

Development and Ideology of the Growing Purpose Workshops

In the spring of 2023, I began my research with the Purpose and Identity Process Lab at Cornell. By learning the psychological makeup of abstract concepts, I realized that I was unaware about how scientific research supports the meaning of purpose. Prior to the lab, I conceptualized purpose as being largely philosophical and emotional without understanding that these ideals can be employed and tested through psychology. I did not realize that purpose could be practiced sustainably without all the existential and intimidating underpinnings that often accompanied the question of “What is my purpose?”.

With the guidance and expertise of Dr. Anthony Burrow and Christopher Davis within my lab, I began to apply purpose research in new ways. I worked closely throughout the summer of 2023 in helping develop the Growing Purpose workshops that aimed to teach the science of purpose. Our workshops are directed towards educators and other volunteers that work with youth with the intention of accomplishing two goals. 1. To enhance and illuminate their understanding of the role of purpose in their work and personal life. 2. To inspire strategies that allow for the youths affected to consider and discover their own sense of purpose. By targeting individuals who work with youth, we address the current lack of current resources that help educators understand the science of purpose with the intention of enhancing youth programs.

Furthermore, the creation of the modules will be accompanied with a web platform that allows educators to exchange materials relevant to developing youth purposes in order to inspire collaboration across various programs in New York. Both the training and the web platform could have a multitude of system-wide benefits as it enables educators to strategize ways to enrich youth learning, thus producing downstream outcomes.

In conjunction with the workshops, there will be an embedded research study that evaluates the effectiveness of the purpose modules and the longevity of its impact on both educator participants and the youth in their subsequent programs. My lab will continue to track the progress of the Growing Purpose workshops in order to improve upon its approach and uncover more data on the impact of purpose education. These findings will eventually be disseminated amongst academic audiences and promoted to other school systems and youth programs.

Content of the Growing Purpose Workshops:

The “Growing Purpose” Workshop consists of six models that each include scientific research, activities, opportunities for open discussion and recaps in order to engage and inspire further discussion about purpose.

Module 1: A window into your reason: Why do I do what I do?

Module 2: Understanding the science of purpose: (Pt.1) What is purpose?

Module 3: Understanding the science of purpose (Pt.2) Why does it matter?

Module 4: Development of purpose: How do I develop it?

Module 5: Purpose in the microsystem: Salience of purpose in everyday life

Module 6: Purpose in the macrosystem: Collective purpose/contexts

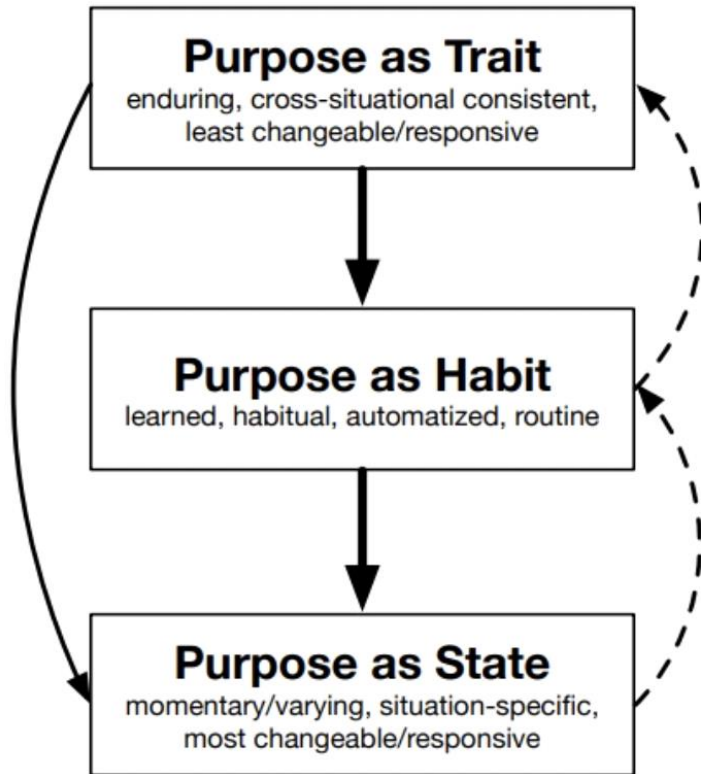


Figure 1: Science of Purpose Example

Activity:

Brief Reflection

- Think about how you initially gained your sense of purpose.
- Which of the 3 pathways do you believe this insight came from?

Note: If none, feel free to list other avenues!

Common Pathways to Purpose	
Proactive:	Sustained, gradual effort over time
Reactive:	Transformation in response to events
Social Learning:	Observing others engage in meaningful ways

Figure 2: Activity Example

Cross-Cultural Application and Next Steps

With the intention and mission statement of the Laidlaw Scholars program in mind, I wanted to ensure international outreach and global citizenship by integrating my Filipino culture into my research. Given that much of the research on purpose is conducted amongst predominantly Western cultures, I want to see how conversations around purpose differ within collectivist cultures, specifically in the Philippines. This school year, I plan on adapting the Growing Purpose workshops with activities and examples that are more salient to educators and non-profit workers in the Philippines by taking factors such as religiosity and family stress into account. I am currently connecting with Filipino non-profits, schools and youth organizations in order to partner with in my leadership in-action experience.

Additionally, a large component of my project is to administer surveys in order to understand the connection between culture and purpose. With open response questions asking about how one's culture relates to one's sense of purpose, my survey will be conducted amongst Cornell students and Filipino-Americans through Qualtrics. I hope to administer the same survey at the University of the Philippines in order to further discern cultural nuances within discussions of purpose.

While my international focus is directly relevant to Filipino Americans, I hope that my research can strengthen conversation about how one's conception of purpose may differ within non-western cultures. Given the malleable template of the Growing Purpose workshops, more adaptations can be made to serve relevant communities that may benefit from purpose education. I am excited to navigate the real-life application of the Growing Purpose workshops and see how my understanding of purpose research and my Filipino identity evolves throughout my experience as a Laidlaw Scholar.

