor je?

Zou je deze vragen, levensvragen noemen?

Wat denk je nodig te hebben om deze vragen beter te kunnen beantwoorden?

Was er ruimte voor dit soort vragen binnen je vorige onderwijs? (middelbare school of MBO) Zo ja, hoe?

Wat voor rol speelt onderwijs in de beantwoording van deze vragen?

Vind jij dat er aandacht zou moeten worden gegeven aan deze levensvragen in het onderwijs? Zo ja, op wat voor manier? En zo niet, waarom niet?

Als er volgens jou geen ruimte is voor levensvragen binnen het onderwijs, waar dan wel volgens jou?

Appendix 3: Original Dutch quotes

Section 1

Existential life experience

Student 10: "Tsjja. Er zijn zoveel opties.. ik ben nog maar 21.. en ik moet nu gaan kiezen wat ik de rest van mijn leven zou willen doen. En dat vind ik gewoon heel lastig. Dan denk ik van ja, weet ik veel. [...]Dat ik nu denk van ja, ik weet nog niet eens zo goed wie ik ben en laat staan dat ik dus ook nu voor diegene moet gaan besluiten wat ik later wil gaan doen. Dus ja, dat

ervaar ik dan als lastig. Ik vind dat, en ik denk dat dat voor de meeste mensen wel geldt, je bent gewoon in die jaren van je tiener jaren gewoon nog zo erg jezelf aan het ontwikkelen en dan moet je al gaan besluiten wat je wil”.

Student 9: *“Ja, gewoon dat je niet weet wat je wil. En dat je eigenlijk, je wordt geforceerd om tussen twee wegen te gaan kiezen”.*

Student 2: *“Ja naar wat ik Misschien echt leuk vind om te doen. Ja, dat vind ik nog wel lastig. Ja, Ik weet niet of ik het altijd wil blijven doen, zeg maar”.*

Student .. *“Ja, Het was wel lastige keuze die ik moest maken, want dan is het een soort van. Zal ik niet gewoon die twee jaar afmaken, en dan ben ik ervan af zeg maar”*

Feelings existential meaning-making

Student 1

Ik heb er niet echt een bepaald gevoel bij ja, gewoon moeheid. Ja gewoon soort van. Ja, Ik weet het niet. Ik weet niet echt wat voor emotie echt het gevoel dat ik daarbij voel. Het is geen blij gevoel, laat ik het daarop houden. Geen positief iets, zou je het.

Student 3

Student: Beetje in de war.

Researcher: In de war. En in de war waarover?

Student: Over ja gewoon. Over wat ik wil doen. Dat klaar ja, of gewoon wat ik wil volgen of wat ik later wil doen.

Student ,,

Student: Ja is wel wisselend soort van. Dan denk ik er wel over. Na van is het niet zonde dat ik er mee ben gestopt. Had ik het niet gewoon moeten afmaken? Als ik er dan over nadenk, denk ik van ja, eigenlijk is het wel goed zo. Ik vind het wel prima zo.

Concept failure

Student 9

Een soort van angst om weer het verkeerde te kiezen. Ja, en ook om mijn ouders teleur te stellen natuurlijk. Want ze hebben wel duidelijk gezegd, we betalen dit jaar nog. En als je weer stopt, dan betalen we helemaal niks meer. Wat ik ook heel goed begrijp. Want het is natuurlijk wel gewoon weggegooid geld.

Student 7

Als dit niet is, wat moet wel zijn? Want ik ben. Ik vind heel veel dingen leuk. Ik ben iemand die overal wel iets zoals ik vind de horeca ook heel leuk, Maar ik heb al gezegd dat ik daar niks in wil, zeg maar voor opleiding, want je kan er altijd nog in werken. Maar ja, ik weet niet. Toen zult het wel vooral met mijn ouders, een beetje niet perse de relatie met mijn ouders stond op scherp, zeg maar verscherpt, maar ook weer wel.

Researcher: Oke, want, want hoe zou je dat omschrijven? Wat er toen gebeurde?.

Student: Gewoon heel boos, gewoon heel teleurgesteld in me dat ik echt merkte van dat ze naar me keken en dachten van ohja ze is gestopt. Weet je wel van waarom kan ze het nou niet, heel erg teleurgesteld ofzo

Student 6

“Dus, toen, ja, ik weet niet zoals ik al zei, het voelde een beetje alsof ik had gefaald, Omdat het wel iets is waar je Natuurlijk al een heel jaar voor hebt gewerkt en dan eigenlijk nog bijna een heel jaar. Dus ja, ik weet niet, ik was een beetje teleurgesteld, ook wel”

Section 2

Personal development

Student 5

Dat is altijd wel gewoon, dingen blijven doen zich blijven leren en het hoeft helemaal niet te zijn. Oh, een bachelor of Masters degree omdat ik daar zin in heb. Ik heb het kan ook gewoon gewoon zijn. Ik wil leren borduren of zo en dan gewoon dat het bij blijven leren of Als je problemen hebt naar therapeut blijven gaan. Of ik wil gewoon hulpvraag aan andere Mensen in plaats van. Gewoon maar gewoon, maar suck it up en zo is het leven nou eenmaal.. Terwijl je ondertussen zoiets hebt van, ugh ik voel me niet goed.

Researcher: Dus eigenlijk zelfontwikkeling is belangrijk voor jou?

Student: Ja zelfontwikkeling en jezelf fysiek en mentaal gezond houden.

Self-efficacy

Student 8:

Researcher: Wat zijn voor jou waarden in je leven die je nastreeft?

Student: Familie, vrienden, geld. Iets bereiken. Zeg maar, in het algemeen niet. Het is wel een groot iets, maar ik bedoel meer... Misschien iets leveren aan de maatschappij. Misschien kan ik ook iets toevoegen aan de maatschappij. Dat zou wel mooi zijn.

Researcher: Mooi! Wat zou je willen toevoegen?

Student: Ik denk gewoon... Stel, ik zou, zeg maar... Financieel vrijstaan. Ik zou succes behalen. Dan zou ik het andere mensen ook willen geven, zeg maar. Ze willen het doorgeven eigenlijk.

Student 4:

Dus die viel heel snel weg, dus u had opeens heel erg van. Ik ben, waar ben ik dan wel Goed voor ben? Ik, dat idee van waar, waar ben ik dan goed voor? Want wat kan ik allemaal? Is Alleen verpleegkundige voor Mij ofzo? [...] Dat je wordt gezien. Niet dat je een soort van tandwiel bent in een machine. Dat vind ik een beetje een overbodige vorm van opleidingen.

Coherence

Student 9:

Want geld maakt niet per se gelukkig. Maar... Mijn doel is zeker wel gewoon... Mijn leven op een rijtje hebben. Als ik hier klaar ben met mijn opleiding. Met deze opleiding dan gewoon werken. Huisje kopen. En dan gewoon langzaam het huisje boompje je beestje. En een beetje het stereotype Hollandse gezinnetje. Dat is gewoon mijn doel eigenlijk.

Student 7

En nu zit je Natuurlijk in, ook Als je het zelf ook een beetje een onzekere fase met alles. Dus ja, dat ik gewoon eigenlijk alles netjes op mijn plek heb. Niet perse dat alles Natuurlijk, je leven altijd goed gaat. Dat is zeker niet, maar meer gewoon dat ik wat meer rust heb en wat meer Vasthouden zo wat

Student 2

Onderzoeker: En wat betekent gelukkig zijn voor jou nou?

Student: Ja. Dat is ook lastig. Even over nadenken hoor. Ja gewoon dat ik gewoon met vrienden en familie kan zijn en dat ik gewoon mijn leven gewoon op een rit heb.

Recognition/competence

Student 1:

Maar ik denk gewoon niet dat je zeg maar Een bepaalde tijd moet je dan hier zijn, en dan Gewoon, zeg Maar dat het een beetje losgelaten wordt en dat het gewoon is van. Ja, Dat is maar gewoon de ruimte heb om mijn eigen dingen te doen. Dat is vooral voor mij vrijheid.

Researcher: Hoor ik daarin ook een stukje vertrouwen? Heb ik dat goed?

Student: Ja, vertrouwen in jou dat het wel goed komt en dat het wel lukt allemaal.

Researcher: Ja ja snap ik ook wel. Ja altijd denk ik ook wel gewild op die leeftijd

Student: Deze Mensen zien dat niet echt. Als je nog 17 bent, dan ben je nog jong en, dan denk ik van ja, je hebt nog hulp nodig, maar dan denk jij van nou laatmaar gewoon, ja ja.

Relationships/connectedness

Student 9:

Ja, vrienden gewoon. Dat je elkaar ook een beetje erdoorheen trekt. We hebben natuurlijk allemaal wel eens een momentje gehad. En iedereen heeft wel eens gehad dat de relatie overging. Of dat je even in het donker weer zat. En familie wat dat betreft, ja... Ik heb geen contact meer met mijn vader sinds een paar maanden. Maar

ik merk dat ik wel heel erg met mijn moeder die kant van de familie... Dat ik dat heel belangrijk vind. Dat onderhouden. Dat ik ook echt wel denk van... Ik geef ze vandaag een extra dikke knuffel. Want dat kan je laatste zijn.

Student 10

Maar ik heb heel erg veel last van eenzaamheid gehad. Sterker nog, van mijn elfde tot nog steeds wat nu, deal ik met heel veel eenzaamheid. Omdat ik gewoon tot die tijd eigenlijk geen dichtbij zijnde vrienden had. En mensen zijn toch gewoon, ja, dieren die gewoon in een gezelschap moeten leven. Want anders is gewoon de eenzaamheid dood bijna. Dus daar heb ik heel veel last van gehad. En daarom vind ik het dus ook zoiets belangrijks. Want ik weet gewoon hoe naar het is, zeg maar. Dus ja, dat gun ik mensen gewoon niet.

Student 5:

Student: Gelukkig zijn. Mensen om je heen hebben die om je geven.

Community

Student 4

Thuis voelen. Het is heel abrupt. En ik kan niet direct zeggen wat dat doet of het de opleiding is, of dat het de vorm is of dat de mensen zijn. Het is gewoon een gevoel die naar boven komt op het moment dat je ergens binnenloopt.

Researcher: Maar jij vindt het dus wel belangrijk om onderdeel te voelen van iets groters?

Zeker ja, ik vind het niet fijn als ik ergens naar binnenlopen en het gevoel dat weet ik dat als ik hier weg zou zijn dat het niks zou doen. Het idee dat ik. Ik wil wel het gevoel hebben dat waar dat ik als ik binnen ben of als ik er ben dat ik wel op dat ik op mijn plek ben.

Student 5

Researcher:: En wat maakt dan dat je dat je het belangrijk vindt om met gelijkgezinden te zijn?

Student: Connectie, dat je een beetje goed kan samenwerken. Als je een beetje een beetje like minded bent, kan je vaak beter ook samenwerken ookal mag je elkaar niet zo. Kan je beter elkaar omgaan. Je zal waarschijnlijk meer aanhang vinden, Dat is meer vrienden. En je doet allemaal iets wat jullie allemaal leuk vinden. Het is een beetje een gezamenlijk iets.

Section 3

Space for existential meaning-making in education

“Niet echt eigenlijk? Nee, Het is niet dat we er echt in verdiept hebben of zo. Ja wel gewoon bijvoorbeeld SLB heeft die vraag van Van waar ik nu sta en zo, maar ze hebben er niet echt in verdiept. Niet het grotere plaatje”.

“Bijvoorbeeld, ja gesprek zoals Wat u met mij aanging? Dat heeft mijn SLB’er nog nooit gedaan zoiets. Wel zoiets, maar niet echt zo op ons gevoelens en zo ja, zoiets”.

“Heb je niet heel erg veel ruimte om jezelf te zijn, want Je moet daar heel erg Natuurlijk een ideaalbeeld van. Een verpleegkundige moet je ook netjes presenteren en eigenlijk kan je niet zoveel 100% Natuurlijk jezelf zijn daar. Ja, school gaat ging bij mij altijd heel erg over je toetsen halen, je opt achter maken en wat je de rest doet. Ja, dat boeit ons eigenlijk niet, zeg maar precies dat gevoel heb ik altijd gehad”.

“Nee. Dat is gewoon heel zakelijk. Je gaat van vak naar vak. Je leert wat je moet leren. Je hebt je toetsen, je hebt je examens. En dan ga je door.

[...]Maar ik vind dat wel echt een belangrijk aspect, zeg maar zelf. Als ik merk waar ik nu ben en sta. Ik wou dat ik eerder naar mijn waarde had geleefd. En wat ik nodig heb. Dus ja, ik zou het wel fijn hebben gevonden als daar meer aandacht naar werd gegeven”.

“Het voelt heel Erg alsof je in een in een rijdende trein stapt. Dus je kan niet echt nadenken of je de goede keuze hebt gemaakt. Je stapt in en je begint. Over de periode

heen bedenk je het of je het leuk vindt of niet, en dat vind ik zelf niet zo'n goed systeem".

Finding the right words for what they mean

"Ik heb dan iets in mijn hoofd. Wat dat dan is, en dan ben ik heel even bezig met oké ja, hoe verwoord ik dat? Hier kan ik dat in beeld brengen, ook Omdat het zulke grote vragen zijn".

"Maar de vraag is zelf zijn niet per se? Ik heb vaak al een mening in mijn hoofd van wat ik ervan vind. Dan is het even nadenken van oké, hoe kan ik dat dan zeggen?"

"ja. Ik weet het in mijn hoofd, Maar ik weet niet hoe het moet uitleggen".

Section 4

Importance existential meaning-making according to students

"Dat denk ik wel. Ik denk dat voor Iedereen eigenlijk wel belangrijk is van. Ja, wie ben je nou eigenlijk? Waar sta je voor? Dat soort dingen".

"Maar ik denk dat iedere student in een soort vorm daarmee struikelt met het idee van waar ze willen staan in het leven. En toevallig ben ik dan wel heel erg van. Oh, ik praat veel. Ik praat eigenlijk elke dag mijn vader en moeder over Kwesties nou voor wat ik gekozen heb en dus in ik ben er makkelijk over om het om dat te vertellen. Maar Er zijn ook heel veel Mensen die dat niet doen en het gewoon Inslikken".

"Maar ik denk op zich wel vooral als er iets misgaat in die, wat wil ik? Misschien dat het niet helemaal wordt behandeld, maar eerder als jij wilt daar hulp bij wilt, dat die Er is".

"Ja, Ik denk dat zeg maar op een opleiding zelf, vind ik dan, dan heb je dat heb je zelf gekozen, dan moet je gewoon echt naar dat beroep gaan werken, vind ik".

"Maar ik denk op zich wel vooral als er iets misgaat in die, wat wil ik? Als jij helpt wil bij die vraag, dat die er is"

"Researcher: Maar je kan er op school niet echt ruimte voor vinden. Of over praten. Waar zou er dan ruimte voor moeten worden?"

Student: In je eigen vrije tijd.

Researcher: Vrije tijd. En hoe dan?

Student: Boeken lezen, kennis opmaken. Je kan altijd wel ergens”.

Integrating existential meaning-making

“Ja, ook wel opdrachten. Want zo blijf je ook een beetje erbij. Want als je een uur lang naar iemand gaat zitten luisteren... en na een half uur dwaal je wel af. En dat je bijvoorbeeld een opdracht maakt of dat je een vraag beantwoord... of een soort kahoot-quiz-achtig. Of bijvoorbeeld zo'n Google Forms. Dat ze daarin kunnen zetten wat ze willen”.

“Ik denk een beetje van beiden. Het moet namelijk niet te zakelijk worden want dan raken ook studenten hun concentratie kwijt. Want elke persoon heeft een andere manier van aandacht. En hoe lang die aandachtspan is en wat ze interesseert. Ik denk dat het daarom heel belangrijk zou zijn om het op variatieve manieren te doen. Omdat de één luistert graag naar iemand die een workshop geeft. En de ander doet graag is veel meer bezig, kan veel meer bereiken als ze iets in de praktijk doen. Of op een heel erg casual manier erover te hebben. Dus ik denk dat het dan het belangrijkste zou zijn dat het op verschillende manieren zou worden uitgevoerd”.

Concept of freedom within education

“Ja, ik denk dat we een opdracht wel best is, maar Misschien ook dat de studenten zelf kunnen kiezen in wat voor vorm ze die opdrachten gaan maken. Dus of ze een Presentatie geven of dat ze verslag gaan maken of een poster gaan maken of wat dan ook. Ik denk dat ik bij levensvragen, Dat is gewoon denk ik ook heel belangrijk, want Dat is ook gewoon iets heel groots. Dat kan je niet, zeg maar voor een docent kan dat niet voor een groep studenten in een dingetje doen, maar die studenten kunnen zichzelf wel Op hun eigen manier Laten zien zo”.

“En ik heb het gevoel dat het scholen daar net iets meer naar moet kijken van. Wie is het persoon? En niet Alleen die les gegeven, maar gewoon ook. Meer vrijheid om

Mensen zelf? Ja te kunnen Laten ontdekken, zeg maar wie ze zijn. Echt wel dat dat dat daar meer aandacht moet aan besteden. Meer vrij.

“Want ik krijg tegenwoordig het idee dat het altijd maar gewoon rennen, vliegen, springen is. En je moet maar gewoon binnen de hokjes tekenen. Dat je nauwelijks meer de ruimte krijgt om te ontdekken. En als je dat doet, dan is het vaak fout”.