



MINISTRY FOR EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Creation of Continuous Professional
Development Programme for Educators

**Compendium of Good Practices on
Inclusion and Equity in Schools**



A Report Compiled by Prof John P Portelli and Ms Salvina Muscat as part of the Erasmus+ Project
Creation of Continuous Professional Development Programme for Educators

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A. EDUCATORS' PERSPECTIVES ON CHALLENGES THEY FACE IN BRINGING ABOUT SOCIAL INCLUSION AND EQUITY IN THE CLASSROOM AND SCHOOL.

1. Linguistic, Cultural, and Religious Differences/ Class Diversity

Dealing with diversity in the classroom is seen as one of the main challenges the teachers face. Creating an all-inclusive classroom and adapting lessons to students that come from different linguistic, cultural, social, and religious backgrounds has proven to be difficult. As language barriers, social values and belief systems vary from student to student, teachers find they have limited tools in educating their students about social inclusions and equity. Usually, students that are not educated on how to deal with the differences among their peers are not as open-minded, which in turn inhibits their participation in class.

2. Racism and Discrimination

One of the primary challenges faced in schools is racism and discrimination of students by other students and students by teachers. Teachers find that racist family upbringings of various students create tension, bullying and exclusions. In such cases, educating both the student and the parents through parent engagement in schools and talks the school hosts is very challenging. Similarly, biases, pre-existing stigmas towards particular social groups and the labelling of these students by teachers create a hostile classroom and school environment for marginalised individuals. Furthermore, students and teachers with preconceived negative perceptions towards students with visible or invisible disabilities demonstrate little tolerance and inclusivity. Another major challenge in classrooms is the polarisation of the students due to their beliefs and conceptions about various differences, whereby creating classroom seclusions.

3. Deficit Mentality and Lack of Parental Involvement

Educators believe that the “family background of the student” can be a major challenge to achieving inclusion. They claim that poverty, “illiteracy,” lack of hygiene, lack of educational assistance to children, lack of feedback from parents and lack of parent engagement, technological illiteracy, social problems, and neglect of children are major challenges. Educators find that the lack of parental participation in school meetings and their lack of interest towards their child’s education present a challenge for the teachers and effect the students’ academic achievements. The teachers believe that

often students mirror their parents' perceptions and attitudes towards education at times in negative ways. Teachers see the parents' involvement in school activities and their feedback as crucial to having a holistic approach to education.

It seems that educators believe that such conditions play an important role in the students' behaviour and academic achievements. As teachers expect some learning to happen at home some of them place a lot of emphasis on the parents' interests towards schooling and their ability to assist their children with homework. In cases of underachieving students of low socio-economic status, cultural, or religious backgrounds some teachers blame the parents for these children's lack of academic interests and achievements. It is crucial to note that while such conditions can create lack of success, it is equally important to note that such conditions should not be interpreted in a deficit mentality especially when there may be a lack of communication from school with family, and when schools assume that middle class values should constitute the norm. Various studies have shown the importance of not falling into a deficit mentality, which is considered a major hindrance to meaningful educational engagement with students, families and communities.

4. Student Motivation and Engagement

Motivating and engaging all the students in a diverse classroom is one of the challenges teachers are grappling with. They find there are many reasons why some students lack motivation including: lack of connection to the content, frequent absenteeism makes them fall behind, social problems in the family setting, and lack of interest in education inherited from their family backgrounds. Educators also believe that being unmotivated effects the students' willingness to complete their homework and participation in class, and hence, according to them, these students are at risk of becoming mischievous in class and distract others due to their lack of engagement with the class material and boredom. Teachers believe that it is important for the content to relate to students.

5. Lack of Educators Professional Development to Deal with and Integrate Differences

Educators do not feel well equipped in practicing inclusive teaching and deal with all kinds of differences in the class. Some find they lack training and information in this area. Others have difficulties moving beyond their biases and expand their understanding of the multicultural classroom. Educators feel there should be more professional development and educational resources for teachers to prepare themselves on the issues their students are grappling with be it linguistic, cultural,

social, or religious. Educators also mention the challenge of resistant educators and bureaucratic structures in education system as challenges.

Teachers find that there is not enough support in the classroom and that schools are not well equipped to deal with students with a statement of needs as they transition to new school environments (often having language barriers); and the specific needs of these students face according to their physical and mental conditions. Providing individual attention to underachieving students, counselling to students with problematic backgrounds, attending to the needs of these students, and intellectually challenging gifted students has proven to be difficult for teachers as they cope with other educational aspects. In addition, working with students with a statement of needs requires specific curriculum and activity adaptations including a multi-sensory classroom.

6. Behaviour Regulation

Students' misbehaviour presents a challenge for the teachers and their peers. While there are a variety of reasons why some students tend to misbehave in the classroom it is never the less a problem that effects the atmosphere of the whole class. Disciplining a mischievous student creates tension, lack of cooperation between students, and becomes a distraction taking time away from the lesson. According to educators in a diverse classroom social barriers and social problems in family settings make it difficult for educators to meaningfully discipline students from different backgrounds. Unfortunately none of the responses indicate nor give examples of what they mean by "meaningful discipline." Moreover the responses do not consider behaviour problems arising out of lack of the connection between content and the students.

7. Time Constrains and Curriculum Limitations

A vast syllabus presents serious challenges for teachers. Having limited time to unpack the syllabus makes it difficult to modify teaching to address diversity, equity and inclusion in the classroom as well as, include all students within each presented topic. It does not allow time to get to know each student individually and their learning needs or concerns. In combination with other constrains including, class size and class space, curriculum limitations intensify the workload of teachers, whereby making the learning experience a rushed and unengaging one for students.

8. Teaching Diversity and Inclusion/ Integration

Educating students from different family backgrounds, values and belief systems on diversity and inclusivity as well as, creating equitable learning opportunities are some of the areas teachers are working towards to make students believe in themselves. However, “integrating and assimilating” students, while “promoting tolerance” among peers are a challenge in diverse classrooms. Teaching respect and maintaining the right social balance in class have proven difficult as students are faced with different worldviews in schools and at home and lack social skills. Some also believe that if “multiculturalism is not used as a tool in the classroom it could be a great challenge.”

9. Lack of Resources in Schools including Lack of Support/ Catering to Student Needs

Not having the right resources in the classroom plays a negative role in the educational process. Teachers find that not being able to provide adequate materials during lessons hinders the students’ learning experience. Besides, taking into consideration the varying economic backgrounds of students, teachers suggest schools provide adequate lunch and uniforms for students in need.

10. Space and Environmental Constrains, and Class Size

Lack of classroom space present another challenge for teachers. The space restrictions limit practising more group activities, which in turn create a more collaborative and inclusive atmosphere for students. School layouts also at times negatively impact lessons as students loiter between classes, hence delaying the start of lessons. Moreover, some school present accessibility issues for wheelchair users.

The large number of students per class presents another challenge for teachers. Some find that having over twenty students per classroom without inadequate space and resources makes it difficult to conduct lessons and class activities. Large class sizes tend to aggravate students with learning difficulties and constrain healthy personal interactions between students and student/teacher.

11. Economic Inequalities

According to the educators the economic class divisions and poverty are becoming more apparent in schools creating inequalities and divisions between students. Teachers find that many students lack basic necessities and that poverty affects the overall health, well-being, self-esteem, integration, and academic achievements of students. Missing learning resources such as, computers and internet at home makes it difficult for students with financial needs to complete homework adequately. Moreover, as some school activities require students to pay for certain expenses including, outings and ingredients they bring about further inequality and financial struggles for working class families.

B. EDUCATORS PERSPECTIVES AND SUGGESTIONS ON EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION AND EQUITY IN THE CLASSROOMS AND SCHOOLS.

1. Dealing with differences in the classroom and in school

The educators identify many pedagogical strategies and practices that they have utilised. In general many educators identify different ways of how to adopt lessons and develop class activities to be more inclusive and that challenge the idea of “otherness” and negative judgement. Using celebrations as informative sessions is one of the creative ways teacher employ to broaden the scope of what it means to be different. Preparing classmates in advance of different situations so that peers would know how to react to various values and differences is another method employed by teachers, whereby educating them on social, physical, cultural, ethnic, and religious differences with a focus on ethics and biases. One of the main activities used to promote diversity and equality is giving various opportunities to international and local students to share their stories and cultures with one another as well as, employing the buddy-system. The latter practices in turn produce a respectable space where differences are accepted in a positive manner allowing students to be more tolerant and empathetic towards each other and encouraging open-minded attitudes and friendships among peers. The following are some specific strategies mentioned:

- Translating lessons so that international students will also understand;
- Showing the importance of acceptance and understanding by being an example oneself;
- Creating mixed and multinational groups and encouraging dialogue and understanding, planning for teamwork and role playing;
- Learning from the students about their cultures;
- Using names, situations and examples from different cultures and societies;
- Celebrating diversity;
- Setting up good communication with children;
- Outings which include inclusion for all students;
- Planning hands on activities;
- Using sources in the subject from different authors who have a different racial and social background;
- Organising different activities for multiple intelligences;
- Showing videos of the particular place the child is from;

- Organising Cultural Days where students bring some items from their place and are given the opportunity to talk about it;
- Organising Tree of Kindness for example on Saint Valentine’s Day: students are encouraged to write positive qualities about each other and hang them on a tree constructed for the purpose of the activity. This can be organised as a class or school-wide activity;
- Planning for “circle time sessions” which also include team building activities to help students connect to each other and be in a better position to understand each other’s strengths, weaknesses and challenges others may encounter in their everyday lives;
- Modelling new ideas and questions to the students to broaden and deepen their own knowledge of the same subject and relevance;
- Helping students understand that knowledge is often produced through conversation and collaboration among different points of view;
- Encouraging students to think critically about how historical, literary and historical canons (as well as the criteria for defining these canons) are defined and evolve over time;
- Including an activity in which the teacher shows different pictures of persons who are all Maltese but without telling students so, and the learners try to guess the nationality of the persons and the reason why they think so. This exercise may bring forth certain stereotypes for example, someone with an orange hair is considered to be Irish etc.;
- Including show and tell children of different cultures and religions are encouraged to share their beliefs and their ways and they are looked upon with respect and interest. During cooking lessons children of different cultures are encouraged to share their culinary methods and recipes with the rest of the class and members of staff;
- Promoting positive inclusion mentality among staff by avoiding labelling and generalisation;
- Allowing children with different religions to talk freely about and practice their religion in class (saying their prayer during break time etc);
- Appreciating or accepting differences rather than merely tolerating them as children need to feel a sense of belonging;
- Introducing a Buddy System – this can be done with all the children in the classroom. They could be put in twos to be each other’s mentor. They could help each other by scaffolding using buddies. During PSCD lessons the students could learn about different cultures and religions.

2. Develop self-esteem and a sense of well-being

Teachers note the importance of developing a sense of well-being for all students in class and to boost the self-esteem of each individual student. Empowering students and having zero tolerance for bullying are crucial aspects in promoting a healthy learning environment. Some of the good practices teachers use include, giving each student the opportunity to voice their opinions, ideas, and feelings as well as, take responsibility for their actions. Often, students with low self-esteem are assigned tasks that encourage participation, a sense of involvement in class, and positive interactions with other peers. These students are frequently motivated to prosper through various recognition systems and incentives. The following are some specific strategies identified:

- Utilising drama created and acted by the students as a means to boost self-esteem, and if possible filming it;
- Giving students the opportunity to voice their opinions/ideas/feelings;
- Making students aware of their responsibilities in the class/school for their own good and for the good of others;
- Including students coming from different cultures during lessons in order to explain their culture to their peers. Hence students feel more accepted and included at school and in the classroom;
- Organising a system where once every month a student is given some responsibility to take care of the groups of students;
- Keeping confidential matters that relate to student private;
- In life we can be different but finally we all have to have the same opportunities;
- Using positive reinforcement to boost the child's self - esteem, praise them when they act appropriately and rewarding good behaviour;
- Providing different tasks to different student depending on their needs;
- Allowing students to focus on one particular task rather than necessarily on group or multiple tasks.

3. Provide individual attention/understanding context of student

It takes a team of educators to provide individual attention for each student based on their needs. As teachers offer extra attention to the students who are falling behind with the class curriculum, focusing on the child's abilities rather than disabilities reinforces a positive attitude in each individual. In addition, understanding the context of each student, their different upbringings, and what is it that prohibits the student to prosper is equally important. Some good practices teachers

use include: spending some one-on-one time in class, re-explaining lessons to individual students in need; talking to students with difficult personalities in private; and becoming approachable to the students so they feel comfortable asking for help, thereby their queries.

- Giving extra attention to those children who were finding it difficult to keep up with the class curriculum and did not have an Learning Support Educator (LSE);
- Understanding and giving attention to children who are passing through a difficult time at home and those who are new to the country;
- Giving daily reading material according to ability;
- Catering for small groups to ensure more individual involvement;
- Creating individualised behaviour plan.

4. Classroom structure

There are various useful structures teachers employ in the classroom to discipline and maintain class routines. Each child's behaviour and capabilities vary, hence paying attention to his/her issues and weakness become important in maintaining harmony in the classroom. Being consistent, creating a well thought-out seating plan, and using time-outs and breaks according to the individual needs of students are some of the tools that have been effective in Primary and Secondary schools.

5. Pedagogical aspects

The teachers perceive that effective planning of lessons and class activities enhance the way curriculum is experienced by students. According to them, actively listening to students helps teachers with their differentiated teaching and learning pedagogies reflected in adapted work according to the class's needs. Employing collaborative teaching that involves students input in lessons and activities is one of the motivating factors in students' performance improvements. In addition, they believe that their ability to communicate effectively, facilitate trust, and build healthy relationships with students and among students are crucial pedagogical aspects. Portraying his/her self as an empathetic human being at times using humour and acknowledging his/her shortcomings makes the teacher be seen as a positive role model, whereby defusing classroom conflicts and facilitating meaningful interactions. They make several specific suggestions including:

- Starting from evaluating individual's strengths and needs and adapting the teaching accordingly;

- Creating a cooperative environment; working in a team when possible;
- Using games to unite students together;
- Being flexible and not sticking to curriculum;
- Talking about topics in general - not specific situations. For example: houses in general, not your house;
- Taking a humane attitude and respecting individual differences as a way of being a positive role model;
- Getting to know the likes and dislikes of the students and what activities motivate or do not motivate them;
- Involving all the students in the lessons and try to elicit replies from them;
- Allowing for discussions in the classrooms following a video clip or a case study;
- Showing empathy with students; treating children 'as your own';
- Acknowledging your shortcomings;
- Listening to what students want to say;
- Differentiated Teaching: A method of designing and enacting instruction to best reach the students acknowledging students' differences including different ways of learning;
- Creating consistency in the child's environment is the best way to reinforce learning;
- Setting up classroom rules together on how to treat each other respectfully.

6. Diversified teaching

Diversified teaching uses a variety of approaches to activate all the senses and improve the cognitive development of students, whereby engages them in more meaningful ways in class and outside. Teachers switch between hands on activities, crafts, cooking, grammar games, language activities, visual presentations, and technology to deliver evocative educational lessons. To place what is learned in context teachers employ practical exercises, give examples, and invite students to participate through round-questions and discussions.

Diversified teaching also pays particular attention to the social, physical, ethnic, religious and cultural differences of the class. Teachers use circle time, story sharing, and show and tell as mechanisms to motivate students to participate, express themselves, build relationships with each other, and improve their knowledge in each subject.

- Creating varied and hands on activities including for example morning dance at the Assembly, using drama and role play, and cooking;
- Using different resources (e.g. board games) and visual aids such as the interactive whiteboard, computer etc to make students participate in class;
- Creating real life situations to convey life skills (e.g. crafts and cooking);
- Developing interactive lessons;
- Breaking-down of the tasks;
- Using videos and clips;
- Creating discussions related to the topic at hand;
- Forming mixed ability group work;
- Using thinking sheets;
- Using social stories and comic strips;
- Allowing for round-robin questions;
- Using different resource banks for the same activity;
- Amending questioning techniques in order to reflect classroom realities;
- Allowing school activities to take place in various locations and flexible times;
- Teaching a language through different abilities using hands on activities and discussions;
- Practicing grammatical rules in context;
- Providing a questionnaire at the beginning of the year in order to get to know the students' needs and abilities;
- Utilising Show and Tell and Circle Time.

7. Team Work

"It takes a village to raise a child." Working together and having good communications between teachers, LSEs, school administrators, and parents is imperative in the development of a child. Although, the teacher is the core person to initiate the dialogues, all the other persons involved in the child's life should be included in the conversation and play their part. Social activities Organised by the school like parent-child open day encourage positive interactions. Moreover, confidentiality is a key factor in earning trust and maintaining a healthy relationship with parents/guardians.

- Having good communication with parents;
- Organising Parent-child open days;
- Fostering good team work between LSEs, Teachers, School Leadership Teams (SLTs), parents and community;

- Providing information leaflets in different languages.

8. Social aspects

There are a variety of social aspects that influence students' performance in class. According to the teachers the key aspects are finance and resources. Students come from different financial backgrounds; thereby achieving a sense of equality among peers proves to be difficult in cases of low-income families. At the individual level, having schools provide some financial assistance with school uniforms, food, and class materials would be of great help for marginalised students. At the school level, having the right resources (particularly in schools located in poor neighbourhoods) is helpful to the schools overall performance. Other important social aspects mentioned are having health care programs within schools to improve students' health and well-being; and creating complimentary language education for foreign and students with a statement of needs. These aspects are critical to improving students' self-esteem and performance as well as, creating a healthier society overall.

- Providing pastoral care to all students;
- Providing the students with food tokens;
- Facilitating help and support from College Professionals and appropriate referrals to help students and their families;
- Providing resources for students who have financial needs;
- Being aware of the needs of others in the classroom and in the school;
- Having enough resources to work with every child;
- Providing resources and school uniform for free in special cases;
- Provided breakfast items, fruits, lunch for break time;
- Creating school health programmes;
- Providing complementary education to enhance the language to those children finding it difficult to communicate and interact with each other.

C. CASE STUDIES

1. Introduction

The use of case studies in the professional development of all professionals, including educators, has become very common. There are different kinds of case studies which aim to achieve different purposes. For example case studies have been used to exemplify a standard case of a certain problem or an ideal solution. But case studies can also be open-ended. The case studies in this section are meant to be of the latter kind. They simply present a snapshot from life in school that presents issues, concerns and challenges. All cases end with a dilemma in order to encourage and elicit meaningful and thoughtful discussion. While we recommend a more or less free flow of ideas and possibilities in the discussion of the case studies, we present the following guidelines and helpful signposts we have used in our experience using case studies:

- 1. Identify the issues that arise for you in the case study.**
- 2. Identify ways how you may propose to resolve each issue.**
- 3. Identify reasons for each proposal.**
- 4. Critically, but supportively, evaluate the proposals and reasons offered.**

The major aim of using open-ended case studies is to encourage participants to think widely and critically about the issues raised in the case study, as well as to freely and reasonably explore possibilities for actions and reasons for such actions. The aim is not to reach consensus. Of course, if consensus arises that is fine. But having different courses of actions that reflect a variety of ethically acceptable beliefs is also acceptable.

2. Richard's Dilemma

Richard had been a school head for 6 years and had proved himself to be a respectful leader in the schools in which he worked. He was a firm believer in involving the assistant heads and the staff in major school's decisions. He also communicated with parents and guardians, and was liked by students with whom he frequently had open conversations.

In September, he was placed in a new middle school that consisted of almost 300 students. He was excited that he had the opportunity to inclusively lead a new school with a fresh team. He looked forward to the challenge.

As the beginning of the new school year approached he had carefully planned with the two assistant heads a way of proceeding forward. Unfortunately one of the new assistant heads was very suspicious of the leadership of Richard since she believed that school management should have all the authority and never consult with teachers whom she considered as lacking experience. She had also communicated with the Director General of Education complaining about Richard's lack of leadership. The other assistant head was new in his role and hardly spoke in meetings. Nonetheless, Richard persisted with patience and organised several meetings with the new teachers who had come from two different schools. Moreover he had 3 new teachers who had just started their career and he was responsible of mentoring them.

Eventually the students arrived and the new school year was in full swing. Richard wanted to develop the new School Development Plan (SDP) in the first month following directions from the Quality Assurance Department. Again, he believed this should be done as a team and so he planned several meetings for this purpose. However he soon recognised how complicated the ethos of the new school was. The assistant head had some following from teachers who believed that doing a School Development Plan was a waste of time. The new assistant head wanted simply to please, as his ambition was to quickly move to the headship of a school. The teachers from the two previous schools seemed to gang against each other each claiming that the head of school favoured the other group.

Tensions were mounting up. Richard became aware of the clash between the different groups and cultures in the school. He continued to be patient and positive. But in the third week of school the female assistant head was publically having a power tantrum with some students who were challenging her rigid way of operating. Richard heard this confrontation that took place in the hallway near his office. He calmly called her to speak with her. As she briskly walked into his office she commenced a litany of insults to Richard: "You are not capable of leading the school. I believe we should not listen to subordinates. Students need to be dealt with rigidity. Parents are to be given orders and not consulted. And, I have already informed the DG about your leadership approach."

Richard's task was harder than he expected it to be. He wondered whether the Department could have selected better assistant heads given all the variables and new initiatives he had to face. How can he proceed to create a cooperative culture in the school? What would you do if you were in his position and why? How could Richard receive better support from the Education Department?

3. Administrator's pets

Hal-Tartarni Middle School was established 5 years ago as a new school. The school has a good reputation and has been blessed by an enthusiastic group of teachers. However as the school developed and changed, new cultures cropped up in the school.

The head of the school has been at the school since its inception. She has worked hard to develop a positive ethos in the school. Last year, however, with the arrival of a new assistant head things started to change. The new assistant head was disgruntled as he has been in that position for over 7 years and he felt it is about time that he should be given a headship. Unfortunately his dispositions do not help his cause. Nonetheless he had raised this issue with the HR Department as he was not successful in the interview for headship on two occasions.

Since the arrival of the assistant head, tensions in the school have increased. The head initially thought that this was something brought about by the change and would pass. Unfortunately she was wrong and things got worse. Moreover she was also involved in power struggles that were usually initiated by the assistant head. One such struggle was even raised with the Department and a report was being formulated.

Two camps have developed in the school. A group of teachers who were favoured by the assistant head frequently clashed with another group of teachers who favoured the leadership of the Head. In every meeting there was an item on the agenda that created harsh divisions. Some teachers did not even talk with each other.

The positive ethos of the school and its original reputation were endangered. Rumours were also flying around that the Head gave certain teachers a light teaching load while others who openly supported the assistant head were always being given difficult classes. Others claimed that the assistant head purposely never reported teachers who supported him and who missed classes.

Recently the Department of Education alerted the College Principal that it was his duty to bring such rumours to the Head of School and that things had to change. The Principal was unable to act promptly and unfortunately some parents reported the case to the media. He wondered: What should be the next action to resolve this issue? Who should solve the issue? What actions could she have taken earlier? What support could the Department have offered to assist heads in such predicaments?

4. Late comers and early leavers

Rita was appointed head to a primary school that had a very good reputation. In the last 3 years the school has had major demographic changes. The population of the school almost doubled and reached almost 700 students. Moreover, the student population were very diverse ethnically. The relatively cheaper rents in the area attracted many new comers.

Rita was very confident that she is able to meet with the challenges that change brings with it. She had five years' experience as an assistant head and three years as a head of school.

In the first two months she made sure to get to know the needs of the school. She also took time to meet with all the staff individually. And she was very comfortable with her senior management team that believed in collaborative leadership. Once they identified the needs and challenges they developed a gradual plan of how to deal with the issues at hand.

One of the challenges noted is that although the school has official opening hours, many parents were not bringing their children to school on time, and at times the delay was about thirty minutes. Rita understood that occasionally things happen and one may, for good reasons, be late. But this pattern had become very habitual with a group of parents. Moreover, some parents of newly arrived students expected that they could pick up their child at any time.

The SLT decided that as a first step the school sends a note to the parents and guardians regarding the importance of sticking to the official times of the school. A week after the note was sent, a Maltese parent came to speak with the assistant head of school about the letter sent out to all homes.

The parent was very courteous and informed the assistant head that his only aim was to support the school. He revealed that some of his neighbours who are recent newcomers to the country revealed to him that back home they were able to go to school freely and pick up their children at any time they wished. He also brought to the assistant head's attention that many of the new parents do not read either English or Maltese and hence they could not understand the letter sent out.

The assistant head thanked the parent. She immediately spoke with Rita who decided that they immediately need to revisit the issue and take action accordingly.

5. The kindergarten student's advice

Joseph was a middle aged and enthusiastic primary head of school who did his best to listen to students' and parents' views seriously even if he may disagree with them. He brought joy and engagement wherever he worked. And he was very well respected in the school with the exception of an assistant head who believed in authoritarianism and rigid discipline at all costs. Joseph was always very professional with the assistant head notwithstanding their differences and did his best to support him although at times Joseph found himself having to correct his mistakes.

It was a lovely Tuesday morning and the school was involved in a half day activities related to making students more aware of environmental issues. Once the activities were complete, a kindergarten student visited the office of the head to inform him that there was a dangerous hole in the corridor next to the student's class. In his customary manner, Joseph thanked the student and walked with her so the student could point out her perceived problem.

The student pointed out the hole and she enthusiastically explained, while putting her small foot in the hole that students could easily get hurt if they accidentally put their foot in this hole. Joseph realised that this could be a real hazard and thanked the student for bringing this to his attention.

Joseph briskly walked to the office of the assistant head who was in charge of maintenance.

"Charles, we have a bit of problem that needs to be fixed today if possible?"

"What is the problem Joseph?"

"Well, a kindergarten girl brought to my attention a problem that needs to be fixed..."

And before Joseph could explain the problem and needed to be taken care of, Charles interrupted in a loud angry voice: "This has reached the limit...now we are taking instructions from students!"

6. The contrast

The bell rang and dismissal was over at *Buźbież* secondary school. The head, Mrs. Borg, was doing the usual round of the school to make sure all is well before she completes the administrative work for the day.

While returning to her office, she heard students calling for help from the computer room that was at the end of secluded corridor. She rushed to check and noted that while the room was locked the key was on the outside. The head opened the door and helped the students go home as they had to be in time to get on transport.

The teacher explained to Mrs. Borg that one of her students, Joanne, had asked her to go to the toilet with urgency some minutes before the end of day bell rang. She did not realise that the girl took her bag with her and did not return. She assumed that Joanne was the one who had locked them in class.

The next day Mrs. Borg asked the teacher and Joanne to her office. Joanne revealed that she had locked them up in class. When asked why, she revealed that she did so in order to get back to Carmen, a student in her class and whom, she claimed, was bullying her because of her appearance. She locked them up to cause Carmen to miss her transportation which usually left 10 minutes earlier than the other vans.

After checking with Carmen, Mrs. Borg called both parents to come and speak with her. The next day Carmen's father came first. He was dressed up in a smart suit, but refused to sit when the head invited him to sit down. After Mrs. Borg explained the situation he became really belligerent and defended his daughter at all costs. He rushed out of the room swearing and threatening that he will report her to the authorities and will pull out his daughter from the school.

About an hour later Joanne's father arrived. He was wearing a very short shorts and a sleeveless t-shirt with his colourful tattoos exposed. Mrs. Borg was taken aback and took a deep breath and thought "he has no more space for others left!" Still under shock Mrs. Borg asked him to her office but he wished his daughter to be present for the meeting. So Joanne was called. When he saw her his eyes filled with tears. Now Mrs. Borg was more baffled. She calmly asked Joanne's father if Joanne told him what had happened. He politely explained that she had but he came to the school as he wished to hear the school's version of what took place. So the head asked him if he knew that his daughter locked a whole class in the computer class while she left to go as it was dismissal time. Gently the father turned to his daughter and said to her that she had not told him this part of the story! He then turned on the head and thanked her for taking care of his daughter. Finally he spoke to Joanne and told her "when you come home we shall discuss the real story, in the meantime make sure you obey everything the head tells you." He kissed his daughter on her forehead, thanked the head and left.

Mrs. Borg was pleasantly surprised by the outcome of the second meeting. She was now aware of her misconstruction of Joanne's father based on his looks. She knew that she had to deal with Carmen's

father and if Carmen is allowed to return to school she has to follow-up with her regarding her bullying attitudes. She was not sure whether or not she needs to take any action at this stage.

7. The curious boy

It was time again for weekly school assembly at local Primary school. The children filed in while cheerful music was playing in the background. The Head of School went up the stage and as he welcomed the students, the chattering stopped. The children were all attentive, waiting for this week's assembly activity which they very much enjoyed and awaited.

Hilda, the Assistant Head, was resting on the wall of the hall enjoying the view of the attentive students. She noticed Peter, a 5-year old Maltese boy seated next to Aiden, the only Black boy in the school, trying to look curiously at the boy sitting next to him. Peter seemed to be the only student not following what the Head was saying. But he did not interrupt anyone. He was simply visibly looking at the Black boy almost like inspecting him with his eyes.

When the activity ended Hilda called Peter to see why he was looking so curiously at Aiden. Peter was shy at first but with encouragement from Hilda he explained.

"I wanted to see where Aiden's black colour ended."

"Why?" she asked in amazement.

With his face lowered and almost in tears he muttered: "Whenever I misbehave at home my mother always calls the Black men to pick me up. I am afraid of Black people. I just wanted to see if Aidan was completely black or whether it was only his face that was black."

Hilda calmly explained to Peter that indeed Aidan was black but she also assured him that Aidan like other Black people were not a problem and he should not be afraid of them.

Hilda knew that she needed to inform the Head of School and also take some action. But what exactly? Should she speak with Peter's mother who was quite outspoken when she attends school? What if she denies what her son claims she tells him? Moreover, given that one child had such a negative stereotype others too may have such misconceptions. Should she not organise some school wide activity about stereotyping and racism?

8. Clara's dilemma

Hal Mula Senior School is a school which was established many years ago but it has been noticed that the number of students not completing Year 10 and/or Year 11 of compulsory secondary schooling was increasing. The most common reasons are either the students do not find the education at school relevant to their needs and/or students have personal socio-emotional challenges which are hindering them from attending school. The school selected 20 students from Year 10 and Year 11 most at risk (half of these students also had very challenging behaviour at school) and the head of school, Clara, together with the College's Psychosocial team developed a programme called the 'Necessary Skills Programme' (equivalent to two lessons a week) to specifically help students develop internal skills to cope with challenges in life. This in a way replaced the Learning Support Zone present in other schools but it was much more than a Learning Support Zone as the programme involved a variety of activities to encourage sharing emotions, dealing with negative feelings, discouraging physical fighting as well as meeting persons who had different attitudes to life. This programme also involved team building activities and included community work within the school. The programme had a positive effect with half the students and their behaviour and attendance at school significantly improved. Parents phoned the school to inform them about the positive change they saw in their children. However, with the remaining half of the students, the programme seemed to have no impact since the challenges going on in their life still proved to be very challenging. In fact, they still had poor school attendance. When they did attend school, they tried to disrupt the daily running of the school and tried to refuse to attend most lessons. Such students were still having a very negative impact on the school which was demotivating for most teachers. Moreover, the parents of these students also informed Clara that their children were out of control and that even though they wanted to help the school, they felt helpless. Even if Clara was getting exhausted, she was determined not to give up. She reflected critically on what she should do: Should she still impose on these students to attend school when it is still likely that they will disrupt the school when they attend? Or should she have a meeting with parents to see what they may suggest? Should she also have a meeting with the students individually or in small groups to get feedback from the students themselves? How could she involve her staff to listen to their difficulties and suggestions?

9. Clash of school cultures

Theresa was a newly appointed head of school who was deployed to a single gender secondary school with a bad reputation of a poor rapport between the Head of School and the school staff. There was a negative tension at all levels within the school, a general lack of respect and heated disputes were also very prevalent. The school had also been through two major changes: relocation from a larger to a much smaller premises and it was to be eventually phased out. As a result, the general attitude at school was very negative and the teaching staff felt everybody was against them. This also had a ripple effect on the students and negatively affected their learning. To make matters worse the physical upkeep of the school was also visibly lacking.

As an Assistant Head, Theresa always tried to lead with emotional intelligence and she believed in keeping a healthy balance between being a manager and a leader at school. The first thing she did when she was appointed Head of the school was to physically liven up the school before the start of the following scholastic year. She added more vibrant colours to the school corridors, invested in displaying positive messages around the school through pictures and quotes on the staircases and walls, painted all the classrooms and landscaped the school premises. She also made some physical changes to her office to make it more appealing to teachers and students to visit.

However, Theresa knew that the biggest challenge would be when the teachers and students started school. Theresa wanted to bring about a mentality shift that would make the teachers believe in themselves, in their worthiness and their work and to infuse a more respectful and motivating attitude at school. Theresa knew that she had to lead by example. As expected, Theresa found that many teachers had a deficit mentality, a general lack of interest and were often blaming students and their parents for their lack of interest in school. Theresa realised that she had to be patient and always respectful to both staff and students and to try and rebuild a sense of trust within the school. Theresa noted that both the staff and the students had reacted very positively to the physical changes she had done at school and she believed that this was just one of the stepping stones to bring the school back on track.

During the first term, she arranged regular meetings with her two assistant heads as well as with the different subject teachers to let them vent out negative feelings and to listen to any recommendations they put forward. This she also did with students and by the end of the first term she started to notice a more positive approach at school at all levels. She also held meetings with parents and explained to

them the school's vision. She also made great effort to be seen walking the school corridors, extolled her staff's efforts no matter how small the effort and made regular contact with the parents. One of the parents helped her set up the school's social media page.

However Theresa sadly noted that a minority of experienced and influential teachers still did not welcome the positive change she was trying to instil in the school; the sad reality was that these teachers had become accustomed to working to their minimum, had no interest in moving forward and were always ready to negatively talk about and/or belittle any school improvement or developments. Moreover, such teachers seemed to have a hold over other less experienced teachers and some of these teachers were actually afraid of them. While Theresa was satisfied with the improvements achieved, because of the collaboration of the majority of the students and staff, she was concerned that unless she addresses the issue at hand eventually the culture of the school may revert to the previous one. She wondered how she could continue to bring positive change in the school. What could she do about the disinterested teachers? How could she get more parents on her side?

10. Improving parental involvement

Parental involvement is particularly lacking at *Hal Bajjada* Secondary School. The school is not in the same locality of the students' residence so this could be one of the reasons for their lack of interest. Moreover, the majority of the parents work but another percentage of parents never had good contact with the school. Mark is a new head of school and would like to improve parental involvement as he believes that when a school has a good communication with the parents the students' progress at school is much better.

Mark organised different meetings at school and in the different localities where the students resided. Following suggestions from the parents who attended these meetings the school set up the social media page so as to improve communication with parents and students of the school community. The social media page was greatly welcomed and was used and having a very positive effect on all as the school's activities are well celebrated and parents actually take the time to 'like' the activities and photos uploaded. Some even started posting comments. Mark also set up a system whereby he could send messages to parents on their mobiles from the school's centralised computer system so as to keep them updated on any upcoming events or urgent matters. Mark also made it a priority to contact parents via the telephone about their children's progress at school and invited them to school

especially in case of issues of concern. Mark also organised several activities open to parents to attend but parental attendance while it improved, was still low. Such an event was the International Languages Day aimed at also involving the parents of foreign students. Involvement of foreign parents was even lower. Parents' help at school in organising activities was also low.

On one occasion he overheard some parents talking. One group noted that they were not comfortable with the "foreign students." Another group of parents noted that they needed to do more as a school to integrate "foreign students" and their parents. Mark reflected on these observations, and he asked what else can he do to prompt parents to involve themselves better at school and bring parents together? How can Mark make parents more aware that attending for/participating in school activities is very motivating for their children? One missing link was parents and staff: how could he improve this link?

11. Preventing early school leaving

Franco has been Head of the Secondary School for the last four years. The school had acquired a name for being a very difficult school, with students having very challenging behaviour, parents who are very uncooperative and sometimes very aggressive both towards the school authority as well as towards the teachers in class.

Most teachers at the school have been teaching there for many years, and know the school inside out. They know all the families of students attending the school and most often teachers are teaching the students of parents who were once students in their class years before.

Franco's major task was to assess the situation at the school. He also looked at the examination results of the previous years and Franco realised that the students were not achieving good grades in their summative assessments, and were faring badly when compared to other students in the same year groups in Malta and Gozo.

During the first couple of weeks, in a one to one meeting with the teachers at school, Franco realised that there were very low expectations from teachers. This was also very evident amongst all parents, who firmly believed that since they were never successful academically, then their siblings were also bound to follow the same route. Franco was shocked to hear a very important person in the village suggesting to try and change the school targets, reduce focus on academic subjects and give more attention on other areas such as sports and arts.

Franco together with the two new assistant heads of school could see a very different picture than what was being given. They realised that the present situation is so much different than in the past. While parents were much more co-operative and willing to collaborate, the low expectations from teachers and parents were resulting in less challenging work being given. A lot of focus was being given to student welfare, leaving little space for focus on academic subjects. The SLT realised that teachers need to revisit their way of thinking and start believing more in the students and challenge them more in order to improve their academic achievement, whilst maintaining the individual attention given to the student welfare which remains a very important aspect of the school ethos.

Franco had a difficult choice to make. He knew that this would surely help the students believe more in themselves, and thus achieve better results, which in turn, could help students continue with their studies later on in life, reducing the possibility of the high percentage of Early School Leavers from the village. But this will surely result in a number of teachers who need to shift from the comfort zone they were working in. The SLT knew that small things could make a huge difference as long as the school and school community no longer believed in a deficit mentality. They honestly wondered if they should push forward these ideas even though it could result in a possible confrontation between teachers and SLT? How could they go about this?

12. Irregular attendance

One of the main concerns of SLT members at *Kemmuna* Primary School was irregular attendance by a good number of students at school.

A pattern was emerging with a number of students missing out on school just before a public holiday, after a weekend, in the run up to local festivities and also on birthdays. A number of families were opting to take their children on holidays during the scholastic year since air fares were much cheaper off season. Doctors' certificates were being submitted regularly to cover up the days missed from school.

The recent decision taken to stop families going abroad during the scholastic year made a difference as well as the introduction of initiatives to stop doctors from issuing medical certificates to cover up on missed days. This was also effective, although a number of doctors were not aware of measures being taken, resulting in a lot of frustration from parents who end up needing to go to the doctor again.

SLT members have also made it a point to follow up students missing school even at Kindergarten level by phoning home to check the reason why the student failed to attend school. This proved to be quite effective, although time consuming. This could be done because of the small number of students at *Kemmuna* Primary school.

The Psycho Social team in the College was doing a lot of work with the students who continuously missed school, calling home and also carrying out surprise house visits. This resulted in better attendance in some cases, although the workload and large number of students missing school in the College was making it difficult for Psycho Social team to keep up with all students.

Parents are starting to realise that if they do not pay the fine being imposed on them for failing to send their children to school, nothing happens. So this is not helping the cause at all.

The one off financial contribution to families based on attendance did help out, but parents realised that this will not be repeated and so it is not an incentive any more.

Given such practical concerns and limitations the SLT were very concerned as to what they could do differently. The new assistant head noted that although they made improvements, the measures were not sustainable. She also reflected that all the directions were purely top-down and imposed on the parents. The SLT wondered whether or not they should attempt to invite parents and get them involved in developing a practical and meaningful policy. How could the school help in improving school attendance?

13. A change in school culture?

Filfla Primary is a school for students from 3 years of age to 10 – from Kinder 1 to Year 6. It is a school with a very difficult history. The school was once catering for a large number of students, most of them coming from families with very difficult social background.

When David was posted as head of school, he replaced a head of school who had been at the school for a number of years. During the transition period between one head to the other, David was given a thorough background of the school ethos.

It was very evident that staff had clear boundaries with head of school. They had a lot of respect towards his authority but dared not question decisions taken, and were always very careful to abide with any decisions taken.

All decisions taken were top down, with very little input from other members of staff, except teachers who were members of the school council and who once were teachers with him in the same school a couple of years back.

The School Development Plan targets were decided upon at the office, and teachers obliged to the targets set. Parents were rarely consulted and link between parents and the school was through telephone on particular days and for defined period of time. Parents could only talk to SLT through appointment on particular days only. This was to avoid a repetition of incidents which happened years before under the previous administration.

David had a very difficult choice to make. The progress done at school level regarding authority was visible. Students respected SLT members and were very careful not to break rules. Teachers also had great respect, although at times it was evident that they were afraid to voice their opinion about issues concerning the school. Parents were also under control, but were finding it difficult to contact the school, and this was leading to a lot of frustration on their part and lack of participation at school level.

David was more of the idea that all stake holders should be consulted and all had a very valid contribution to give, but he did not want to lose the grip the present administration had on parents, students and also members of staff. However, the current ethos went against his professional beliefs. He sincerely felt that he should introduce a more democratic form of leadership that he sometimes felt that he was living a lie and yet things seemed to be under control. But is blind control consistent with a meaningful education? Should education really be about control? Should it not be about participation and distribution of leadership?

14. The territory dilemma

Ms Jane is working through her tenth year of headship and the second year in a public Primary School. She firmly believes in distributed leadership which means mobilising leadership expertise at all levels in the school in order to generate more opportunities for change and to build the capacity for improvement. The emphasis is upon interdependent interaction and practice rather than individual and independent actions associated with those with formal leadership roles or responsibilities. She had practised this in other schools with raving reviews by the Audit teams.

There are four assistant heads in the Senior Leadership Team at this Primary school. Every member is given duties according to his/her expertise and Ms Jane encourages each member to be a leader and to participate actively. The assistant heads seem to be on board and feel that they are valuable

members of a team. Professional collaboration is the foundation for distributed leadership. As the months went by Ms Jane noticed some glitches that tainted her philosophy but was not perturbed. Her College Principal, Mr. Deguara summoned her urgently to his office. He was taken aback with what happened to him that week when he phoned her school. He got through to Mr Fenech, assistant head and told him that he needed some information regarding a transport issue. Mr Fenech's immediate answer was that transport was not his business and that the College Principal had the wrong person as Ms Farrugia was the assistant head in charge of transport and hung up. Ms Jane was devastated to hear that her philosophy of collaboration and team building was not growing as she had wished it to.

Back at school she felt she needed to observe and look for the deficiencies. She noticed that Mr Fenech has interpreted the distributed leadership into building his "territory", he was very jealous of his responsibilities, not wanting anyone of his colleagues to know what he was doing. The fact that he had a leadership role had led him to devalue the Head's role by making him think that he was the one doing all the leading. The other assistant heads were confused on whether they should become territorial or keep working towards Ms Jane's goal. The head realised that her effort of building a collaborative and trusting environment was being jeopardised. She asked herself: How can she continue in her quest to work with distributed leadership? What could she do? Can Mr Fenech continue to form part of the Senior Leadership Team? Can he let go of his territory and be part of a collaborative team?

15. Early school leaving and leadership tensions

The All Saints Primary School caters for children from 3 years up to 11 years. The Senior Leadership Team is aware that one of the main problems in school is absenteeism. This phenomenon is spread across all year groups and usually those children, who start missing school in kindergarten, continue to do so throughout the primary years.

Kinder consists of two years and it is not compulsory, so some parents choose to send their children whenever they want to. Experience has taught the school administration that children who miss school in the early years grow up to be those who miss compulsory school time. The head and assistant heads know that to tackle this problem, they need to address various issues. Mr Pollacco, head of All Saints Primary school for the last three years, insists on various strategies to promote kindergarten education as a learning hub and not just a baby-sitting facility. He sets out on building a website where all the good practices of the school are publicised with emphasis on the work done in the early years. The aim was to show that young pupils learn skills and experiences that help enrich them in their growth.

The three assistant heads and teachers welcomed this initiative and collaborated in the setting up and execution of it. Mr Keith, a new assistant head to the school, helped in the technological aspect of this initiative and since he was a journalist helped the head in getting contacts for media exposure. Ms Bonanno and Mr Scicluna, assistant heads with years of experience in the school, and most teachers, insisted that more should be done and this was discussed during curricular meetings and SDP sessions. Their main concerns were that most of the pupils, who were missing out on school, had serious social problems that needed to be addressed and these families had little or no means to own technological gadgets. They felt that the website and media strategy would only be cosmetic and does not really tackle the problem radically. They wanted a more holistic approach which meant dealing with the family and their social problems that are hindering them from sending their children to school.

Ms Bonanno and Mr Scicluna together with most of the staff at school interpreted the head's insistence with technology and the media as a reluctance to address the issue seriously. They wanted to use the school's psycho-social team and utilise the Social Workers and Counsellors to address the family's background and social problems. This situation was ultimately causing a serious strain on relationships within the school and the cohesive work towards a common vision was being threatened. Mr Pollacco was being faced not only with handling the issue of absenteeism but also an administrative difficulty. He wondered: What should be the next action to resolve the issue in administration, and by whom? What should be the next action to resolve the issue of absenteeism? By whom? What support could be given by the school psycho-social team?

16. Jake

Jake is an eight year old child. The mother claims that the child is trans-gender. The biological gender of the child is male but the child prefers to be treated as a girl.

Jake has moved from one school to another without ever meaningfully engaging in learning. Her attendance was irregular mostly because of the clashes which the mother had with the school administration and the Education Authorities.

Jake started to attend Ulysses Primary School from the start of this scholastic year. The school administration were briefed of the child's history through the School Social Work Services. With this in mind, Clarissa, the Head of School decided to choose which battles to fight with the child's mother. Clarissa's priority is to have the child attend school, be happy and get engaged in learning, and develop some friendships.

With the help of the Complementary teacher the child was assessed for the literacy abilities. The child was found to be very weak in all academic areas. Hence an appropriate Action Plan was devised.

Luckily the child integrated quite well in the school and she learnt to read. The empathy which the school administration and the teacher showed with the mother paid off. The mother started to cooperate with all the initiatives taken at school to help in the child's progress.

A few days ago Jake accompanied her classmates to Ogygia Middle School as part of the Transition programme within the College. One of the students who attends Ogygia Middle school and who happens to live in the same neighbourhood where Jake lives, started passing lewd remarks about Jake's sexuality. Jake was very upset. The next day she expressed her concerns to the head of school about attending the Middle School.

During an afternoon school staff meeting, Clarissa brought this issue up with the staff so as to see what else the school could do. However she discovered that there are still some teachers in the school that have a problem to accept the reality of Jake. One of them confronted Clarissa at the meeting. "How can you justify what we are doing to this boy? Can't you see that there are serious legal issues? Isn't the child still legally considered as a boy in the school records? How are we really preparing him for the struggles he will encounter in middle and secondary schools and in life? Is it not best to treat him as a boy?"

Clarissa was not sure whether she should even acknowledge such sexist remarks. She did not want to give this teacher's traditional perspectives any credibility. Yet, she knew that if she did not deal with the matter at hand promptly such comments will eventually reach the mother who may withdraw the child from the school. She wondered what her next step should be.

17. The New Boy

Paul was 12 years old and had recently moved back with his parents who had recently settled in Malta from New York. They wanted to go somewhere nice and calm where they could study and enjoy the beaches rather than having the hectic life they had in New York. A quiet child by nature Paul found it difficult to make friends at first. However, the boisterous boys in the school included him in all games and talked to him in English so he would not feel left out since he knew no Maltese. He looked happy and the teachers never suspected anything was amiss.

Then one fine day he would not get on the school transport to come to school. The driver came to

inform the head of school, and his parents phoned that he would not be coming in. They also asked for an appointment to discuss Paul's adaptation to the school.

As a result of the meeting with parents the head offered Paul meetings with a Guidance Teacher to help him transition into the Maltese school system more smoothly since education in Malta was very different from what he was used to in New York. Also, he started lessons in Maltese as a foreign language, to help him integrate more with other students.

However, at this stage he started to sit alone in the school ground and refused all offers to join in games. The Guidance teacher became very worried because Paul was not going anywhere after school except to Yoga Classes with his parents and their English friends. It did not seem that his parents were supporting the suggestions made by the school.

Another meeting was called with the parents. This time, during this meeting, the parents insisted that the classroom was too noisy. Also, that they thought that the school should follow the American way and remove all the boisterous boys from his class so that he could feel calmer and attend school happily.

At this point, the head of school was wondering what actions he could have taken earlier to prevent this issue from escalating. Maybe other support services could have been asked for to help this child? Or was it that the parents were not accepting the culture of the school? What action should the school take at this point?

18. Maria's Dilemma

Maria had been an assistant head of school in a Boys' Secondary School for 5 years. Her heart ached when every single year, as soon as the Form 1 students came in, there was a good group of them who could barely read and write. She could not understand how, after 8 years in formal education, they could arrive in the Secondary School without these basic skills. She could understand that some students were developmentally slower than others, however, not to that extreme. As a result, on the first opportunity that arose where she could become a head of a Primary School she went for the interview with a strong determination to avoid letting this problem persist. She was selected and was eager to start her new work.

As soon as she was given the headship, she was also given the School Development Plan drawn up by the previous staff of her new school. The plan included only two good ideas for actions namely: (i)

taking points from “The Strategic Plan for Early School Leaving in Malta” there were suggestions for Shared Reading Sessions in Kindergarten classes with the help of parents, (ii) the school had signed an agreement to put into action the ‘*Aqra Kemm Tiflaħ*’ Program (Read as much as You can Program). However, that was as far as it went. Two good ideas were on paper, just the bare minimum, but nothing had been done about them, no action plan was included.

And to make matters more complicated, only one person from the previous staff was now on Maria’s new team, so the SDP was not owned by the new staff. She had ideas about what could be done concretely. However, given Maria’s belief in collaborative leadership and that the School Development Plan should be owned by the staff, she was not sure what steps she should take.

Should she continue on the School Development Plan prepared by a previous administration and staff who were no longer there? How could she ensure that her new staff owns this School Development Plan when they hadn’t contributed to its conception? Should she draw up a new School Development Plan with this new staff? At the same she did not want to lose any time as she knew that her ideas would benefit the students. But then if she pushes her ideas without any consultation she may be perceived as a dictator and this would not augur well for her success in the school.

19. Move as One

A newly appointed head of Galantom Middle school was keen to meet her new staff so as to create a bond. So she planned a team building session on the first day she met her new staff. She did this at one of the local hotels. While getting to know her staff she explained her vision for the school. She did this asking their opinions. They all discussed the way forward as they were all new to the school. She made sure they participated so that her vision would become their vision. At the end of the event all were keen to meet at school on the following day.

The next day, at school, they discussed the year groups and Ms Zammit planned how best to assign the classes trying to make all of them happy. They all agreed that the first initiative they had to take was to assuage parents’ concerns, which were a big deal in this school. Should they plan a parents’ meeting where the whole new team is presented to the parents together and discuss the school vision for the school and therefore their children? It was a real dilemma as they had heard that the parents did not always collaborate.

One of the teachers, Ms Boffa, was not happy in the new school. She kept quiet and Ms Zammit felt her hostility. She discussed this with the College Principal. They agreed to ask the teacher to attend

another meeting so that she would not be present when the meeting for the parents was held. Was this a good idea? The meeting for parents was held and was quite successful.

The next day teachers were informed about the year group they were going to teach. However a few minutes later, Ms Boffa rushed into the head's office without asking permission.

"I need to speak with you urgently!" she screamed. The head asked the teacher to calm down and to take a seat.

"Do not shush me. First, the Principal of the College does not allow me to attend the parents' meeting held at the school. Then you change my class. There is definitely a plot against me. I have the right to keep the class and year group I taught for 20 years. I have launched a formal complaint with the Union. If this is what you want; this is what you will get." And she rushed out off the office without allowing the head to say another word.

Ms Zammit was shocked with the teacher's behaviour. She had another problem now on her plate. Should she go back on her work and give this teacher her old class when it had already been given to another teacher? Should she insist that her only available class was what she offered her? Would that ruin relationships with this teacher and with the community, since she had been teaching this year group for quite a number of years and was known as being a 'good' teacher? Or, should she insist with the College Principal that for the good of the whole school and community the best would be to find Ms Boffa another school?

20. Collaboration Zero

St Anne Primary School had the reputation of a very good primary school that involved parents. The administrative team worked hard to include parents and listen to their views. They tried to involve them beyond assistance in library or concerts; they actually did their best to involve them in some curriculum decisions.

Overall they were happy with the relationship with the parents. However, slowly but surely the parents expected the administration to do exactly as they say. The administrative team felt that the parents' expectations were too onerous and they were not respecting their professional judgment.

Collaborating with parents had turned nasty during the last few months of the previous scholastic year. Parents barged in and shouted in the head's face. They accused teachers, through the School

Council, of making mistakes. They made reports on everything and everyone.

A decision was taken to start allowing parents to school only by appointment. Because of this action, collaboration between parents and school went down to zero. Before the summer holidays, a new head of school was posted at the school. This new head was informed about her new challenge. She had two months to prepare for the challenge. Ms Lofaro, new head of school, thought about how best to tackle the situation in order to win the parents back but also respect the views of the teachers. She knew that sometimes teachers were mistaken and had to listen more to parents. But she was also aware that parents can also be very disrespectful. Ms Lofaro was a parent herself and she had read so much about parental participation in the schools. She also wanted to be a successful head of school. So she was thinking seriously about: What she should do to start cultivating a new collaboration with parents? How can this happen? What should she do so as to prevent a repetition of the previous scenario happening once more?

21. School Culture clash

Xemx Secondary School formerly a very prestigious secondary school for boys, is now a co-ed Secondary Senior school with a catchment area having a high incidence of social and economic problems. The school was recently in the press for challenging issues and as a result has acquired a negative reputation.

There are a number of teachers who have been at this school for many years, and seem to be finding difficulty adjusting to the changed needs and abilities of the students. This group of teachers is very resistant to change, and reject outright any mention of innovative teaching methods, curricular development, or school development planning. Some new teachers also find the school difficult to work in, but there are also those who are happy in the school, and care about and respect the students.

To ensure a satisfactory level of teaching and learning, and to provide advice and support, teachers' schemes and records of work are checked by assistant heads, and classroom observation is carried out. Although teachers are given ample notification of this, very few hand in their schemes on time, and assistant heads need to keep pestering them to do so.

There is resentment towards the SLT, as teachers feel their main role is to keep discipline, and should be patrolling the corridors at all times, in order to dispense punishments to students immediately

when sent by a teacher. The SLT, on the other hand, are frustrated when teachers report every small incident, instead of taking action themselves. SLT members spend a lot of time tackling these disciplinary issues, leaving little time for curriculum development. While the SLT acknowledges the paramount importance of discipline, they are perplexed by some teachers' apparent lack of concern for students' poor academic results.

Great pressure is exerted to have troublesome students removed from the school; industrial action has been taken in the past, and currently union directives are in place regarding discipline in the school. Measures taken at school level are not deemed effective enough by teachers. Teachers are often hostile towards these students, and have been heard saying they must be broken, and are often at odds with the SLT, who treat students with respect but are firm when a student misbehaves.

A recent article in a major local newspaper has raised some delicate but crucial questions: Should problematic students be sent to other schools? Will this prevent them becoming early school leavers? Are teachers correct in labelling SLT members incompetent for treating students with respect when dealing with disciplinary issues?

22. John's Challenge

John is a student with severe physical disabilities who attends mainstream schooling. His disability includes also communication problems and he can only communicate via a device through stare built specifically for him. His parents are ardent supporters of inclusion and do all they can to see their son succeed through the schooling process. The school also does its utmost to provide the best service for all the students including John who until recently managed to go through the system unscathed.

John is growing up and so are the tensions building up inside him. He sees his peers playing during the PE lesson and does not feel involved. He has outings which are not always accessible and to which therefore he cannot attend. He has to refrain from coming to school on the rare occasions when the LSE is not available as other LSEs are not trained to deal with his specific situation. Worse still he cannot cope with the endless demands of the curriculum at his level and his summative assessment results have taken a nose dive.

The parents are at loggerheads with the school. They blame the LSE for incompetency, they blame the school for complacency and they blame the educational system for not catering adequately for their son. The school feels helpless in the situation. It has done its utmost in the situation. It has

made available all of its resources, it has gone beyond its remit to reshape the provision to make it more accessible yet there still remain structures that have still to react to the situation.

The head of school and assistant head have reflected deeply as to what else they can do to assist John. Maybe there are other things they could do and they are not aware of? However they also wonder whether the parents could be somewhat in denial. Might they be requesting things which John will never achieve and that in their endeavour their zealousness could even be abusing and stressing John?

23. ESL preventive measures

Many students at Southside Primary School come from a low socio-economic background. Therefore the school feels it needs to compensate for this disadvantage by offering students high quality education in which differentiated teaching and learning is at its very heart in an attempt to reach all students.

For quality teaching to take place the school invests a lot of time in teacher education. Besides the scheduled Professional Development Sessions, teacher education takes place during Curriculum Time which is held around three times a month. Each Year group has 4.5 hours of meeting/training per month. During these sessions professionals such as Head of Departments and Support Teachers are invited to give seminars or workshops to the teachers. These sessions are usually custom made for the developmental needs of the students in the school. Besides their professional development, these meetings help in team building and sharing of good practice.

In order to increase educational attainment, besides differentiated teaching, the teachers employ innovative teaching methods with an emphasis on ICT and digital tools in order to engage the students more and more. The school also offers after school programmes such as *Nwar* and *Klabb Nahla* to children who need extra attention.

Since many children at this school are at high risk, the Educational Psycho-Social Team and SAFE School Programme staff namely Anti-Bullying and Child Safety Services are frequently called in to give support and intervene where needed. During this process the school ropes in the parents too, to ensure all stakeholders are on board. There is also in-school support given to these children through the Nurture Class which provides day-to-day support and structure.

The students have an active role in school life. This ranges from participation in show and tell during morning assembly, Special Assemblies organised through the year, Christmas Concert and Open Day, and participation in Students Council.

Despite all the above mentioned measures educational attainment keeps being low in the end of year examinations. This is quite discouraging given all the input the teaching staff is putting on a daily basis. What more can be done? Or what can be done differently in order to reach all children and increase educational attainment?

24. Educational Leadership

The Head of School, Peter, has been working in this school for the past 3 years. Taking over from the previous leaders have been quite an uphill struggle. Besides lack of parental involvement Peter had the added challenge of teachers' passiveness. Peter took up the challenge with enthusiasm and having worked in many schools before he had the opportunity of observing many good and bad practices.

The first initiative he took was to invite the teaching staff for a one-to-one meeting on a voluntary basis in summer before the start of the school year. He had a very good turn out as 29 out of 33 members of staff accepted the invitation. Peter is very approachable and makes sure he hears the staff's concerns and acts upon them in a timely manner. That summer and the year which followed, Peter worked a lot on team building. In order to accomplish this, besides being available for his staff, he set up a private social media group where he could keep in touch with all staff and encourage them to open up and share good practices.

Peter also has a vision for the school and one of his main characteristics is to inspire his colleagues to grow professionally and engage in quality education for the pupils. Peter keeps regular contact with his staff during Curriculum Time and also by sending updates in a weekly Memo. He seeks the staff's opinion on many issues however he still feels the staff in general is slow in gaining momentum. He wishes the staff to be more involved and give their opinion. The staff's unresponsiveness can be quite discouraging at times and Peter wonders what he can do better. What do you think Peter can do better to get the staff to be more open? What would you do differently? How can he get better participation and involvement from his staff?

25. Irregular attendance for a reason

Kate is a working mother living in Valletta. She works late in a restaurant. Her mother lives in *Mensija*. Kate takes her two children to *Mensija* Primary School because her mother takes the children to school and picks them up afterwards. The attendance of these two children is very irregular. They miss more than 35% of their school days. Kelson, the youngest child, is a student with a statement of needs having a one-to-one LSE. The mother does not inform the school when Kelson is absent. She does not communicate with the school whatsoever. She does not attend any parents' meetings if held in the morning or in the afternoon. Very often turns up to school late. This might result to Kelson's LSE being assigned another case for the day, with Kelson turning up at school 30 minutes late.

The school administration follows the National Policy by the book. At the end of each month the school reports to the SEWO the unjustified absences of the two children. The school management has tried to discuss the issue with Kate by calling her in the head's office when she comes in the school with the children. The children are missing out on school. The mother seems to be unmotivated to change. Reasons given to the school include sickness. Other reasons often include long travel time due to traffic, laziness and inclement weather. The ultimate measure (Local Tribunal) seems not to bother the mother. She always seems to find her way out and claims she has little help. The school cannot escalate the case to a further level and feels toothless. Is the National Policy still effective? Is there another measure when everything fails? How would you go about helping these two children attend school more regularly?

26. Difficulties within the family.

Maia is a 10-year-old student whose school attendance is very irregular. She comes from a difficult family background in which domestic violence and gambling is not excluded. Maia is raised by her mother and her mother's partner. Maia's mother has sought the help of the local community social worker many times for poverty issues and Maia is being followed by the Educational Social Worker. The Educational Social worker keeps good contact with both Maia's family and the school and she has made many attempts to get Maia to attend school regularly.

The head of school have met Maia's mother on a number of occasion. These meetings were mostly called by the school however there were a few times when the mother called for these meetings herself. The mother feels very helpless herself and cannot get Maia to come to school regularly. The school administration feels that the mother needs psycho-social help herself as she presents to be

quite a vulnerable person. On the last of these meetings the mother opened up with the head of school explaining that she has no money for school activities, material objects and neither to prepare a decent lunch for her daughter to bring to school. Despite this disclosure, one must say that whenever Maia happened to come to school she was always clean and well groomed. The Head of School proposed to the mother that in order to help the family, the school will incur all expenses such as outings, photocopies etc. and that the school will also provide Maia with a healthy lunch. The school and the mother also agreed to get Maia to school for a couple of hours a day, until she is ready to stay the full day. After this meeting Maia came to school on and off for a couple of weeks and the school kept to the agreement reached with the mother. There were many of these days in which Maia asked to stay for the whole day because she was enjoying her time at school. During this period Maia was also being seen by the school Guidance Teacher.

Despite all these attempts Maia's attendance remains irregular. What else do you think can be done to help Maia come to school regularly? What would you do? How can Maia and her mother receive better support from the Educational Support Services?

D. SUGGESTED RESOURCES:

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