

A review of Frankl, V. (2019). *‘Yes to Life: In spite of everything’*. UK: Penguin, Random House.

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Victor Frankl’s book was written in 1946, the same year as his best-selling book, ‘Man’s search for meaning.’ Both books were written within a year of his liberation from some 3 years in Nazi concentration camps. ‘Yes to Life: In spite of everything’ contains three lectures given at an adult education centre in Ottakring in Vienna, Austria, under the titles of ‘On the Meaning and Value of Life I and II’ and ‘Experimentum Crucis’. It has only recently been published for the first time in English.

Through his three lectures Frankl addresses i) the uniqueness and individuality of each individual that constitutes the value of this person in serving the community; ii) the importance of love in seeing our loved one in all their uniqueness and individuality; iii) the importance of responsibility in saying ‘yes to life’.

The importance of Frankl’s ideas for Living Educational Theory Researchers is because they resonate with our commitments to the unique constellation of each individual’s values as they seek to enhance their educational influences in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations within which the practice is located. They resonate with the importance of loving what we are doing in our educational practices with values of human flourishing. They also resonate with the importance of accepting an educational responsibility for asking, researching and answering questions of the kind, ‘How do I improve what I am doing in my professional practice in education with values of human flourishing?’ and with contributing our living-educational-theories to the professional knowledgebase of education.

In the first lecture Frankl points out that in answering the question life asks us, we can realise the meaning of the present moment. This meaning not only change from hour to hour but also changes from person to person: the question is entirely different in each moment for every individual (p.39).

This insight is important as it stresses the recognition of continuing professional development in continuously changing contexts and the uniqueness of every individual situation (pp 55-56). The first lecture also focused on the fact that the uniqueness and individuality of every human being constitutes the value of his person, and that this value must be related to a community to which this uniqueness is of value. In his second lecture Frankl points out that there is also a second way in which the person as a unique and individual being always comes into his own, in which the value of his personality is also realised and his personal, specific meaning of life is fulfilled: this is the way of love, or better still, of being loved (p. 87). In the third lecture Frankl points to the importance of responsibility:

But on average, people are too sluggish to shoulder their responsibilities. And this where education for responsibility begins. Certainly, the burden is heavy, it is difficult not only to recognise responsibility but also to commit to it. To say yes to it, and to life. But there have been people who have yes despite all difficulties. And when the inmates in the Buchenwald concentration camp sang, 'We still want to say yes to life', they did not only sing about it, but also achieved it many times – they and many of us in the other camps as well. And they achieved it under unspeakable conditions, external and internal conditions that we have already spoken enough about today. So shouldn't we all be able to achieve it today in, after all, incomparably milder circumstances? To say yes to life is not only meaningful under all circumstances – because life itself is. But it is also possible under all circumstances (p.123).

Frankl created a school of psychotherapy known as logotherapy. It focused on the importance of generating meaning and purpose in one's own life. At the same time Adler focused his individual psychology on the importance of recognising and transcending the feeling of inferiority, whilst Freud focused on the defence mechanisms of the ego. Each of these theories contains important insights that Living Educational Theory researchers can use to strengthen their mental health and their motivation to continue to enhance the flow of values of human flourishing in their Living Educational Theory Research. I continue to find energy and inspiration through Frankl's responses to his experiences in the concentration camps, through which he finds hope, meaning and purpose. I think that you will too.

References

Frankl, V. (2019). *'Yes to Life: In spite of everything.'* UK: Penguin, Random House.