

Exploring the Affordances and Propensities of Multimodality in Narrative Pedagogies through Multimodal Ethnography

Edward Wright

Abstract

This paper seeks to reflect on the propensities and advantages of multimodality in teaching and learning, and its rich exploration through multimodal research. It will also report and reflect upon the findings of a small-scale multimodal ethnographic study that was conducted over one scholastic year. This investigated whether, and how, the use of multimodal creative productions can facilitate adolescents' search for meaning through the re-configuration and re-imagination of life experiences shared in a classroom context. The pedagogical context of this research consisted of RE (Religious Education), and MLE (Media Literacy Education) classrooms, enabling an exploration into a possible fruitful dialogue between these two curricular subjects. Another related aim of this paper is to investigate how a narrative-hermeneutic approach to learning can facilitate meaning-making when applied to and through multimodal production tasks in RE and MLE. The results indicate that through multimodality, made possible by the advancement of creative digital technologies, narrative pedagogies can become more effective. This transpires from the fact that multimodality expands the range of resources available for students to construct and share their narratives, as it integrates the auditory, visual, gestural, linguistic, and spatial modes, augmenting the overall narrative experience. Moreover, this study shows that multimodality can facilitate meaning-making by promoting and nurturing a pedagogy for creative expression, a pedagogy of empathy and compassion, a pedagogy of agency and authenticity, a pedagogy of vulnerability, and a pedagogy through the use of metaphor. The paper also makes specific recommendations on how a narrative-hermeneutical approach through multimodality can promote the specified pedagogies in the context of the mentioned curricular subjects.

Keywords

Multimodality, ethnography, narrative learning, narrative pedagogies, critical reflection, self-reflexivity, identity exploration, Media Literacy Education, Christian Religious Education

Contact: Edward Wright, edward.wright@ilearn.edu.mt

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Introduction

Throughout my 25-year teaching career, the questions posed by my students that I too often had to grapple with and try to answer were all related to the relevance of some curricular subjects for everyday life. My subjects all belonged to the humanistic category and so invited such questions even more: Why should RE (Religious Education) even be included in the curriculum? What could it possibly offer us except for doctrinal content and tenets of faith that have no relevance to real life, and sometimes do not even make sense? Why should we discuss life scenarios when there is a gulf between what happens in the PSCD and Environmental Studies classrooms and what actually happens in real-life situations? How can such subjects be a preparation for life when the reality outside the school is so different? These questions were always expressed with accompanying feelings of anger, concern, frustration, and even pain. Unfortunately, these feelings never came to me as a surprise at all.

On the other hand, students always showed a strong sense of satisfaction when comfortable spaces were created for them to engage in meaning-making through reflection and thought-provoked learning. Whenever I assigned students a task in which they could express themselves freely, through creative multimodality, we always ended up delving into various profound issues and questions that tapped into the meaning of a life that seemed to be frequently characterised by absurdity, injustice and suffering of every kind. Thus, I was always curious to understand how students' ways of thinking and navigating cognitively, emotionally, and conatively around these issues of meaning could create a sense of purpose that positively redirects their life trajectory and decisions. I also realised that the more students learnt digital skills that allow space for self-expression and reflection, the more their meaning-making potential was unleashed. Since such meaning-making through open discussions and engaging activities was always intended to connect curricular learning to everyday life, in order to act on students' feedback, I decided to embark on systematic research that would be intertwined with my professional practice, to facilitate effective pedagogical strategies, tools, and techniques which can have potential in offering solutions and pave the way for future adaptations of humanistic subjects.

The pedagogies I applied were strongly multimodal, in that they utilized the benefits of several modes of learning including creative digital technologies, and multimodal ethnography was adopted as the main research method as an

almost natural choice.

The main aim of this paper is to reflect on the propensities and advantages of multimodality in teaching and learning, and its rich exploration through multimodal research. It will also report and reflect upon the findings of a small-scale multimodal ethnographic study conducted over a scholastic year. This study investigated whether, and how, the use of multimodal creative productions can facilitate adolescents' search for meaning through the re-configuration and re-imagination of life experiences shared in a classroom context. The pedagogical context of this research study consisted of the CRE and MLE classrooms, enabling an exploration into a possible fruitful dialogue between these two curricular subjects. Therefore, the two main interrelated questions that this research study sought to address were:

- How can creative multimodal engagement contribute to adolescent identity formation by facilitating the search for meaning in humanistic subjects, especially in the context of RE and MLE?
- How can a narrative-hermeneutic approach to learning facilitate meaning-making when applied to and through multimodal production tasks in RE and MLE?

The importance and relevance of the second question transpires from the fact that through the application of multimodality, and research through multimodal ethnography, I sought to implement narrative pedagogies that facilitate meaning-making through sharing, re-interpreting and re-configuring life experiences, as a source of empowerment and healing, in a community (the class as a community of learning) context.

I must acknowledge, with satisfaction, that this endeavour also led me to "live my pedagogic life ... more fully" (van Manen, 1997, p.78). By this I mean a desire to make sense of the students' experiences, alongside them, through which I can immerse myself into the pedagogic relationship more fully.

Literature Review

Meaning-Making Through Multimodal Texts and Digital Storytelling

Various research studies have provided valuable knowledge about how contemporary adolescents and youth make meaning out of the accessible

resources in both informal and formal settings. Since digital media are characterised by multimodality, young people who have opportunities to design the texts they produce will get more access to multiple modes than ever before (Jewitt, 2009). Thus, researchers are indicating new possibilities for the culture of textual design in educational settings, as it is moving away from the traditional emphasis on printed text and towards more engagement with multimodal and digital texts (Borgfeldt & Lyngfelt, 2017; Öman & Hashemi Sofkova, 2015). This trend is driven by the popularity of multimodal design with adolescents and youth. Borgfeldt and Lyngfelt (2017) report that the teachers' encouragement of their students to choose alternative resources to writing led to a significant student reliance on visual modes, especially colours and images, when creating texts. Writing was frequently limited in use and relegated to a complementary role. The same researchers analysed students' perceptions of the available resources when designing multimodal texts (Borgfeldt & Lyngfelt, 2017). They found that most adolescent participants expressed that it was easier and more effective to communicate by using colours and images than to write. Furthermore, in this study the possibility of using various modes of expression encouraged and empowered all students to be more creative in the tasks than when writing was the only mode.

Applying a multiliteracies framework, Öman and Hashemi Sofkova (2015) observe that when students were asked to redesign films, they used images as their main mode of expression, though teachers had provided them with linguistic resources. Similarly, Lund (2017) observes that the students' favourite modes for creating texts were linked to the software and hardware that they used in their everyday lives. Multimodal digital texts are also greatly influenced by young people's engagement with popular culture. Thus, all their digital activities, even those related to popular culture, have significant potential to enhance their learning (Engblom, 2013; Williams, 2014). Unfortunately, this potential has often been overlooked (Engblom, 2013). However, other researchers indicate that when adolescents create stories at school, they utilise their experiences from popular culture (Schmidt & Wedin, 2015). Williams (2014) asserts that in their composition of multimodal texts in an educational context, young people use popular culture experiences, even when not specifically instructed to do so by their educators. Furthermore, Hagood et al. (2018) state that young people have the necessary cognitive abilities to discover and comprehend underlying messages contained in texts from popular culture. When their experiences of and interest in texts that they value are utilised in class, educators find it easier

to discuss certain issues, such as those related to socio-economic background and gender, based on the social roles acted out by characters found in various popular culture texts (Dyson, 1997). Dunn et al. (2014) emphasise that the inclusion of students' interests and experiences often increases their engagement, leading to meaningful learning.

Multimodality and Creative Digital Technologies

One of the most significant and major characteristics of today's culture is its dependence on digital worlds, new technologies and virtual realities. Most people, especially children and youth, are immersed in this world and 'embodied' in its reality that is comprised of so many characteristics that possess high levels of interactivity, engagement, sensual appeal and promise for gratification. The fact that today's digital technologies afford several opportunities for the active participation in and design of modes of expression that can include print or digital text, images, gestures, sound, and movement, has provided ample opportunities to children and young people to express their 'identities' in various ways, marked by creativity and imagination. Such 'identities', however, would have already been shaped and moulded to a greater or lesser extent by these technologies (Barbot & Heuser, 2017). This reality led a number of scholars to turn to multimodality in their endeavours to understand everyday interaction and communication in contemporary social life.

Multimodality refers to the use of more than one mode of communication in a text to create meaning, and it emerged in literature as a popular term simultaneously in the fields of education, social semiotic in communication, and social interaction research. This provided a new and broader framework to understand connections between learning and communication, the diversity of modes that are used for meaning-making, as well as the significance of the social in meaning-making (Bezemer & Kress, 2016).

Combining Multimodal and Ethnographic Data Collection in Hermeneutic-Phenomenological Research: Compatibility, Benefits, and Limitations

Over the years, multimodal methodologies have provided several timely ways to address the various profound changes brought about by the digital technologies through the increasing complexity they bring to communication, meaning making, and researching interaction, both in the new environments for research that they create, as well as in the tools they offer for data collection, storage, and representation (Norris & Jones, 2018). These also include the

analysis of visual data, video-based data and naturally occurring digital data, such as visual digital displays (Jewitt, 2009). The use of film and video data provide a re-accessible and permanent record of complex interactions over time. This then enables repeated viewing and simultaneous viewing and discussion within groups, including focus groups in qualitative research projects.

Moreover, the three main theoretical assumptions that underpin a multimodal approach offer much promise for compatibility and synergy with the narrative-hermeneutical-developmental approach adopted and applied by this research study (Bezemer & Cope, 2015). The first assumes that both communication and representation draw on multiple modes, all of which contribute significantly to meaning-making. Secondly, multimodality assumes that all modes or forms of communication are socially, culturally, and historically shaped, and they perform their communicative functions in distinct ways. Thirdly, interaction produces meaning. Participants in research create meaning through their selection and configuration of modes. The focus of multimodality is meaning-making, during which process people always make choices out of a network of alternatives. In the context of exploring and analysing concepts of embodiment and the role of the body in contributing to the process of meaning-making, which is a core part of learning, the multimodal approach offers potential to capture and analyse complex interactions that are grounded in physical activity but simultaneously mediated socially through new forms of collaboration and communication, as well as through new tools (Lotherington & Jenson, 2019).

A fundamentally important question is about the epistemological compatibility and intersection of multimodality with ethnography in all stages of the research process. Could the very act of bringing together the descriptive and analytic conventions of the multimodal and ethnographic methodologies be considered an opportunity for their mutual enrichment, or could a tension be created with possible negative implications? Such questions revolve around issues that are not new to research, as they follow and build on older debates in qualitative methodologies that focus on understanding the locus and status of both the 'social' and 'meaning' in research (Lotherington & Jenson, 2019). The tension between these two is reflected in questions that explore whether and to what extent the social context is constituted through and defined by social interaction or language (verbal and non-verbal) or both, and seek to prioritise semiotic or social explanation in how meaningfulness is accomplished, and where the boundaries are between the two.

The answers to such questions depend, at least partially, on how multimodality and ethnography are defined. Some view ethnography as being grounded in cultural and social anthropology (Heath & Street, 2008) while others, operating more in an educational context, make important distinctions between different applications of ethnography, such as that between doing ethnography (anthropological perspective), adopting an ethnographic perspective, and applying ethnographic tools in the form of methods and techniques, for ethnographic fieldwork that is not necessarily underpinned by cultural and social theory (Norris & Jones, 2018).

However, beyond such questions, issues, and distinctions, both social semioticians and ethnographers converge on their common interest to examine the diversity of resources that people use in their everyday lives and their preferred social worlds. Moreover, both categories of researchers prefer a social rather than a cognitive perspective to explain social realities that shape people's minds and behaviour. This shows the importance of entering into a thorough discussion of how multimodality and ethnography could engage into a healthy synergy between them, in a digital age in which recording technologies have become ubiquitous, significantly increasing the potential extent to which researchers can describe and analyse various aspects of representation and communication (Varvantakis & Nolas, 2019).

Multimodality emerged from the combination of ethnography and semiotics (Lindstrand, 2018). From the 1980s, the 'semiotic turn' in classroom ethnography had already been attending and attaching significance to embodied, non-linguistic and material features in the production of meaning. Since then, several ethnographic studies have taken place with children and adolescents, capitalising intelligently on the participants' immersion in a mixture of official and unofficial cultural styles, operating within a landscape of voices including poetry, music, video, songs, drawing, radio, and animation, as well as written language (Jewitt et al., 2016; Lindstrand, 2018). Some of these studies even observed and analysed children's and young people's authoring practices, such as the coordination of vocalisation skills, gesture, graphic production, and gaze (Atkinson et al., 2008). In fact, several ethnographic researchers view ethnography as encompassing the same domains of analysis as multimodality, thus adopting a particular perspective on ethnography as the "analysis of social and cultural life with a proper regard to the many modalities of action and organization: sensory, discursive, spatial, temporal and material" (Atkinson et al., 2008, p. 2).

The popularity and relevance of multimodal research transpires from the fact that it is more reflective of the “complexity that is grounded in the diverse modes of everyday life” (Atkinson et al., 2008, p. 3; Varvantakis & Nolas, 2019). This assumption feeds on the compatibility between ethnography and social semiotics, traditionally understood to be strictly separate and autonomous research methodologies with different starting points: social order and meaning-making, respectively. In view of how ethnography and multimodality evolved and developed simultaneously and in close connection over the last decades, such epistemological compatibility is evident from the possibilities and opportunities that are created through the encounter between the two, which has been reflected, elaborated, and experimented upon by several qualitative researchers like Alison Clark and Jennifer Rowsell. Through their emic-focused approach they demonstrated how the intersection enriched their educational and empirical research. Clark argues that her approach allows participants and responders to express and share their ideas and experiences. In Clark’s approach, multimodality is used as means to enrich the ethnographic analysis by “slowing it down”. This enables her to attend more to the diversity of means through which young people construct knowledge and create meaning. It also enables her to focus on the “how” of meaning-making (Clark, 2011).

Rowsell’s research is even more attuned to the participants’ senses. In her ethnographic study, the methodology she applies focuses on artefacts that have significant value to their owners, and in this way she delves deeper into their sensory meanings. Her ethnographic view demands that the researcher gets at least partially immersed and fully engaged in a physical space with certain kinds of smells, a repertoire of sounds, a colour palette, and other sensual stimuli that could help participants, as well as the researcher, access and create meaning out of memories that transpire from significant life experiences that might have remained hidden or, at least, veiled in the interview dialogues and observations. Further to this, Rowsell emphasises the significance of the inseparability of modes and senses (Rowsell, 2011). She is strongly convinced that not only are ethnography and multimodality complementary in their methodological approaches, but their synergy has great potential to provide more textured and emic ways to multimodality, of which the analysis offers more enriched ethnographic accounts of identities and identities in situ (Rowsell, 2011; Lindstrand, 2018; Varvantakis & Nolas, 2019).

Methodology, Analysis and Interpretation

The research is embedded in professional and pedagogical practice, employing a multimodal ethnographic approach transpiring from a narrative–hermeneutical perspective, i.e., one that seeks to place the interpretation of experience within the act of storytelling. Multimodal ethnography utilizes a broad range of media to conduct fieldwork, facilitate analysis and, most challengingly, to represent completed work (Dicks et al., 2006). Moreover, it utilises individual experiences within various sociocultural contexts that are offered by digital multimodality in both the final students' productions and the process leading to them. Through its emphasis on the application of multimodality to students' tasks and digital productions/artefacts created, the multimodal ethnographic approach taken makes the collection of rich data from a variety of sources and techniques possible: workshop seminars, focus groups, semi-structured in-depth interviews, and the student participants' multimodal productions.

The sample in this study consisted of twenty participants, all students from two Catholic church schools which were selected as they both offer MLE and RE in their curriculum, as well as for the fact that I worked with these schools for a long time when I was Head of Department for the two subjects. Typically, a convenient and purposive sample is applied in qualitative research to identify and select cases that are rich in information for the proper utilisation of available resources, including individuals or groups of individuals who are well informed and proficient in a phenomenon of interest (Etikan et al., 2015). Bernard (2002) also suggests the use of purposive sampling for reasons of availability and willingness to participate in a study, as well as the ability to articulate opinions and experiences in an expressive and reflective manner. Participants were all 11- to 13-year-old females. They were brought together, and through this research study they covered the learning outcomes of two units, one from their MLE and one from their RE syllabus. The unit taken from the MLE syllabus of each year (Years 7 and 8) was about the media production process, including storyboarding, scriptwriting, filming and editing, as well as the basics of photography. The unit selected from the RE syllabus of each of these years dealt with the importance of faith in human life, and the Christian perspective on suffering.

The main scope of the first whole-day workshop was to assign tasks to students through which they covered the previously mentioned learning outcomes (LOs) in their syllabuses. All such tasks encouraged students to

be as creative as they wanted to be through the use of digital technologies. Participants were also specifically told to save all their multimodal products (like photos, videos, storyboards, scripts, etc.), so that they could edit all their works into one multimodal production before the second seminar. Then, during the second whole-day workshop that took place about a month later, they shared the multimodal productions they had created with all the photos and footage they compiled from the tasks of the first activity workshop. In between these two workshops their MLE teacher taught them how to use simple digital online tools, all freely accessible, to edit their work. The participants were also invited and encouraged to keep a personal self-reflective journal to reflect on what they were learning throughout the whole pedagogical process. After each student shared her multimodal presentation during the second workshop, she was allowed to explain her production, and then a short discussion followed that allowed students to utilize their peers' reflections to learn how to re-interpret life experiences. During this time, what the students had included in their self-reflective journals was also processed for further learning and reflection.

Therefore, the data analysed and interpreted for this research study was collected from the students' mood boards, storyboards and scripts, the informal discussion I had with them as I observed them during tasks, the sharing of the multimodal presentations and their reflective processing, and semi-structured in-depth interviews with five of them after the second workshop was over. These took place at their respective schools. All the discussions and interviews were transcribed, and my personal observations were recorded in my own reflective journal.

The data was analysed using Paul Ricoeur's (1984, 1992) method of interpretation. This method acknowledges the interrelationship between epistemology (interpretation) and ontology (interpreter). Ricoeur also notes the way interpretation moves forward from naive understanding, where the interpreter has a superficial grasp of the whole of the text, to deeper understanding, where the interpreter understands the parts of the text in relation to the whole and the whole of the text in relation to its parts (the hermeneutic circle). In this way, Ricoeur's theory of interpretation provides researchers with a method of developing intersubjective knowledge. Through exposition of the concepts of Ricoeur's theory, which include distanciation, appropriation, explanation and understanding, guessing, and validation, a hermeneutic approach to textual analysis is presented, discussed and

critiqued. This method was applied to all the data in this research (all transcripts and multimodal productions) after each transcript was divided into 'meaning units'/'free nodes' that were identified and marked. These were clearly referenced through a good indexing system that organised the units for better facilitation of the interpretive analysis that follows. These meaning units/free nodes were actual statements taken from the transcripts of the in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and field observations, as well as from the multimodal texts/presentations created by the student participants (such as the short films). As much as possible, these meaning units focused on hard data that provided insights into the phenomena being explored, namely the students' faith experiences of everyday life, relating to the research questions. However, there were other statements that at first seemed irrelevant but then were deemed to be significant enough to be interpreted or to facilitate further and deeper interpretation of other meaning units.

All ethical requirements were also seriously considered and satisfied before, during, and after the research was done. These included:

- Information sheets and consent forms for parents;
- Information sheets and assent forms for students;
- Permission from the Secretariat for Catholic Education;
- Permission from the schools involved in the study;
- Student participants were anonymized in the data analysis, as each was assigned a number from 1 to 20.

Ethical considerations included:

- Privacy through anonymity and confidentiality;
- Establishing a relationship of reciprocity with student participants;
- Addressing the issue of power in the researcher's relationship with teachers and participants;
- Beneficence and no harm to participants: Sensitive interviewing through a maturing awareness.

Results

The results indicate that multimodality can facilitate adolescent meaning-making by promoting and nurturing the following pedagogies:

A Pedagogy for Creative Expression

Most participants expressed their strong belief that photography and filmmaking can serve as catalysts for creativity, and through creativity they can be engaged more in learning different curricular subjects such as RE and MLE. In her interview Student 13 was representative of the opinions that many pupils shared. She stated that working on the audio-visual production:

Made me comfortable to express myself creatively, and that was not boring at all. The fact that you go out taking pictures and footage to create a video that explains your personal faith is different to how we usually learn. That makes it even more appealing ...

Other students even mentioned the process of production, which called for a lot of reciprocal effort and collaboration among them, as an excellent opportunity that enabled empathy among the students, leading to free and creative expression that stimulated reflection. Student 5, 13 years old, expresses this thought during her interview by saying that:

... as we were working on our tasks [referring to tasks related to production process], there were moments when we cried together, laughed together and at each other, and [feeling emotional] hugged one another constantly ... the images that we were sharing and looking at meant a lot to us, and represented suffering ... and everyone could tell how they made us feel [crying while sharing this comment]

During the focus group seminars most of the participants reacted very positively to their peers' creativity and reflected that this made them view their own life experiences in a different light and from various perspectives. In turn, this led them to become more tolerant, empathic, and sensitive toward others, as well as honest in their self-expressions. During the second focus group seminar, Student 2 expressed it in the following way, drawing strong approval from all her classmates:

I will never forget all the images that were shared ... as they not only strengthened our friendship but brought to my mind more images from my personal life, that I could now see differently, and feel more at peace ...

A Pedagogy of Empathy and Compassion

Most of the students manifested, knowingly or unknowingly, a strong inner desire for empathy and compassion, also acknowledging that such qualities make them feel much better, even when their everyday life problems remain unsolved. Empathy and compassion from others make them feel loved and cared for, respected, recognised, and appreciated for their real worth and for who they are. In turn, these feelings help them feel calmer, safer, as well as freer to think and generate solutions, albeit sometimes partial, for the challenges they face. The following were some of the students' comments in reply to questions asked by the researcher about empathy and compassion:

It feels so good when people understand you and know exactly what you are feeling because they went through it as well ... you feel that you are not alone ... (Student 14)

When some of my friends came to hug me after I shared my difficult experience [referring to the separation of her parents and her father's cancer diagnosis], I felt accepted and loved and cared for who I am, non-judgmentally ... (Student 19)

Empathy and compassion were also experienced throughout the entire pedagogical process, including the production stages leading to the students' multimodal presentations. As they empathised more with each other, reciprocated a sense of compassion, and worked collaboratively on their tasks, they learnt much more about themselves and others. Consequently, they nurtured more positive, productive, and respectful human relationships, which in turn led to more effective learning, critical reflection, and self-reflexivity:

The more I feel understood and comfortable with my classmates, the more I feel motivated to do my best and collaborate on group tasks ... and I think that many of them think the same ... (Student 18)

As we worked together, we got to know each other more and related

more on a human level ... that really helped us become more productive and effective, and produce work of quality, as we worked with and for each other ... (Student 11)

A Pedagogy of Agency and Authenticity

It comes out very clearly from this study that adolescent students feel the need to voice themselves, not just their ideas, views, and opinions in contexts of discussion on a wide array of issues, but also some life experiences that could be reflected upon in relation to knowledge attained in the classroom. This would make knowledge much more relevant to one's life, thus contributing to more positive attitudes that students have of certain curricular subjects, especially RE and MLE:

What's the use of learning knowledge by heart and memorising facts, if they don't have relevance to everyday life experiences? (Student 12)

I really feel motivated to learn things that help me deal with and cope with life problems and challenges ... and that help me lead a happier and more fulfilling life ... (Student 8)

However, many students in such an age bracket also feel that, unfortunately, the local educational system and the most widely-employed classroom pedagogies do not cater for such a need, as they either fail to understand it or they underestimate its importance. Furthermore, this long-standing lacuna in our student-centred pedagogies does not make it easier for students and teachers to feel comfortable with a narrative approach, as the sharing of life stories is always something personal and intimate, risky, and possibly threatening to one's status quo marking the inner self.

Students also expressed their belief that if they overcame their fear of self-disclosure, they would grow in every aspect of their character, as they learn how to explore various aspects of their inner realities through others, re-interpret their life stories for their own advantage in relation to holistic wellbeing, and free themselves from whatever is an obstacle to self-realisation and fulfilment. In the script of her multimodal presentation, Student 10 shared the following:

Sometimes I feel lonely, I feel bad, as I suffered a lot, but I want to break free from my past ... [voice-over feature while she was dancing by the sea and being filmed by a friend]

It seems that the need for a voice emerges out of the much more fundamental adolescents' need for recognition, attention, affirmation and feeling accepted and loved for who they are. However, its suppression appears to have negative consequences on the teaching and learning process and dynamic, as students are aware of the fact that they are expected to learn effectively and successfully irrespective of what they are carrying inside them, and of their life situations and related emotions that need to be somehow addressed, re-interpreted and dealt with.

Student: Thanks to what we did I now feel that I have a voice, and my friends and RE teacher know me more as a person ... I feel loved and respected more for who I am...

Researcher: And what difference does this feeling, awareness, make to you?

Student: A lot ... you don't feel you're just a number sitting on a bench ... and in the RE and MLE classroom even more now (Student 7)

Young people seem to have an ever-stronger desire to explore what their authentic inclinations are and how they can realise them within the affordances and constraints of their external reality, in ways that make it possible for them to select optimally satisfying actions, i.e., to know who they really are, what they truly value, and what they really wish for in life. Such knowledge as self-awareness would then possibly lead them to develop deeply anchored self-guiding schemas that provide a self-fulfilling direction. These would include their goals, interests, values, and group-affiliation.

Certainly, one of the strongest needs that is evident in the adolescents participating in this study is that they desire and long for authenticity, in the sense of learning critically to reflect on who they are in order to fit into their most-suited roles and experience the freedom to be who they think they are and want to be. They want to become more authentically themselves, and they also want to see this quality or virtue in others, especially in those who surround them in different social contexts. In such a sense, the desire for authenticity could be discerned in quite a significant number of students. No student used the term 'authenticity', but they used expressions such as the following:

This is me ... and I am proud of who I am... (Student 9)

I don't care anymore of what others think of me and think what I should be, now or in the future ... this is what I want to be [her productions show her love for the visual and performing arts that her family always abhorred] (Student 4)

A Pedagogy of Vulnerability

One main and most evident characteristic of this research study was the expression of various forms of vulnerability. Not only were all the participants vulnerable due to their age but most of them took the opportunities provided by the tasks in this ethnographic research process to share some life experiences that are painful to their memory. Several precautions were taken, and ethical considerations were addressed in this regard. The students' sense of vulnerability was expressed during the entire research process as they shared their experiences while working on mood boards and story boards, planning the script, discussing the sequences of their multimodal presentations, sharing the multimodal productions in the workshop seminar and focus group, as well as during the in-depth interviews. Some of their most mentioned painful experiences included the following: strained family relationships, the death of close relatives and friends to whom they felt close, lack of hope and courage stemming from difficult experiences, illnesses and forms of disability suffered by people dear to them, and shattered dreams that they believed could never be realised. These forms of vulnerability were shared in relation to the learning outcomes that were being addressed, and in this way the content that was being taught gained more relevance and became the source of empowerment and positive transformation. In her in-depth interview, one student acknowledged a sentiment that was also quite frequently mentioned during the focus group discussion:

This is what we want as students, to learn our subjects at school in ways that could relate them to our lives ... so that we learn skills for life and learn how to deal effectively with challenges and difficult situations... (Student 16)

A Pedagogy Through Metaphor

One important activity that the students were given was to spend some time exploring the space they were in, on the inside and on the outside, and

observe objects and images that could serve as metaphors for their life and or/faith. This would then be a starting point for them to reflect upon how they see life through the lens of their own faith/worldview, and how what they see affects several other aspects of their lives. It was also made clear to them that their filmed or photographed metaphors must be part of their final productions. From both the students' productions and their interviews it clearly transpired that the visual metaphors they chose for their life and faith helped them experience life on a deeper level.

Metaphors seemed to help the adolescent participants compare life to relatively more concrete and structured concepts, considering that life's meaning can be difficult to grasp and the experiences that comprise it are not easy to interpret in a positive way that empowers one to move forward with hope. Metaphors through the camera helped them to simultaneously engage more their imagination and critical sense of reflection on life experiences and filter their meaning through the pupils' religious beliefs and worldviews.

Thus, the study pointed to metaphor's potential to give relevance to and shed light on the relationship between the participants' religious creed and everyday life. When Student 14 spoke about her metaphor, in the context of a focus group discussion, she revealed:

I chose the flower because like our life it starts from a seed and just like our life it grows gradually while we continue to live through difficult experiences. In the same way that the flower grows ... getting what it needs from the sun and nature, we also strengthen our faith as we go through different experiences in life.

Delving even deeper into the analysis, the students' metaphors also brought out their beliefs and worldviews that demonstrate what they consider important and of value to them. Consequently, their values have a significant impact on their behaviour and decisions in everyday life. As Student 11 stated:

The metaphor I chose is the chair as it is available for everyone to sit on just like faith is available to all people to practice it. Whoever does not want to sit is like whoever does not want to practise faith. Well, up to him. You have to take care of the chair by cleaning it and same goes for faith.

Discussion

A Pedagogy for Creative Expression: The Appeal of Multimodality in Adolescence

This study demonstrates that when students are provided with opportunities to create their own multimodal productions in curricular subjects like RE and MLE, they are not only engaged with a broader range of expressive resources, but their authentic interaction with an audience, creativity, and motivation are enhanced. Moreover, by employing two or more semiotic modes, students would be able to create meanings that become more than just the sum of the parts (Hafner, 2015). One contribution of this study to the literature comes through the exploration and illustration of students' creative use of multimodal resources in a curriculum-based digital storytelling project while examining the voices, identities, and emotions that are developed throughout the project. This study also demonstrates other research findings that describe how the semiotic modes of visual communication and writing are ways of expression that can have similar meanings, and coordinate with each other to facilitate expression as well as enhance the depth of the messages conveyed. This occurs since different media apply various tools and achieve divergent effects, even when communicating similar content. Thus, learners can explore different possibilities and affordances to communicate and learn about the strengths of various communication modes. Furthermore, multimodality also allows learners to synchronise modes, thus allowing them to use more than one mode to communicate and convey messages by combining media in artful and creative ways (Walsh, 2006). Creative multimodal production, especially in the form of digital storytelling, is being increasingly utilised in educational contexts (Yang, 2012).

A Pedagogy of Empathy and Compassion: The True Potential of Learning the Skills of Empathy and Compassion

All throughout the stages of this research study, empathy and compassion were two constant vital elements. As the sharing of life experiences in relation to subject content necessarily involves the mutual empathising and showing of compassion, it was clearly evident that the more the student participants felt empathised with and were shown compassion, the more they felt comfortable to share their own stories in relation to the subject content and learning outcomes addressed. They also acknowledged that the empathy and compassion they showed towards others, and that they felt towards their own shared

experiences, were an essential part of a healing process that they had desired for quite a long time. They also felt that through empathy and compassion they gained a better sense of agency over their lives, felt more empowered to act for a better future, and perceived more relevance for both MLE and RE, especially the latter.

It comes out very clearly from previous research studies that without a pedagogy of empathy and compassion, educators would only be teaching content, rather than their students (Franzese, 2017). Empathy has been understood by many as the ability to put oneself in another's shoes, an act through which one projects himself into an observed context (O'Neill, 2010). Mirror neurons are empathy's enablers, allowing one to experientially understand concepts, notions, and feelings not just by doing but by watching others in the doing (Ramachandran, 2011). Observing another in an experience helps the observer to contextualise a framework for assimilating the experience as if it were his own (O'Neill, 2010).

With and through empathy and compassion, we can discern better when a student is lost and when others have made real connections. We can see when students are engaged or disengaged. We also better understand where our students are and where they could be. Through empathic teaching, it becomes more possible for educators to reach the whole class, including students at the margins and those who appear to be either left out or left behind (Ramachandran, 2011).

The connections forged and nurtured by empathy are collaborative as students take priority in our pedagogical choices and we can respond effectively to their cues. Teaching with empathy invites us to discern how our students learn best, so that we could then apply that information to our classroom methodologies. Through empathic teaching we demonstrate to our students a greater conceptualisation of both self and 'other'. Thus, it can affect a more inclusive perception of 'my neighbour as me' as students reconsider the 'other' by processing perspectives that differ from their own, recalculating in the process the 'us/them' archetypes. Certainly, one of the greatest assets of empathy's power in the classroom is that it "reminds students that the burdens of their own struggles do not relieve them of the responsibility to see and to acknowledge others in theirs" (Franzese, 2017, p. 696).

When students' empathic acuities are improved, their emerging sense of professional identity is positively shaped in a way that includes the ability to bear benevolent witness to others' suffering. Enriched by an understanding of the narratives and personal impacts of problems, our students become better equipped to solve them (Franzese, 2017; O'Neill, 2010).

A Pedagogy of Agency and Authenticity: Encouraging the Authenticity of Students' Voices Through Agency

The findings clearly indicate that the students' need to have a voice in the classroom is incredibly strong. Moreover, their voice yearns for the expression and interpretation of their life experiences in the light of what they learn in subjects like RE and MLE. In fact, most of them spoke about the approach to learning applied in this study as powerfully effective in making the subject relevant, as students can realise that the content of the subject can speak to their lives, and have a positive impact on their wellbeing, especially during times of adversity. Many students acknowledged that through their voices (sense of agency) they reflected more on their own lives, they experienced the freedom to be themselves (sense of authenticity), they felt more empowered to find alternatives for their future lives, and they experienced the true love and genuine care of their friends towards them through empathy and compassion. These findings are in line with those from several research studies that indicate how various components of meaning-making may be associated with psychological wellbeing (Sutin et al., 2010). With reference to adolescence, most research studies show that wellbeing at this age is highly correlated, and can be enhanced, through positive relationships with family, peers, and community, as well as through meaning-making opportunities, especially in the family and school environments (Ferrer-Wreder & Kroger, 2020). Furthermore, research suggests that through narrating life experiences, psychological wellbeing can be enhanced (McLean et al., 2010). Narrating difficult or negative life experiences may even facilitate the restoration of a sense of identity (Michael & Snyder, 2005) and of a sense of meaning and coherence in life (McAdams, 2001). In various studies, participants who narrated challenging life experiences with a sense of positive coherence and closure concurrently reported higher scores on ego-resiliency, defined as the ability to maintain positivity and adapt effectively in the face of adversity (Tavernier & Willoughby, 2012). King and Licks (2009) also conclude that articulated meaning-making (within the context of both trivial and major life events) was a significant positive predictor of psychological wellbeing. However, there also seem to be other

conflicting studies. Michael and Snyder (2005) maintain that finding benefit in the loss of loved ones was significantly related to higher levels of rumination. Rumination has been viewed as an ineffective coping strategy in relation to stressful life events, whereby individuals continuously process negative aspects of experiences without constructing adaptive strategies to reduce the psychological distress. Furthermore, in a more recent study by McLean et al. (2010), where the participants consisted of adolescent boys aged between 11 and 18 years, results indicated a positive relation between meaning-making and psychological wellbeing among late adolescent boys, but not among early adolescent boys. McLean et al. (2010) and Mansfield (2010) even caution that within certain contexts (e.g., at-risk youths who choose to narrate their lives considering their present and possible future life events, as opposed to their past life events), the narrating and re-interpretation of past events into a coherent life story may also be detrimental to psychological and emotional wellbeing. More research examining potential factors that may moderate the relation between different forms of wellbeing and meaning-making is certainly warranted.

A Pedagogy of Vulnerability: The Power Of Shared Vulnerability

This study reveals that most students find it challenging to expose their vulnerability for a variety of reasons. In fact, whilst some participants find it easier to share vulnerable aspects of themselves through life experiences, others do not even understand how exposing one's vulnerability to any extent could be of any benefit, both to the one disclosing and to the audience. This mixture of views and understandings constituted one of the study's biggest challenges, as this also had several pedagogical and ethical implications that called for constant consideration. These will be further discussed in the following section that focuses on the limitations of the study and how they were dealt with.

However, despite the challenge, one of the most positive aspects that transpired from this study's findings was that the positive outcomes related to wellbeing that were gradually being expressed by a growing number of students through their vulnerable selves made others feel the desire for such outcomes. Quite a few students in the interviews, who were among the quieter ones during the focus group seminars, expressed how they would like to experience the inner freedom and empowerment and sense of agency that their peers manifested, as well as to reap the perceived benefits. In research, vulnerability has been variously defined in ways that capture both internal and external conditions

that can create risk in people's lives. It is accepted that vulnerable young people may have experienced "numerous negative life events, such as parental death, sexual abuse, and ... live with structural violence, especially poverty" (McLean et al., 2013, p. 2).

Adolescents and young people with less education and employment pathways, less time to think about their growing identity and transition to adulthood, and less supportive adults in their life on whom to model possible adult roles have been found to experience greater challenges with their identity development (Munford & Sanders, 2015). They are more likely to experience challenging transitions to adulthood, as these are compressed and accelerated (Kearns, 2014). Previous studies with vulnerable young people have consistently found that such conditions, especially a lack of family and social connections, which provide a secure base and a sense of belonging and inner security, accentuate the challenges of vulnerable young people in their endeavour and quest for meaning-making and identity construction (Munford & Sanders, 2015). Moreover, there are several studies that delve into the experiences of young people transitioning from out-of-home care. This confirms the challenges that young people face when attempting to make sense of losses and instability, alongside thinking about future goals and developing coherent ideas of self (Hiles et al., 2014). These studies confirm that challenging and even traumatic past relationships and experiences, constant instability, and limited support can lead to the undermining of young people's ability to develop positive meaning and identities. My experience in this study was that a significant number of student participants were vulnerable, as their lives were marked by one or more of the above-mentioned conditions. In a broader sense, most of them understand that every human being is vulnerable, to a greater or lesser extent, as we all have feelings and experience emotions, both positive and negative, as we steer through the pleasant and the difficult moments of our lives.

However, despite all such challenges, the positive outcome of the story is that research has identified several pathways for the development of adolescents' and young people's positive identities. Some young people during adolescence have been found to use life experiences, such as addiction and mental illness (Diaz et al., 2011), loss (Brewer & Sparkes, 2011), and illness and trauma (Gartland et al., 2011) as catalysts for engagement in meaning-making activities. Moreover, the role of religion and spirituality in the lives of vulnerable adolescents has also been found to be significant within meaning and identity (Yonker et al., 2012).

This study confirms that those who find it easier to expose their vulnerability through narrative meaning-making can either empower others to do the same in the present or future, or could also possibly be a deterrent for others to do the same, as such an endeavour depends on multiple factors, including one's personality traits, family environment and upbringing, negative experiences or traumas experienced and their aftermath, the level of support provided by others and the strength of social support systems created, as well as the complex interaction and assimilation of all these factors into one's personality (Noble-Carr & Woodman, 2018). Another positive aspect derived from this study in relation to previously published research is that no harm can be done to those adolescents who for any reason would not be willing or ready to engage in narrative meaning-making and its complex dynamic, as long as all the support systems and possibilities are offered by the school or community promoting such a pedagogy (Ferrer-Wreder & Kroger, 2020).

A Pedagogy Through Metaphor: Using Metaphor as a Powerful Pedagogical Tool for Reflection

This study indicates that metaphor can be an incredibly powerful pedagogical tool that facilitates expression in relation to meaning-making, even in the process of creating digital content and products. Ninety different metaphors emerged from the students' minds and hearts throughout the entire research process. They were all intended to facilitate their reflection on how they view their lives from their own worldviews, especially in relation to their faith perspectives. Many of them expressed ideas and insights, fears, and anxieties, desires and hopes, that otherwise would have been difficult to articulate, as some of them acknowledged.

This affirms previous findings that show how metaphors, both through visual expressions and speech, can increase the power of storytelling through their potential to decode complex messages, while simultaneously enhancing salient features that people want to communicate. In their widely acclaimed book, *Metaphors We Live By*, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) state that our conceptual system is fundamentally metaphorical in nature and that it is imaginative rationality. They view metaphor as a tool that facilitates the use of people's knowledge about their direct physical and social experiences to understand and delve deeper into more abstract things like time, work, mental activities, and feelings (Gibbs, 2008). The theory of conceptual metaphor states that a metaphor, traditionally considered as an oddity of language, is a cognitive tool

for understanding one concept in terms of another (Kövecses, 2010; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). The concept sought for understanding, the target, is typically abstract, making it difficult to represent in its own terms. On the other hand, the concept used for this purpose, the source, is more concrete and therefore easier to grasp. Many sources stem out of sensorimotor states and well-learned interactions with one's physical environment (e.g., grasping, walking). Others refer to ordinary, stereotyped knowledge of cultural artefacts (e.g., building construction, computer operation) and activities (e.g., sport games rules, proceedings in court). This was observed in this study, as the students had opportunities to walk in nature, admire and enjoy the beauty of natural objects, movements, and occurrences, and through them and their relations to each other capture and reflect upon aspects of life and faith.

Recommendations

Restructuring the Content and Pedagogy of MLE and RE Through a Narrative-Hermeneutical Approach

Several participants in this study acknowledged the fact that many students may still not prefer to opt for technology to have their voices heard and life experiences reflected upon and shared, due to their lack of technological knowledge, skills and competences that could be easily learnt and grasped. Frequently and inevitably, this lack transpires from unfounded fear. As one student participant put it, this fact points towards a strong need that must be addressed, that of teaching these students how to effectively use several easy and free online digital tools, and other software, from scratch and in a scaffolded manner, through the years that MLE is taught in church schools, possibly from the primary school years. Apart from learning how to use these tools, students must learn how to utilise them to create auto-biographical multimodal products/presentations. They must also learn how various ways of presenting one's life experiences, and techniques employed to sequence and/or relate them through editing, have a strong impact on how these life events are perceived, reflected upon, and interpreted by both their creators and consumers.

Moreover, students must be educated more about how different categories of people, especially those who are marginalised and have been through painfully traumatic experiences, are depicted and represented by various media. In relation to this, the students must learn and practice about how virtual

spaces can be created for these categories to voice themselves and their fears, anxieties, dreams and hopes, without experiencing further injustice and pain.

Furthermore, students must learn about all possible ethical considerations and implications of these media representations of marginalised and vulnerable people, so that they could also apply this knowledge to their own multimodal productions showing some of their personal experiences through a narrative–hermeneutical lens. Such considerations must necessarily include knowledge and awareness of what is acceptable to share or not in different contexts and to different audiences. They must also include critical reflection on possible positive and negative consequences, legal and personal implications of sharing such presentations publicly and uploading them online, as well as normative and moral obligations towards other students, especially regarding confidentiality.

Finally, the narrative–hermeneutic approach discussed in this research study can also shape the pedagogical dynamic of MLE through lesson design and the modes of delivery. These would also include specific pedagogical tools employed and techniques applied. The themes that are included in assignments, the individual and collaborative modes of assessment for and of learning, the necessary report writing, and presentations created, the critically reflective mind and self–reflexive practices required, can all be positively shaped through the narrative–hermeneutic lens. As one student put it:

When teachers give us the freedom to reflect on themes and realities from everyday life, especially those that can inspire us in our age, we feel more encouraged and motivated to share our experiences...from our own standpoint...

Redefining Assessment of and for Learning for MLE and RE: Making Good Use of Third Space

Educators can play a key role in ensuring that students develop self–regulation skills by designing appropriate learning tasks. They must first provide them with opportunities to engage in learning tasks that are meaningful to them and that take place over an extended period of time. Moreover, students can collaborate on such tasks not only at school, but also in their own homes, and other spaces they spend their lives in, especially when online. Learning activities must be scaffolded until learners become comfortable with managing themselves and taking control of their own learning. By doing so, and supporting

students all throughout, the latter would feel empowered to transition from behaviours regulated by others to behaviours regulated by themselves. In this way educators would be helping their students take control of their own learning and to learn more about themselves as learners.

Investing In Educators' Professional Development for the Transformation of a Mindset Regarding the Use of Technology

Undoubtedly and inevitably, all educators must be well trained and prepared to effectively apply the pedagogical implications of such an approach to teaching and learning. They must have many opportunities for continuous professional development that would be comprised not only of awareness of and knowledge about the benefits of various pedagogies, especially narrative and critical pedagogies, but also of how these could be applied through this study's particular lens. Thus, educators must directly experience the benefits of narrative pedagogies through a narrative-hermeneutical perspective, sharing some of their life experiences in the light of many learning outcomes that they are expected to address in the classroom. In the process of doing so, they must have opportunities to learn about and discuss ethical procedures, considerations, and implications, different probing techniques that could be employed for the processing of learning activities, and various ways of documenting critical reflective and self-reflexive practices, individually and in groups that engage in a critical dialogue of the learning process.

Moreover, all educators, not only MLE teachers, must be taught a multitude of digital skills that enable them to effectively use media technologies, through which they could implement the narrative-hermeneutical approach to learning and teaching creatively, always in a student-centred way. Online digital tools that are free and easy to learn and use must be taught, and then serve as motivators to other packages of editing software. Teachers of MLE and RE, and other subjects, must be taught the basic skills of photography, filming, and editing, as well as skills associated with all stages of media. They must also be taught various ways of expressing and representing life experiences.

Addressing Policymakers on the Students' Need for Meaning-Making in the Curriculum

All the recommendations that are put forward in the field of education can only be taken seriously and implemented effectively within an acceptable time period if researchers and educators manage together to convince

policymakers to pull their same rope, out of a firm belief in the value of their proposals. With respect to the multimodal narrative pedagogies discussed in this paper, such persuasion could occur through meetings and seminars organised with and for policymakers, especially those directly or indirectly involved with the humanistic subjects like MLE and RE, opportunities to observe lessons delivered to students of various age groups by educators who know how to apply a narrative–hermeneutic developmental approach to teaching and learning, and opportunities to listen to students' voices, and watch their multimodal products.

Inculcating Values, Shaping Attitudes and Teaching Skills that Define the Pedagogy of Compassion and Authenticity

The pedagogical importance of empathy and compassion in the classroom can be nurtured through educating students and educators alike in emotional literacy skills and expression, especially the skill of empathy. This can be done through a few empathic pathways that can be very effective in the classroom, including story–telling, actual or simulated interaction, the inclusion of multidisciplinary referents, role–playing to re–enact situations, exercises, and play (Franzese, 2017).

Empathic pathways are also activated when students reimagine or re–enact cases that are provided as exemplars during the lesson, or as assessment for and of learning tasks. For example, students can be asked to put cases into more journalistic settings, where students are assigned various roles, including those of reporter, producer, and of various litigants and litigators to elicit and recount what happened in the given dispute and their reactions to its resolution for an imagined television program segment. Such an exercise allows students to become the people behind stories, and the range of emotions typically displayed is vast and genuine, as the opportunity is presented for the “as if” to feel real. These stories can then elicit others from their everyday life.

Furthermore, when students share personal experiences in relation to the syllabus learning outcomes addressed in the classroom, especially when these experiences are painful and represent hard life challenges, they need to be educated in how to show compassion and empathy towards each other, through both words and gestures. This educational process must also include processing skills of the multimodal productions shared, of the words they include, the still and moving images edited, and the symbols and metaphors employed.

Transforming Vulnerability from the Beast into the Beauty that Enriches Life

When both educators and students become vulnerable through the sharing of and reflection upon life experiences, there is always a significant disruption of power dynamics in learning spaces, both physical and online. This disruption lies at the heart of the pedagogy of vulnerability. However, the extent, dynamic and facilitation of this sharing and disclosure of life experiences, in relation to the learning outcomes in the curriculum, require critically important decision-making skills and others related to associated sensitive issues, most of which are of both a pedagogical and ethical nature. For this reason, educators must have some of their professional development and training sessions delivered by other professional in the caring professions, such as psychologists, psychiatrists, therapists, youth, and social workers. Apart from the knowledge, skills and competences transferred and learnt, such collaboration between professions will also greatly help in establishing clear boundaries between what could be addressed pedagogically by educators through classroom practices, and what should always be the terrain and responsibility of other professionals, to manage and deal with. Lastly, educators must also be educated well in the legal aspects and implications of exposing vulnerability through multimodal productions, which could even end up becoming viral in the online world.

Conclusion

A student in my RE and MLE classroom once told me that the more he relates what he learns to his own life, especially through technology, the more he feels empowered to live life differently, as he feels more in touch with who he is and with who he would like to become. I sincerely think that this genuine reflection shared with me many years ago, and that has remained with me since then, adequately summarises the scope of this research study.

This study did not seek at any point to exalt the power of technology in the expression and sharing of human experiences in the classroom, and nor did it seek to present it as a powerful tool without its challenges and limitations. However, it did seek to understand and explore how it could facilitate the reinterpretation and reconfiguration of life experiences, in the light of the learning outcomes taught in curricular subjects like RE and MLE, and through a narrative-hermeneutical approach that always takes into consideration the developmental needs and challenges of the students. Through this narrative-hermeneutic approach, meaning-making initiatives and holistic wellbeing activities can transpire to enhance the students' lives and achievements not

only within the realm of a school environment, but beyond that, into holistically shaping student individuality through such meaning-making initiatives. Through this pedagogical perspective, meaning-making initiatives and holistic wellbeing activities enhance the students' lives and achievements not only within the realm of a school environment but beyond, encouraging student individuality and critical reflection.

Notes on Contributor

Edward Wright is a full-time lecturer at IfE. Previously, he was a teacher for 25 years and Head of Department for 13 years with the Secretariat for Catholic Education. He recently completed his doctoral degree at Bournemouth University, from where he had graduated at a Master's level in Media and Communications. He is also in possession of an Honours degree in Psychology, a postgraduate certificate in Education with specialization in PSCD, and another in the Learning Outcomes Approach, and degrees in Theology, including a Master's. As a teacher he taught PSCD, Social and Environmental Studies, Religious Education and Media Literacy Education. He lectures on the methodology and pedagogies of Religious Education with the Faculties of Theology and Education at the University of Malta. He also lectures in Philosophy and Psychology with the Directorate for Research, Lifelong Learning and Employability (DRLLE). Edward is particularly interested in narrative and critical pedagogies, and the psychology and philosophy of education and wellbeing in the holistic formation of teachers, especially those of the humanities. Throughout his doctoral journey he investigated how digital technologies, especially photography and film-making, can contribute to meaning-making and identity formation in adolescence through narrative pedagogies. His academic research led him to an interest in how aspects of spirituality as meaning-making can be addressed narratively and through a cross-curricular approach, making them sources of strength transpiring from the positive potential of human vulnerability. Edward is also a teacher trainer and mentor.

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