Article

Finnish social services students' perceptions of purpose and helping unknown others

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Abstract

This mixed methods study introduces the concept of purpose in the social pedagogical education of Finnish social services students ($N = 151$). The aim of this study is to specify the purpose profiles of the students and to investigate how students with different profiles define the intended outcome of having a purpose in life and why they want to help unknown others. Three purpose profiles are identified: dabbler, purposeful and dreamer. Most of the social services students appear to be dabblers, who differ from the purposeful group in that they keep searching for new purposes in life. Purposeful students were the most able to address values as their guiding principles in life, although what was most important for students in all profiles was to pursue a pleasant life rather than a value-driven or some form of good life. Purposeful students also specified value-based helping goals more than others and felt that their own well-being was the key to helping others. The study points out that students' awareness of their values and purposes should be promoted during their social pedagogical education. Most students might not be aware why they are pursuing a helping profession. Students could be supported in identifying helping unknown others as their life purpose in order to promote their wellbeing, satisfaction at work and wider understanding of the personal level and social level impacts of helping.

Keywords: social services students; life purpose; purpose profiles; helping; values; motives; self-awareness; social pedagogy; Finland

Introduction

Finnish social services students are educated for a helping profession (see Guggenbuhl-Craig, 1971), supporting clients in various settings including day care, child protection and overall rehabilitative work, with clients of varying age, and advocating for their social rights (Mäkinen et al., 2011). The education of social services students at Metropolia University of Applied Sciences, the context of the study, is based on social pedagogy, which combines social and educational means to support clients (Social Services Curriculum, 2019). The students should become 'capable of analysing social phenomena and understand their significance to people's lives and wellbeing' (Social Services Curriculum, 2019). In social pedagogy people should understand their social responsibility while they pursue their individual goals in life (Hämäläinen, 2015). The aim of social pedagogical resource-oriented practice is to help people to reach their full potential through holistic relationship-based education (Úcar, 2013). This in the essence could mean that, as future social pedagogues, the social services students are capable of helping their clients to identify and develop their purpose in life.

Searching for meaning and purpose in life is fundamentally human (Frankl, 1959). Purpose in life is defined as 'a stable and generalized intention to accomplish something that is at once meaningful to the self and of consequence to the world beyond the self' (Damon et al., 2003, p. 121). People who have identified purpose in their lives intentionally aim at benefitting the world beyond themselves (Damon et al., 2003; Moran, 2009). Purposeful people are better able to promote the purpose development of others (Tirri and Kuusisto, 2016) and they demonstrate greater wellbeing than people who show precursor forms of purpose (Damon et al., 2003). Sense of purpose in social services work has been linked with wellbeing and committed work practices and, therefore, to the provision of better services (Itzick et al., 2018). Conversely, purposelessness can cause depression, self-absorption and unstable interpersonal relationships (Damon et al., 2003). It can also pose a threat to democratic societies if people merely undertake self-focused pursuits rather than being oriented toward serving and helping others or advancing societal development in different ways (Damon, 2008).

When people have chosen to study to become professionals helpers (see Guggenbuhl-Craig, 1971) we would easily expect them to be consciously and intentionally oriented toward benefitting unknown others (see Biggerstaff, 2000). Helping professions are often perceived through the perspective of being 'called' to do the work for the benefit of others and helping others for the intrinsic social value of helping (see Ponton et al., 2014). There are no studies available about Finnish social services students' motives to study the field, but studies in other contexts on social work students' motives (Knezievik and Ovsenik, 2015; Liedgren and Elvhage, 2015; Ngai and Cheung, 2009; Toros and Medar, 2015) have shown that students often have both individualistic motives, such as personal development, as well as social motives, such as alleviating poverty, for study in the field. In her social work career choice instrument Biggerstaff (2000) defined motives based on four dimensions: personal and family experiences, desire to be a therapist, prestige of the profession and social change mission of the profession. She explained that the choice of a career in social work is a 'multidimensional construct matching personal and social change values' (Biggerstaff, 2000, p. 34). However, in her instrument she was not able to depict a specific service motive and discussed that this may be due to the fact that it is either so basic to social work that there is little variability in this factor among students or it is so closely bound with the social change mission, leading to duplication rather than existing as a separate part of the construct of career choice motivation. A study of Swedish social work students showed that the students were more oriented toward individualistic, self-focused motives to study the field than the social change motives (Liedgren and Elvhage, 2015).

A Croatian study (Knezievik and Ovsenik, 2015) of social work students' motives to study the field showed that those students who posed an altruistic orientation to the work – a desire to benefit others with no expected benefit to themselves (Batson et al., 1999) – succeeded better with their studies than those who lacked this altruistic orientation. The orientation to benefit others has been found to increase job satisfaction in 'calling professions' such as social services (see Ponton et al., 2014). Having a calling or altruistic orientation toward benefitting others can be associated with having a purpose in helping (see Damon et al., 2003; Moran, 2009). However, the question of purposeful helping also includes, in addition to personal meaningfulness, the service motivation or motivation for social change mission (see

Damon et al., 2003; Damon, 2008; Moran, 2009). Moran (2009) has specified purpose as a moral compass in prosocial activities that are representative of genuine purposes. This prosocial emphasis can be perceived as an aspect of being morally aware of fundamental human value (McBeath and Webb, 2002) and intending to advance the conditions that promote wider communal and societal wellbeing, and not only advancing one's own life conditions. People who have other-focused motives in engaging in civic activities are also more committed toward advancing societal conditions than people who have merely self-focused motives (Malin et al., 2015). Developing societal conditions and all-inclusive community-oriented practices are considered important aspects of social pedagogy (Hämäläinen, 2015; Social Services Curriculum, 2019).

In the US and UK, social work-related education has been criticised for being dominated by cognitive-behavioural and evidence-based treatments rather than identification of feelings or deeper purposes in one's helping orientation (Trevithick, 2014; Urdang, 2010) and this is something to be aware of in terms of Finnish social services education as well. Students need guidance in becoming aware of how their feelings, attitudes, life purposes and relationships with clients are major factors in the helping process (Barlow and Hall, 2007; Urdang, 2010). If these fundamental prerequisites for building relationships with clients are neglected it may cause managerialistic approach in social services work (see Trevithick, 2014). McBeath and Webb (2002, p. 1023) have emphasised particularly the critical need for social workers to understand their moral identity: 'if a social worker does not recognize his or her moral identity and calling, then one may wonder whether such a person ought to do social work at all'. Ultimately, purposeful social services professionals are capable of identifying values and deeper pursuits that direct their lives generally and that direct their professional helping goals (see Moran, 2009). Having a purpose in life, whether in benefitting the people closest to oneself, or unknown others – or wider societies – requires that one has identified why and how one's activities are meaningful not only to oneself but also to others (Moran, 2009; also Manninen et al., 2018a). The starting point of social services and social work education should be to recognise the students' prerequisites for becoming professionals in helping as acknowledging their deeper pursuits and values in life (Valutis et al., 2012). For students in social pedagogy, it is especially important to recognise how they are oriented toward serving communities, because community-oriented practices are specifically emphasised in social pedagogical practices (Hämäläinen, 2015).

Yet, according to our study (2018a) students in social services seem rather self-focused in how they justify their long-term life goals. They are mostly concerned with their close relationships, hedonistic pursuits, self-actualisation and being happy. Helping is valued highly, but investigation into the students' open-ended answers on their purposes show that a relatively small number of students mention helping unknown others or improving societal conditions as their life purpose. It has been stated that being actively involved in concrete helping activities, for example, in social services students' field-based education would improve the students' identification with helping as their life purpose (see Malin et al., 2013). According to our most recent study (2018b), this is in some respects true: social services students felt a greater sense of purpose after taking part in concrete helping activities in field-based education. Yet the mechanisms for this improved sense of purpose do not seem clear. Only a small number of students gave some consideration to client perspective or wider societal concerns when asked to reflect upon their most influential field education experience (Manninen et al., 2018b).

Nevertheless, these types of trends have proven rather common when young people's purposes have been studied (Damon, 2008). Young people and young adults tend to be focused on their immediate close circles and on rather self-serving pursuits (Damon, 2008). For example, most young people and young adults appear to exhibit precursor forms of purpose rather than genuine purpose (Malin et al., 2013). This means that they are still searching for their purposes, do not show engagement in actualising their purposes or are not concerned with the beyond-the-self implications of their purpose. These precursor forms of purpose have been identified with reference to profiles of the disengaged, dreamers, and dabblers (Damon, 2008; Moran, 2009; Tirri and Kuusisto, 2016). The disengaged are detached, but may pursue hedonistic or ego-boosting activities (Damon, 2008). Dreamers have high ideals, but lack the intention to actualise them (Damon, 2008). Dabblers show engagement in possible purposeful pursuits, yet they remain open to finding new purposes in life (Damon, 2008; Tirri and Kuusisto, 2016). Dabblers can also be engaged in prosocial activities, but they are not capable of providing prosocial justifications for

the pursuit of their life goals (Moran, 2009). In practice this means that they do not know why they are engaged in prosocial activities such as pursuing a helping profession; neither can they identify what are the implications of these activities for oneself or others. Purposeful individuals on the other hand have identified their personally meaningful higher-order long-term life goals, which they justify with reference to personal and prosocial benefits (Moran, 2009; see also Manninen et al., 2018a).

Helping others can generally be based on varying motives and incentives: mere self-serving motives, genuine concerns for others or mixed motives (Roeser et al., 2014, p. 231). A self-serving motive to help others is based on the perceived benefits of helping; for example it helps you or makes you feel good about yourself. A specified goal in social work ethics generally is that one's helping practices ought to be based on one's own well-being: in order to promote the wellbeing of others one has to be well him or herself: 'Social workers have a duty to take necessary steps to care for themselves professionally and personally in the workplace and in society, in order to ensure that they are able to provide appropriate services' (International Federation of Social Workers , 2018). Having a purpose in life promotes wellbeing (Damon et al., 2003) and could serve as an important basis in ethical social services practices.

The present study aims at identifying Finnish social services students' profiles in purpose and their perceptions of the intended outcome of having a purpose in life and what kind of motives they provide for helping unknown others. In this study, our objective is to identify social services students' deliberate and specified forms of helping and benefitting unknown others (see Guggenbuhl-Craig, 1971). Based on previous purpose studies, especially Moran's (2009) research, we expect purposeful students to have explicitly identified their values more often than other students. We also expect that the personal purposes of purposeful students would be linked with helping and benefitting unknown others more often than those of other students. Moreover, we expect purposeful students to exhibit value-driven justifications for why they want to help unknown others. The aim of this article can be articulated in the following research questions:

(1) What purpose profiles do Finnish social services students exhibit?
(2) How do students with different profiles perceive:

  (a) the role of purpose in their lives: what is the intended outcome of having a purpose in life?
  (b) helping and benefitting unknown others?

Method

Participants

The data for the study were collected at the Metropolia University of Applied Sciences during the fall semester of 2015. This study is a secondary analysis of the data collected in a survey for a larger youth purpose study (Moran, 2014a). The participants were recruited from courses related to field work. The same participants answered three online surveys; this study uses responses from the first survey ($N = 151$). The corresponding author was present during the classes to answer students' questions in order to verify the survey. The overall response rate was 96% ($N = 151$). The Finnish social services students in this study were predominantly female (94%, $n = 142$) and of non-immigrant backgrounds (92%, $n = 139$) with a mean age of 28 years ($SD = 7.03$). The students were first- ($n = 41$), second- ($n = 49$), third- ($n = 38$), and fourth- ($n = 23$) year students.

Measures

The instruments used for the study were compiled by Seana Moran (2014a), at Clark University in the US, for global-level comparative youth purpose studies and have been used during the last few years. In the Finnish context, the instruments have been used within the past few years in studying student teachers' goals and purposes at the University of Helsinki and also in comparing their profiles to students in theology, for example. The Meaning of Life Questionnaire (Steger et al., 2006) has been widely used and validated and the other instruments within this study are being validated in ongoing research with appropriate statistical tests.

The components of purpose set forth by Damon et al.'s (2003) were operationalised with latent variables from Moran (2014a) questionnaire. A sense of purpose was measured with the Meaning of Life Questionnaire (Steger et al., 2006), including two subscales, namely the *presence of purpose* ($\alpha = 0.846$) and the *search for purpose* ($\alpha = 0.870$). Both subscales had five items and were rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). A sample item for presence of purpose is a statement such as 'My life has a clear sense of purpose'; a sample of search for purpose is 'I am seeking a purpose or mission for my life'.

Actualisation of purpose and beyond-the-self orientation were studied with a Purpose Characteristics Questionnaire (Moran, 2014b). The 17 items on the scale address confidence, commitment, motivation, opportunities, skills/knowledge, actions, plans and beneficiaries of the purpose, each rated on a five-point scale (1 = *not at all*; 5 = *extremely*). Examples of items can be found in Table 1. Since this scale has not been widely standardised and validated in Finland before, an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was performed. Any item that 'severely damaged' (Fabrigar et al., 1999, p. 283) assumptions of normality was removed from the EFA. Further, items with communalities below 0.4 were removed (Costello and Osborne, 2005). After the first round of EFA with Maximum Likelihood as the extraction method and Direct Oblimin as a rotation, factor loadings over 0.40 were accepted (see Costello and Osborne, 2005). Any item that loaded over 0.40 on two factors was removed, which in turn improved the determinant. Two items that had high cross-loadings (<0.32) were not deleted; nevertheless, these loadings indicate that students link commitment and confidence with their purpose to benefit themselves and their families. Eventually, 13 items were computed in the final EFA (Table 1). The Determinant (0.001), Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure (0.895) and Bartlett's test of Sphericity ($p = 0.000$) confirmed the sampling adequacy (Field, 2012). A number of factors were identified on the basis of eigenvalues exceeding 1 and on visual inspection of a scree plot (Costello and Osborne, 2005), both of which supported a three-factor structure. The factors were described as *Actualisation of purpose* ($\alpha = 0.888$), *Beyond-the-self* ($\alpha = 0.778$) and *Self and family as beneficiaries* ($\alpha = 0.778$). These three factors explained 69% of the variance.

The qualitative data were gathered using open-ended questions from the Life Aspirations Questionnaire (Magen, 1998): (1) What do you think is your life purpose? (2) Why do you want to accomplish this purpose? and (3) What makes this life purpose important to you?

Table 1. Purpose Characteristics Questionnaire: Factor loadings, communalities ($h2$), and percentages of variance.

Factors and items	N = 151 M (SD)	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	h^2
Actualisation of purpose $\alpha = 0.888$	**3.70 (0.77)**				
-I have specific plans for this purpose	3.05 (1.12)	0.847	0.125	0.120	0.586
-I intentionally choose my activities based on how relevant they are to this purpose	3.61 (1.09)	0.722	−0.175	0.024	0.609
-I have general plans for this purpose	3.56 (1.07)	0.652	−0.108	0.035	0.454
-I am engaged in activities now that support this purpose	3.99 (0.94)	0.636	−0.050	−0.233	0.652
-I am fully committed to this purpose	4.13 (0.89)	0.558	−0.035	−0.365	0.688
-I have the skills and knowledge to pursue this purpose	3.58 (0.94)	0.524	−0.017	−0.226	0.465
-I have confidence that I can pursue this purpose	4.01 (0.92)	0.514	0.011	−0.354	0.578
Beyond-the-self $\alpha = 0.778$	**3.55 (1.04)**				
-This purpose will benefit animals or the environment	3.21 (1.29)	−0.014	−0.801	0.064	0.590
-This purpose will benefit ideas or knowledge domains	3.63 (1.23)	0.132	−0.697	0.017	0.547
-This purpose will benefit others I don't personally know	3.83 (1.23)	−0.070	−639	−0.195	0.531
Self and family as beneficiaries $\alpha = 0.851$	**4.3 (0.80)**				
-This purpose will benefit me	4.34 (0.902)	0.062	0.047	−0.900	0.833
-This purpose will benefit my family and friends	4.25 (1.00)	−0.050	−0.141	−0.700	0.567
-I will have opportunities to act upon this purpose	4.32 (0.828)	0.161	−0.104	−0.663	0.668
Percentage of variance		47.36	13.27	8.17	

Analyses

In order to identify the purpose profiles among Finnish social services students, a cluster analysis with K-algorithm was conducted. Four variables (*search for purpose, presence of purpose, actualisation of purpose*, and *beyond-the-self*) were computed to represent Damon et al.'s (2003) dimensions of purpose.

To specify how the students in different profiles perceived the role of purpose as an intended outcome of having a purpose in life and why the students wanted to help unknown others, open answers were analyzed using inductive content analysis (Elo and Kyngäs, 2008). Answers ($n = 5$) that did not address any specific life goals were removed. The first version of the coding scheme was created inductively by the first and second authors by reading written answers and comparing students' perceptions. To test the coding scheme, the authors independently coded 30% of the answers without profile information. After this round, disagreements were discussed and the coding scheme developed further (Table 2). Then both authors independently coded the remaining answers; the codings were compared and disagreements discussed.

The unit of analysis was a meaning unit, such as 'words, sentences or paragraphs containing aspects related to each other through their content and context' (Graneheim and Lundman, 2004, p. 106). For each answer, the authors determined whether the role of purpose as an intended and expected outcome was to lead a happy and pleasurable life, some form of good life or a value-driven life. Students in the pleasurable life category discussed their desire to be happy and experience life as pleasant. Students in the good life category wanted to lead a good life, be good persons and do something good for others, but they were not able to articulate it more specifically beyond mentioning the good life as a general-level concept. Students in the value-driven category explicitly identified and considered values or guiding principles in life.

The students' reasons for helping and benefiting unknown others were investigated using a similar procedure, first by identifying all possible reasons for helping and then by coding the entire data set according to commonly agreed-upon categories, namely, helping based on values, helping for perceived self-benefits: benefiting myself and my well-being, or self-awareness and one's own wellbeing as a prerequisite to helping others.

In each answer, it was possible to identify more than one perception of the role of purpose; for example, a student could state that he or she wanted to live a happy and pleasurable life, be a good person, and live according to his or her own values. Also in the helping category, the reasons students wanted to help others were all included in one answer. Example quotations related to the coding scheme are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Coding scheme and examples of open answers.

Coding scheme	Examples of students' open answers
Perceptions of purpose in life	
Happy and pleasurable life	To do things that make me happy. To lead a life that feels pleasant. (Dreamer, student 142)
Good life	My purpose in life is to lead a good life. (Dabbler, student 26)
Value-driven life	To take care of other people and construct a world that is as equal as possible because there is a lot of inequality in the world. (Dabbler, student 63)
Perceptions of helping	
Helping for perceived self-benefit	Helping work is wonderful. I get a lot out of it (Dabbler, student 2)
Helping based on self-awareness and one's own well-being	My purpose is my well-being in order to help others to be well. (Purposeful, student 15)
Helping based on values	I want to promote people's well-being, prevent ill-being, and bring happiness and joy, because I believe that everybody deserves to be happy, whoever they are. (Purposeful, student 15)

Results

Purpose profiles of Finnish social services students

To identify purpose profiles of Finnish social services students, a cluster analysis was conducted to classify participants according to their levels of orientation to *searching for purpose, presence of purpose, actualising of purpose*, and *beyond-the-self*. Table 3 shows the descriptive statistics and correlations for

the components of purpose. Correlations demonstrate that presence of purpose and search for purpose are negatively correlated, while presence of purpose correlates strongly with actualisation of purpose. Beyond-the-self is moderately correlated with actualisation of purpose. The correlations provide empirical support for the dimensions of the theoretical construct of purpose (see Damon et al., 2003; Damon, 2008). The means indicate that, even though Finnish social services students had identified some purposes to which they were committed, they were still seeking new purposes.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics and Pearson's r correlations for components of purpose.

|	*M*	*SD*	*α*	**1**	**2**	**3**
1 Search for purpose (scale 1–7)	5.16	1.25	0.870	-		
2 Presence of purpose (scale 1–7)	5.04	1.17	0.846	−0.373 **	-	
3 Actualisation (scale 1–5)	3.70	0.77	0.888	−0.131	0.673 **	
4 Beyond-the-self (scale 1–5)	3.55	1.04	0.778	0.020	0.236 **	0.387 **

$** p < 0.01.$

In cluster analysis, a K-means algorithm was utilised, since it contains the simplest partitional algorithm that provides the benefits of ease of implementation, efficiency and empirical success (Jain, 2010). Two-, three- and four-cluster solutions were tested. A three-cluster solution was selected, since it offered theoretically supported groups (Naes et al., 2010). Damon's profiles (2008, pp. 59–60) were applied in labelling the clusters as (1) *dabbler*, (2) *purposeful* and (3) *dreamer*. The clustering variables differed statistically significantly across the three profiles (Table 4), with medium and large effect sizes ranging from 0.220 to 0.555 (Cohen, 1992, p. 157).

Table 4. Clusters of Finnish social services students' purpose profiles.

		Dabbler n = 86 (57%)	**Purposeful** n = 38 (25.2%)	**Dreamer** n = 27 (17.9%)	*F, p, η_p^2*
1 Search for purpose (scale 1–7)	*M (SD)*	5.68 (0.76)$_a$	3.72 (1.20)	5.53 (1.00)$_a$	60.897 0.000 0.451
	z-scores	*0.43 (0.59)*	*−1.18 (0.94)*	*0.30 (0.80)*	
2 Presence of purpose (scale 1–7)	*M (SD)*	5.05 (0.80)	6.14 (0.55)	3.45 (1.01)	92.241 0.000 0.555
	z-scores	*0.03 (0.69)*	*0.90 (0.52)*	*−1.36 (0.86)*	
3 Actualisation of purpose (scale 1–5)	*M (SD)*	3.89 (0.48)$_a$	4.10 (0.53)$_a$	2.53 (0.72)	80.800 0.000 0.51
	z-scores	*0.25 (0.62)*	*0.52 (0.68)*	*−1.52 (0.93)*	
4 Beyond-the-self (scale 1–5)	*M (SD)*	3.74 (0.89)$_a$	3.88 (0.92)$_a$	2.52 (1.04)	20.909 0.000 0.220
	z-scores	*0.20 (0.85)*	*0.26 (0.89)*	*−1.0 (0.99)*	

Note: Means within a row which share the same subscripts are not significantly different at the $p < 0.05$ level. Games-Howell (Field, 2012, p. 459) pairwise post hoc comparisons were utilised for search and presence, since variances were unequal. For actualisation and beyond-the-self components, Bonferroni post hoc comparison was utilised.

Figure 1 illustrates the profiles of the three clusters. The largest percentage of students were identified as *dabblers* (57%, n = 86). They continue searching for new purposes in life, even though they already experience rather high presence of purpose. They are committed to the pursuit of their purposes, and they also show high anticipated beyond-the-self aspects of purpose. *Purposeful* (25%, n = 38) students rate the search for purpose as low and the presence of purpose as high. They are also highly committed and skillful in their pursuit of purpose, and they show the highest level of anticipated beyond-the-self implications for their purposes. Even though dabblers and purposeful students shared similarities, dabblers were distinct in wanting to keep their options open and look for new purposes in life. *Dreamers* (18%, n = 27) are searching for their purposes in life, and they showed the lowest level of presence of purpose. They were not committed, and they lacked the skills to pursue purpose. They also rated low the beyond-the-self aspects of purpose.
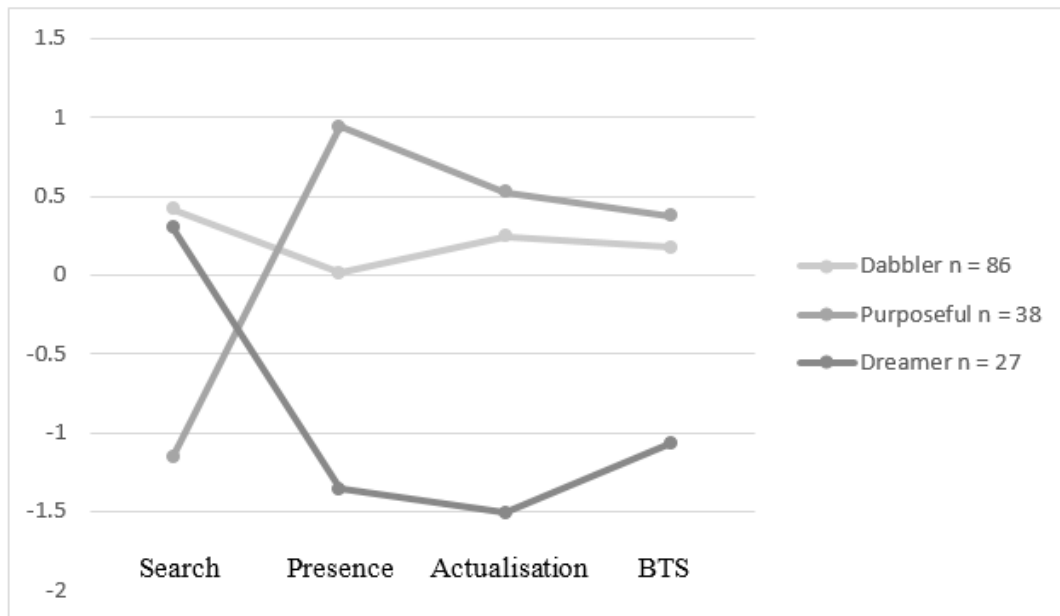
Search   Presence   Actualization TS Actualization

Figure 1. Finnish social services students' purpose profiles based on z-values.

Perceptions of purpose in different profiles

As presented in Table 5 below, most of the students' perceptions of the role of purpose in all profiles were related to having a happy and pleasurable life (68%, *n* = 99). Typically, students perceived their purpose as follows:

> To have an honestly happy life, including a loving marriage, children, and a job that I genuinely enjoy. Because I have one life to live, I want to try to enjoy every moment (Dreamer, student 75).

Among students in all profiles, about half of them (47%, *n* = 68) discussed their desire to lead a good life or be a good person, or they generally invoked some idea of wanting to do good for others. These students related purpose to some ideal form of a good life but were mostly not able to specify this in more detail.

> To do good things in life. To live well and ethically, loving and supporting my fellows (Dabbler, student 123).

In terms of values identified as a moral guideline or principle in life, the *purposeful* students differed from *dabblers* and *dreamers*. They explicitly defined their life goals, using words like value, principle, or guideline. Approximately 45% (*n* = 16) of *purposeful* students showed this kind of thinking with regard to their purposes in life. They did not just list pleasurable life goals or wish to pursue a good life in general. These guidelines or values were, for example, equality, helping described as a calling, faith as a guiding principle in life, or happiness defined as an explicit value. A purposeful student described her values:

> Respecting other people and nature is a fundamental value for me (Purposeful, student 33).

Table 5. Perceptions of role of purpose and helping in different profiles.

		Dabbler n = 85 (58%)	Purposeful n = 36 (25%)	Dreamer n = 25 (17%)	In total N = 146
Perceptions of role of purpose					
	-Happy and pleasurable life	58 (68)	25 (69)	16 (64)	99 (68)
	-Good life	41 (48)	18 (50)	9 (36)	68 (47)
	-Value-driven life	25 (29)	16 (45)	1 (4)	42 (29)
Perceptions of helping					
	-Helping based on values	12 (14)	8 (22)	0	20 (13)
	-Helping for perceived self-benefits	15 (18)	5 (14)	3 (12)	23 (16)
	-Helping based on self-awareness and one's own well-being	8 (9)	6 (17)	1 (4)	15 (10)

Perceptions of helping in different profiles

When perceptions of helping related to students' purpose profiles were identified, value or a helping guideline was most common among *purposeful* students. In the following example, the student reflected that she wanted to promote ecological values:

> To do work that supports the well-being of society and human beings and which is socially and environmentally sustainable. People's well-being, nature, and the well-being of those closest to me are important to me. I think we have to consider a sustainable future (Purposeful, student 128).

Students also viewed helping either as a tool that made them feel good about themselves or as a means of gaining benefits for themselves. For 18% (n = 15) of *dabblers*, helping was considered to bring positive personal benefits in that a person can feel good about him or herself or because helping just generally feels good. Relatively similar proportions of *purposeful* and *dreamer* students thought the same way, as in this example:

> To be happy, actualise my desires and help those in need. In order to feel that my life has a meaning (Dreamer, student 54).

Few students wrote that their own well-being and self-awareness was the key to helping others, as set forth in the ethical principles of social work (International Federation of Social Workers , 2018).

> Through knowing myself I am better able to help others professionally (Dabbler, student 28).

This student had understood that self-awareness is the key to developing as a professional in social services. As a group, *dreamers* discussed helping in their purpose reflections the least.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to identify the purpose profiles of Finnish social services students (N = 151) and determine how students in different profiles perceived the intended outcome of having a purpose in life. Also in this study we investigated why students wanted to help and benefit unknown others. Based on a quantitative analysis, three distinct purpose profiles were found among Finnish social services students. Most were profiled as *dabblers* (57%, n = 86), 25% (n = 38) were *purposeful,* and 18% (n = 27) were *dreamers*. The analysis confirms Damon et al.'s (2003) purpose construct and studies on the profiles of youth purpose (Damon, 2008; Moran, 2009) in that most young people and young adults appear to be *dabblers*. This profile was also the most prominent among student teachers in the Finnish context (Tirri and Kuusisto, 2016). As among Finnish student teachers, the profile of dabblers is very similar to that of the purposeful students in the social services except that dabblers remain open to finding new purposes in life. In contrast, purposeful students search for purpose the least, but have the highest level of presence of purpose. Both purposeful students and dabblers were actualising their purpose and showed the highest anticipated beyond-the-self intentions of purpose. Dreamers on the other hand had no or a low level of

presence of purpose, but they kept searching for possible purposes in life. Furthermore, according to both the quantitative and qualitative analyses, dreamers appeared the least interested in benefiting the world beyond themselves or in helping others. The profile of dreamers is close to but distinct from Damon's (2008) *disengaged* group, as dreamers were actively searching for their purposes in life and were not detached in this sense.

Based on the qualitative analysis, the purposeful students, as expected, were the most able to define values as guiding principles in life (45%, n = 16) in comparison with dabblers (29%, n = 25) and dreamers (4%, n = 1). However, there were no other differences in the purpose profiles in how the role of purpose was perceived. The majority of students in all profiles indicated that they wanted to lead a happy and pleasurable life. This finding is in line with the previous study, which found that Finnish students in social services rate hedonistic goals, such as leading an exciting life, rather highly (Manninen et al., 2018a). Also in all profiles, approximately a half of the students desired to be a good person or lead a good life. They seemed to have some ideal understanding of a good life, but they were not specifying this aspiration in greater detail.

It was also expected that purposeful students would describe their goals of helping and benefiting unknown others through value-based definitions. This expectation was met to some extent, although only 22% (n = 8) of purposeful students defined their value base in helping. Furthermore, the overall number of students who mentioned helping unknown others in their purpose reflections was low in this sample, which could indicate that only a minority of students aim at finding a life purpose in a helping profession or advancing societal development (also Manninen et al., 2018b). Among purposeful students, 17% (n = 6) indicated that their own well-being or self-awareness was the key to helping others, which is in line with the ethical principles of social work (International Federation of Social Workers , 2018). Around 16% (n = 23) of students in all profiles observed that helping makes you feel good about yourself and said that they helped for the positive emotions that are experienced by helping or for the perceived self-benefits generally.

Purposeful students seem to be more capable than others of providing value-based reflections for their pursuits. Thus, they seem to be more self-aware than others in their pursuits in general and in helping in particular. Yet this study produced a somewhat worrisome finding, namely, that the proportion of social services students who could be considered as purposeful was small, with even fewer being aware of their pursuits in helping. Based on our studies it appears that only a minority of students seem to find life purpose in helping unknown others that could also be perceived as having a calling to do social services work (Ponton et al., 2014). Dabblers might not know why they are engaged in studying a helping profession and what kind of implications the involvement in prosocial activities holds (see Moran, 2009). Our latest study (2018b) on these students showed that they interpreted influential field education experiences mostly from the perspective of personal meaningfulness and not so much from the perspectives of communal or social aspects of helping. One very speculative concern is that as Dabblers the students might be so focused on finding their own purposes in life and establishing their identity that they might experience challenges in promoting the clients' purposes (see Tirri and Kuusisto, 2016). Also, if one does not recognise one's values in general or in helping in particular it might jeopardise morally aware client practice (see McBeath and Webb, 2002; Moran, 2009). This on the other hand could lead to a managerialistic approach in client work (Trevithick, 2014) and to a failure to approach such work as a deeply moral concern (McBeath and Webb, 2002): as supporting the growth of every individual human being from the standpoints that they have (see Úcar, 2013). Further, if the students are mainly concerned with their microlevel life circles it could affect their commitment to community-oriented and civil practices that are considered important in social pedagogical practice (Hämäläinen, 2015; Social Services Curriculum, 2019).

What this all means for social services educators is that we first have to aim at understanding the basic values and deeper pursuits of our students, in order to develop efficient interventions to develop their personal and professional identities (Valutis et al., 2012). We must be mindful that many of our students might be very concerned with finding their life purposes and we should help students to build coherent identities in order for them to become morally aware practitioners (see McBeath and Webb,

2002; Moran, 2009). We should not take for granted that all social services students would be consciously and intentionally oriented to benefitting unknown others, because they might not recognise the reasons for this. Why, then, should our students become purposeful helpers? In having a purpose in helping, they would feel more content with the actual client work (Itzick et al., 2018; also Ponton et al., 2014), perhaps even succeed better with their studies (Knezievik and Ovsenik, 2015) and overall they could experience greater wellbeing than they would without a purpose in life (Damon et al., 2003). Generally, in social services work we should be able to attract people who identify themselves with social services work core values such as the social change mission of the profession (Biggerstaff, 2000). When people have a long-term intention and goal to contribute to matters larger than themselves they are more likely investing in community- and civic-oriented practices to enhance societal development (Malin et al., 2015). And this, in fact, is one of the main aims of social pedagogy: developing people's social responsibility while they pursue their individual goals (Hämäläinen, 2015).

However, this study has limitations as the sample was relatively small. Further, with any Likert scale study, one must consider the possible implications of the social desirability of the answers (Liedgren and Elvhage, 2015). The subject of the study is also ethically sensitive and the students' purpose profiles were studied in nonrelation with their identity: the students were only represented by random numbers within the study. In future research, interviewing students would provide more in-depth perspectives. Longitudinal research designs are needed to study how those with different purpose profiles experience their careers in helping. In particular, more research is needed to investigate how the purposeful moral character of students can be developed in their social pedagogical education. Students need to acknowledge how their perception of the role of purpose in their own lives influences the interactional work with their clients (Barlow and Hall, 2007; Urdang, 2010). Among social services educators, special attention should be paid to the *dreamers*, who show the lowest presence of purpose, are the least self-aware, and are the least oriented toward benefiting the world beyond themselves.

Conclusions

As a final conclusion to this study, Finnish students in social services do not appear to be very different from youth in general in their profiles; the ratio of students in different profiles has also been addressed in previous purpose studies (Damon, 2008; Moran, 2009; Tirri and Kuusisto, 2016). Based on the present study, it should not be taken as absolute that social services students are aware of their values or their purposes of life. According to this study, students seem to need education in order to become self-aware about the role of purpose in their lives and to learn how to connect life purposes with their profession in helping and especially with its social change and service mission (see Biggerstaff, 2000). The present study also indicates that educators should be aware that students can be deeply concerned about searching for their life purposes, and this should be addressed throughout their studies. Social services students' understanding of their values in life in general and within helping in particular should be studied and made more explicit. All possible educational measures might be insufficient if we do not know whom we are educating (Valutis et al., 2012) and what their starting point is in becoming purposeful, moral practitioners in social pedagogical work.

Declarations and conflict of interests

The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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