

## **Nurturing Narrative Pedagogies for Agency, Empathy, Compassion, Authenticity and Meaning-making - *Dr Edward Wright***

Over recent decades several studies have shown that throughout the human lifespan, but especially during adolescence and youth, the search for meaning in life and the achievement of an authentic sense of identity, are crucial developmental tasks. They are also intimately related to adolescent well-being. Also, ample research studies explored the strong relationship between meaning-making and identity formation, as well as the implications of this relation to a narrative-hermeneutical approach to teaching and learning. The most important of these relates to the many benefits that transpire from opportunities given to adolescents to voice their personal and even painful life-stories, reflect upon them in an empathic and compassionate environment, as well as reinterpret and reconfigure their lives imaginatively, satisfying a profound spiritual or transcendental hunger. Thus, through life experiences that are shared in a classroom context, in relation to the learning outcomes being addressed, adolescents can feel safe enough to embark on a search for transcendence that takes the form of narrative meaning-making. Such an endeavour could potentially fill their physical, psychological, and social voids, and be an invaluable source of empowerment, resilience, and healing. This process occurs in the form of a search for meaning and hope that is beyond present and material experiences, as young people actively strive to satisfy their material and spiritual needs. The former includes the need for protection from harm, and inclusion in the community, while the latter refers to the need of valuing themselves, feeling worthy of their existence, feeling respected, loved and cared for, feeling a sense of empathy that empowers them to develop their full human potential for their own sake and that of their families and friends, and experiencing a sense of compassion that heals the wounds caused by a physical and social environment that is marked by disintegration and fragmentation, causing so much pain, anxiety and distress. This presentation seeks to show how such an endeavour is possible in humanistic subjects, especially RE and MLE, through a pedagogy that nurtures both agency and authenticity, while addressing possible conflicts that arise from their encounter, and is embedded in compassion that transpires from deep care and respect for the other.