Internationalisation and Multiculturalism in Maltese Education and Society
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Foreword
by the Chief Executive Officer – Joanne Grima

Maltese schools have experienced an influx of international students during the past years and the educators within these schools were expected to cater for the needs of everyone under their care. The challenges created due to this influx were various since students brought with them different mother languages, experiences, cultures, traditions, beliefs, and ways of life. This baggage inflicted challenges on educators but several researchers took up the opportunity to study the various situations from different angles and perspectives. This was truly required in order to understand, take stock and develop recommendations on the way forward. Such recommendations are required to ensure the creation of the right environment conducive to learning for all students, international or not, and to guarantee the best educational journey for all. The Institute for Education felt the need to contribute in this aspect by disseminating these research findings for educators to be in a position to adapt practices, to react to circumstances experienced at school and, where possible, be proactive. The Institute believes that through such studies, schools will be in more favourable positions to create their own structure to integrate international learners and assist all learners to become beneficial resources for one another; thus, enriching the learning experience of each other. It also aims to reach educators and support them in their different scenarios since some have experienced the influx gradually while others experienced a change in the demography of their school population overnight. We have heard on various occasions that practice should be based on research and for this to be actually possible, one must be aware of such studies. The Institute will offer a yearly platform though this journal to expose research, share it with educators and provide them with the information to develop the tools required to function effectively.
Introduction
Ms Christine Fenech

It is the Institute for Education’s mission to promote quality education for all educators and educational leaders, foster learning communities and contribute to equity and social justice. One way of achieving this is by gathering and sharing latest research on education. Establishing an annual symposium and giving an opportunity to postgraduate and doctoral students and researchers to share their research in education with the community of educators and educational leaders, as well as with parents and policy makers in Malta is the Institute’s contribution to this end. Through this journal, this research is being made available and easily accessible to the learning community beyond the symposium itself. As such, it is meant to serve as a resource and source of inspiration to educators, educational leaders, policy makers, parents and the interested public alike.

The topic chosen for the first annual symposium, namely ‘Internationalisation and Multiculturalism in Maltese Education and Society’ is highly topical. Malta, by virtue of its size, insularity and geographic location, has been subject to various waves of colonial rule, influencing the language, culture, religious practice, social, economic and political make-up of the islands today (Baldacchino and Royle, 2010; Caruana et al. 2013). In the more recent past, Malta’s accession to the European Union in 2004 contributed in part to an increase in foreign residents, particularly following the lifting of work permit restrictions on Romanian and Bulgarian citizens in 2013 (EUROSTAT 2020). However, beyond EU accession, the share of migrants in Malta has increased exponentially in recent years from 11,000 in 2004 to 23,611 in 2013 and 83,267 in 2019 (EUROSTAT 2020). This represents an increase in the share of migrants among the total population from 3% in 2004 to 6% in 2013 and 17% in 2019 (EUROSTAT 2020). Indeed, this share exceeds by far the share of migrants among the total population in countries like Germany (12% in 2019), Italy (9% in 2019), the United Kingdom (9% in 2019) or France (7% in 2019) (EUROSTAT 2020) and is well above the average in Europe (11%) (IOM 2020: 24).
Introduction

Although migrants remain a relatively small share of the total world population, international migration has witnessed an increase globally in the past two decades. While they have accounted for 2.3% in the 1970s, their shares have increased in recent years to 3.0% in 2010 and 3.5% in 2019 (IOM 2020:21). Beside the increase in numbers, the countries of origin and destination, migration channels and migrants' legal statuses have diversified substantially in recent years, amongst other factors (Vertovec 2007; IOM 2020). This is due in no small part to wars, political (Arar et al. 2019, 2020a, 2020b; IOM 2020) and environmental crises (Adamo & Izazola 2010; Arar et al. 2020b; IOM 2020) emerging as push factors for migration.

This increase has implications for public service provision, including education (Vertovec 2007; Arar et al. 2020a, 2020b; IOM 2020; Bezzina & Vassallo 2019). As is reflected in the articles in this journal, it has impacted both the number and diversity of students in classrooms in terms of countries of origin, religious and cultural practices, language proficiency, educational background or experiences of political and economic struggle and personal trauma, to name but a few. But what is more, teachers and students have been ill-prepared for this change personally and professionally.

But besides that, Baldacchino (2003) reminds that this increase is felt more strongly than in larger countries due to Malta’s size and population density, resulting in ‘fears’ of ‘invasion’. Indeed, various articles in this journal have uncovered similar perceptions among educators, educational leaders, students and parents regarding the increase in migrants in Maltese society and education. Vertovec’s research (2018) confirms this connection between migration and public perception, finding that

> *even slight but rapid diversification has notable effects. In places where a relatively small but fast influx of migrants have arrived, tendencies toward xenophobia are greatest. Therefore, it is not just the perceived size of migrant groups that affects people’s assessments of change, but it is the pace of change that some find distressing.* (Vertovec 2018: 2)
The symposium and this journal are intended, therefore, both to take record of the developments and provide insights into how educators, education leaders and students are responding to this development. It does so with the aim of uncovering and addressing negative perceptions to foster equity and social justice. Moreover, it does so by providing recommendations for policy and practice and, thus, serving as a resource for the learning community.

These developments and perceptions thereof are explored at the macro-, meso- and micro-level. Chapter 1 focusses on the macro-level analysis and investigates the development of multiculturalism in Maltese society in general and education in particular. Chapter 2 analyses the impact at the meso-level by exploring the impact on schools as learning communities and analysing supportive framework conditions in this regard. Finally, Chapter 3 is dedicated to the micro-analysis and delves into the experience of educational leaders and educators. Over and above these analyses, Chapter 4 of the journal showcases good practices in addressing multiculturalism in education.

The journal articles provide a rich and diverse picture of the impact of multiculturalism in Maltese society and education. We are indebted to the excellent contributions made by the authors and the dedication and commitment by the selection and editorial board, who have guided the authors in the development of their articles, as well as contributing an introduction and context for the different chapters.

References


Introduction


EUROSTAT (2020) Population on 1 January by age, sex and broad group of citizenship [migr_pop2ctz]


Chapter 1: Internationalisation and Multiculturalism in Maltese Society

Internationalisation and Multiculturalism in Maltese Society

Dr Khalid Arar
Migration is an ancient phenomenon; however, the extent, duration, and consequences of present-day international migration seem far more complex and challenging than in the past. In the 21st century, various factors generate migration, ranging from civil and international wars to political and economic crises (for example, Venezuela) and to simply the search for a better life (Arar, Orucu and Waite 2020). Over the last three decades, many wars have displaced enormous populations – including the first and second Gulf Wars, the Gaza War, the Somalian Civil War, the Bosnian War, the Arab Spring conflicts in the Middle East, the Colombian Civil War, the Iraq War, the Afghanistan War (Banks 2017; Waite 2016). Regime change and political conflict have also engendered vast population moves as seen in the Arab Spring followed by the Syrian and Yemenite civil wars, (Arar, Brooks and Bogotch 2019; Banks 2017; Dryden-Peterson 2016; Hatton 2017; UNHCR 2001-2020; Waite 2016). Moreover, developments in transportation and communication around the globe have facilitated a constant flow of people from one country to another through either conventional or illegal, sometimes fatal paths (Arar, Kondakci and Streitwieser 2020). The number of migrants constantly increased from 174 million in 1995 towards 272 million in 2019, meaning that approximately 3.5% of the total global population was on the move in 2019 (IOM 2020). These movements are also intertwined with technological developments:

Migration is intertwined with technology and innovation and there exists a large body of analysis that has assessed how international migration acts to support (and sometimes limit) the transfer of technology and knowledge, often working in tandem with investment and trade flows along historical, geographic and geopolitical connections between countries and communities (IOM 2020: 8).

Because people search for security, employment and education, they inevitably move from unstable states with failing economies to more successful states where they have the possibility of a better life (Arar 2020). Yet, displaced people form a distinct group within the total number of international
migrants. According to the IOM (2020), approximately 40 million migrants were classified as “displaced persons” in 2019, while according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR 2001–2020) the current number of those recognised as registered refugees exceeds 25.4 million. There is little hope expressed by futuristic estimates for a decrease in international immigrants and the number of displaced persons is not expected to fall (Arar et al. 2020). This means that effective policies are urgently needed that can help manage international migration and provide for the acute needs of different types of migrants (IOM 2020).

Various economic and social benefits derive from migration for both countries of origin and destination countries (IOM 2020). According to Bauman (2011), globalization enables wealthy nations to entice and solicit people from poor nations. Mass marketing nurtures sometimes artificial needs, tempting people in less developed nations to improve their material welfare by migrating to work in wealthier nations. Migrants from Africa, the Middle East and Asia fall prey to exploitative smugglers and human traffickers to transport them by sea to Europe and Australia on voyages that sometimes end in their deaths. Other luckier migrants are accepted and absorbed by the target states and are able to become contributing members of the host society:

Countries of destination benefit significantly from migration as migrants often fill critical labour gaps, create jobs as entrepreneurs, and pay taxes and social security contributions. Some migrants are among the most dynamic members of the host society contributing to the development of science and technology and enriching their host communities by providing cultural diversity. (United Nations 2018: 1).

However, many governments are unwilling to recognise or invest the necessary resources to develop these benefits (Arar 2020). Populist politicians magnify and exploit xenophobic perceptions through mass media (Waite 2016). Cultivating support of populations suffering from economic or social difficulties, they argue that immigrants threaten the host country’s national security, erroneously claiming that forced
immigrants cannot possibly have the necessary skills to integrate within the host country’s socio-economic structures and inhibit their assimilation (IOM 2020). Applying these tendentious perceptions, host country education systems may, for example, refuse to recognise the educational credentials of immigrants or refuse to admit them to vocational training, which then marginalises this population and may eliminate any potential contributions they could be making to their given host society (Arar, Brooks and Bogotch 2019).

War generates a humanitarian crisis, not just for warring nations: civilians caught in the crossfires are forced to migrate to escape suffering and even death (Dryden–Peterson 2016). The initial target countries for persons displaced by war and political crises are neighbouring countries, creating new hardships for other nations and their governments (Arar, Orucu and Waite 2020; Banks 2017). Nations recently affected include Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, Malta, Italy and Greece, each recently overwhelmed by waves of displaced persons and forced to cope with these war-torn, traumatised populations seeking safety, shelter and new lives. The estimated number and proportion of international migrants already surpasses some projections made for the year 2050, which were in the order of 230 million (2.6% of world population) (IMO 2020).

While some displaced persons hope to distance themselves as far as possible from the traumas of their homeland, others cherish hopes of repatriation once the situation in their homeland improves. Those who fear to return often pass through the initial countries of sanctuary hoping to reach more distant, wealthier countries, but these countries may be less willing to accept them or to give them shelter (Loo, Bernhard and Jeong 2018). According to recent reports by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, of the 70.8 million displaced persons worldwide who were forced to leave their homes, half are under 18; and most were denied access to basic rights such as education, health services, employment and freedom of movement (UNHCR 2001–2020).

Destitute migrants have little chance of travelling beyond their initial port of sanctuary. In this context, distinctions are drawn between migrants who voluntarily seek better living
conditions, and forced migrants, asylum seekers and refugees, forcibly displaced from their homeland (Arar 2020). Many of the latter category will never be officially recognised as refugees and may remain stuck in displaced persons camps, waiting for years to complete the process of recognition as asylum seekers or remain as stateless persons (Arar, Brooks and Bogotch 2019; Dryden-Peterson 2016). An Oxfam Media Briefing (2016) notes that the six wealthiest countries in the world: US, UK, France, China, Germany and Japan, which make up more than half the global economy, accept less than 9% of the world’s refugees (see Burnett 2017). As a consequence, ten Middle Eastern and African countries host 86% of the world’s displaced population, and 60% of the world’s recognised refugees – Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iran, Pakistan, Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia, Chad, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (UNHCR 2016).

In declarative terms, the world’s sovereign nations pay service to the ideal that all nations should contribute for the care and reintegration of the displaced victims of war and socio-economic disturbances (Arar 2020). International conferences have noted the difficulties involved in meeting the needs of peoples moving between different countries for various humanitarian and economic reasons (Australian Human Rights Commission 2017; UNHCR 2017a) and there has been ongoing debate as to the degree with which this responsibility should be shared equitably among the developed nations. Since 2017, the world has witnessed historic change at the global level with United Nations Member States coming together to finalise two global compacts on migration and displacement (IOM 2020). However, the US President, speaking at the United Nations on the 25 September 2019, firmly disagrees with this humanitarian view, urging nations to protect their sovereignty and borders, and to restrict immigration by refugees and other migrants.

Different countries’ response to this humanitarian crisis range from ‘acceptance’ and ‘containment’, to ‘forced and temporary acceptance’ and controlled and selective acceptance, to the closure of borders and the application of sanctions, accompanied by hostile nationalist discourse. Migrant and refugee coping policies can range from proactive welcoming policies, as in Germany and Canada, to active rejection.
Indeed, Trump’s rejection of migrants has been followed by states such as Hungary, which has reinforced its exclusionary borders, and Poland, which, despite labour shortages, has refused Middle Eastern refugees (Santora 2019).

In essence, the issue of dealing with immigration stemming from the refugee crisis raises moral questions and public-political discourse challenging the host society’s resilience and the extent of its willingness to welcome and absorb those seen as “others”, and tested by constant open questions. The host country’s reception policy shapes how official and community social systems respond to the migrant phenomenon, including the policy outlines of educational and social institutions and the procedures they will operate and resources that will assist them to meet the challenge of absorbing immigrants or refugees. (Arar, Brooks and Bogotch 2019).

This involves multiple challenges and specific tasks. For example: the majority of refugee youth have missed years of schooling and feel a sense of cultural isolation, especially since it may take time for them to master the language of the host state (Arar et al. 2020). Socially, they usually endure poverty and deprivation. This situation engenders a state of alienation and marginality and there may be clashes with the absorbing state’s population and narratives (Arar, Örücü and Ak Küçükçayır 2019; Norberg and Gross 2018; Waite 2016). Yet, national education systems are the factor that has the potential to rehabilitate and rebuild the lives of young migrants by offering them care and new education opportunities (Arar, 2020).

This complex reality is also reflected in educational research, although little research has been devoted to the influence of large migration flows on host states’ education systems (Arar et al. 2020; Banks 2017; Dryden-Peterson 2016; Thondhlana 2017; Norberg and Cross 2018; Waite 2016). Nevertheless, a number of studies in this field indicate a strong interrelation between discrimination and ineffective state policies for the integration of refugees (Banks 2017; Norberg 2017; Waite 2016). Educational leaders obviously have the means required to leverage education services and to produce inclusive processes based on justice and corrective assistance that can
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shape positive educational experiences for migrant children and their families (Arar 2020). However, the necessary support and assistance for migrants has not yet been sufficiently understood or brought to public awareness, and there is limited relevant information for educational policy-makers, researchers and field workers coping with this issue when they seek guidance, information and strategies to produce and implement suitable policies (Arar et al. 2020; Bogotch and Kervin 2019). Therefore, this chapter attempts to examine how the phenomenon of immigration has affected Maltese society. And there are two main sub-questions: How does the education system in Malta deal with the absorption of immigrants? And how can policy-makers and educational leaders apply inclusive education for immigrants, engendering social cohesion and multicultural discourse to facilitate the integration of these newcomers?

An article by Fenech and Seguna draws an interesting map of the major changes that have taken place in the internationalization process in Maltese society, while attempting to characterise the push factors that have brought migrants to sanctuary in Malta and the factors that attracted these migrants particularly to this country. The article sketches the profiles of the migrants, relating to the timeline of their stay, their sense of belonging and language and the way in which education and social systems in Malta responded to the multifaceted challenge of absorbing this foreign population. The scholarly analysis emerging from the article characterises the personal and communal integration of immigrant students into the education system and shows how Maltese society is affected by this diversity. Important policy conclusions are derived from the findings of this paper which, if adopted, can help the authorities to better address this complex challenge. The macro-conceptualization that this article provides includes linking the transformations of internationalization in Maltese society with similar transformation over the globe.

Chircop’s article dives into the changes that have taken place in the Maltese society and which have shaped it as a pluralistic society moving towards multiculturalism grounded in legalization and socio-cultural discourse. These processes have, among other things, weakened the ethnocentrism
that characterised Maltese society in earlier generations. Discourse on diversity and multiculturalism has become the heart of Maltese education leadership’s policies and practices. In this article, this discourse is represented through the in-depth interview narratives of 19 public and church education teachers on issues of diversity and multiculturalism. Critical Discourse Analysis was applied to analyse the gathered data. The educators’ constructions of Maltese society and the social diversity within it reflects their location as citizens of an island nation, with some of the participants seeking to preserve their visions and traditions of an imagined traditional community while others look outwards and embrace change as something positive. They provide multiple conceptualizations of Maltese society and its social diversity, reflecting the geopolitics, history, religion and size of the island.

The two articles together paint a complete picture, with the first providing a scholarly framework for consideration of the phenomenon of internationalization, while the second article thickens this picture, presenting the discourse that is interwoven within the educational system on multiculturalism, and intercultural issues as defined by James Banks (2017) and Will Kymlicka (2017).

References


Chapter 1: Internationalisation and Multiculturalism in Maltese Society


Chapter 1: Internationalisation and Multiculturalism in Maltese Society

Internationalisation of Maltese Society and Education

Ms Christine Fenech
Dr Anita Seguna
Abstract

Malta has witnessed a stark increase in immigration in recent years. The European Commission's Country Report for Malta 2019 (European Commission 2019) suggests that labour and skills shortages may be a pull factor for international labour to Malta. However, push and pull factors for migration have become more complex in the 20th century, including aspects such as safety from wars, and political or economic crises (Arar et al. 2019, 2020a, 2020b; IOM 2020). Moreover, the profile of migrants has changed from targeted recruitment of guest workers in the post-war period to substantial diversity of countries of origin, languages, religions or migration channels (Massey 1990; Vertovec 2007, 2018). This diversification can also be witnessed in Maltese society and education and is posing challenges for schools to provide inclusive education suited to the learning needs of a diversifying student population (Bezzina and Vassallo 2019). However, while some qualitative research, through isolated snapshots of the numbers of international students in compulsory education, exists, detailed data and analysis of its development over time are lacking.

This research, therefore, investigates data collected in recent years in Maltese society and within compulsory education. By studying the change in figures of international residents and students in compulsory education (public, church and private schools), the article provides evidence of the rate at which diversification has been witnessed. It focuses upon diversification by sector and evaluates geographical differences witnessed within this diversification. Moreover, it investigates differences in the profile of international students enrolled in different educational institutions to demonstrate the extent to which ‘super-diversity’ is encountered within Maltese schools.

Keywords:

immigration, internationalisation, migrants, Malta, education, perception, policy response
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Introduction

Recent decades have seen an increase in international migration in terms of scale, in the diversification of countries of origin that migrants hail from, as well as the countries of destination. An increase has also been noted in the differentiation of migration channels and resulting migration status and entitlements, changes in age and gender profile of migrants, their spatial distribution, labour market access and experiences and responses from the receiving countries’ population and public service providers (Vertovec 2007, 2018; Arar et al. 2020a; IOM 2020). These various variables are not new. However, Vertovec (2007) argues that their interplay and scale have changed substantially from previous periods of international migration to warrant more differentiated analysis, terminology and policy responses that go beyond the focus of migrants’ country of origin. This is all the more true in view of challenges to the concept of multiculturalism in response to radicalization and the threat of terrorism in the late 20th and early 21st centuries (Vertovec 2007; IOM 2020). Moreover, push and pull factors for migration have become more complex in the 21st century, including also aspects such as safety from wars, and political, economic (Arar et al. 2019, 2020a, 2020b; IOM 2020) and environmental crises (Adamo and Izazola 2010; Arar et al. 2020b; IOM 2020). With immigration increasing and diversifying globally (Massey 1990; Vertovec 2007; Arar et al. 2020a, 2020b; IOM 2020), it has also increased in countries that formerly witnessed limited inflows of migrants or were actually countries from which individuals emigrated. Malta is such a case in point with recent substantial increases in immigration (NSO 2014; Bezzina and Vassallo 2019; and see Figure 1). Such increases affect public perception and public service provision, particularly transport, healthcare and education (Vertovec 2007; Arar et al. 2020a, 2020b; IOM 2020; Bezzina and Vassallo 2019). Indeed, in a qualitative research Bezzina and Vassallo (2019) analysed its impact on school leadership in secondary schools in Malta. However, they stressed the need for quantitative analysis on the changing demographic of compulsory school students in Malta (Bezzina and Vassallo 2019). It is for this reason that this article looks more closely at the recent immigration patterns in society and education in Malta in the context of overall
changes in global migration patterns. It seeks to address the research questions which investigate how Maltese society and education have been transformed by immigration. More specifically, the article will analyse the magnitude and speed of the increase in migrant residents and school students; whether there are particular patterns to be observed in enrolments of international students in public, church and private schools; and whether particular patterns can be observed in the spatial distribution of international students in Malta. The second research question will explore the public perception of this transformation. The article, therefore, provides an overview of data evidencing these recent migration flows within the education sphere as one of the public services affected by it, and discusses their impact, public perception and possible policy solutions. In this way the paper contributes to providing an overview and analysis of existing data and trends of increases in international students in compulsory education in Malta, since to date such a comprehensive overview is lacking.

Changes in Global Migration Patterns

International migration has been witnessed throughout history with European colonisation between 1500 and 1800; migration from Europe in the early 19th century due to industrialization; and refugees from Europe between World War I and World War II (Massey 1990). Thus, it stemmed largely from Europe towards a restricted number of countries. This changed, however, after World War II with a more targeted recruitment of guest workers from countries with either geographical, cultural or historical links and proximity (Massey 1990; Vertovec 2007). The intended temporary migration transformed progressively into permanent residence (Massey 1990; Vertovec 2007) and actually encouraged increased migration (Massey 1990). Besides immigration regulations in terms of family reunion, interpersonal links of migrants with their home and host country decreased the cost of migration in terms of information on the host country, its labour market, housing or services (Massey 1990). Thus, once a critical mass is reached, immigration tends to further increase irrespective of changes in wages, job opportunities or policies in host countries (Massey 1990).
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Indeed, since 1990 immigration has increased in numbers of migrants, countries of origin and destination, migration channels and migrants’ legal statuses due to various conflicts around the world (Vertovec 2007; IOM 2020). The IOM’s World Migration Report 2020 indicates that the share of migrants among the total world population was around 2.3% in the 1970s and 1980s, rose to about 2.9% in the 1990s and first decade of the new millennium and increased over 3.0% since 2010 to reach 3.5% in 2019 (IOM 2020: 21). Although these figures show that migrants remain a relatively small share of the total world population, it is evident that figures have increased in absolute and relative terms. Indeed, between 2000 and 2019 Europe witnessed the second largest growth in migrants (25 million migrants) after Asia (34 million migrants) and now has the third highest share of migrants among the population (11%) after Oceania (21%) and North America (16%) (IOM 2020: 24). This has been further supported by cheaper transportation, communication and technology as evidenced by increased remittances, phone calls, marriages and diaspora engagement impacting on social, political and economic structures (Vertovec 2007; IOM 2020).

But apart from increased numbers, in the 21st century international migration has taken a further turn with wars, political (Arar et al. 2019, 2020a, 2020b; IOM 2020) and environmental crises (Adamo and Izazola 2010; Arar et al. 2020b; IOM 2020) emerging as factors for emigration besides economic motives. Indeed, the IOM’s World Migration Report 2020 indicates that from the world’s top 20 countries with the largest number of IDPs [internally displaced persons] displaced due to conflict and violence […] at the end of 2018 […] most countries were either in the Middle East or sub-Saharan Africa […] and the] Syrian Arab Republic had the highest number of people displaced due to conflict (6.1 million) […]. (IOM 2020: 43)

Moreover, migration routes to Europe appear to be particularly perilous with the Mediterranean Sea claiming the highest numbers of deaths with at least 17,919 people out of 30,900 fatalities during migration recorded between 2014
and 2018 (IOM 2020: 32). Hence, migrants may reach their destination with trauma both from experiences in their country of origin that have propelled them to leave, and with traumatic experiences during their migration journey.

### Migration Patterns to and from Malta

Malta is a case in point of a country having witnessed a substantial increase in immigration in recent years (Bartolo, Galea and Azzopardi 2008; Bezzina and Vassallo 2019, and see Figure 1). From a population of 407,832 in 2008 it grew to 493,559 inhabitants in 2019. As can be seen in Figure 1, this increase was largely due to incoming mobility of migrant and stateless persons, which made up 14,725 in 2008 and 83,267 in 2019. Over the same period the Maltese population remained largely stable growing from 393,107 in 2008 to 410,292 in 2019. Indeed, the share of migrants and stateless persons in Malta more than quadrupled during that period from just 4% of the population in Malta in 2008 to 17% in 2019. This exceeds by far the share of migrants and stateless persons in Germany (12% in 2019), Italy (9% in 2019), the United Kingdom (9% in 2019) or France (7% in 2019) (EUROSTAT 2020) and the average in Europe (11%) as indicated by the World Migration Report 2020 (IOM 2020: 24). Moreover, one should bear in mind that Malta's population density is 1,322 inhabitants per square kilometre and, thus, far higher than that of the United Kingdom (244.3 inhabitants per square kilometre) or Italy (19.2 inhabitants per square kilometre) (NSO 2014). Malta is, therefore, at the same time one of the most densely populated and smallest countries in the world (Darmanin 2013; Seguna 2019). The increase in international population is, thus, seen and felt more intensely in Malta compared to geographically larger countries (Baldacchino 2003).
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How can this substantial increase in the international population in Malta be accounted for?

One reason may stem from Malta’s membership in the European Union since 2004. This marked an important milestone for the island since, as Figure 1 demonstrates, a steady increase in the population has been evident. Between 2008 and 2018, within exactly a decade, Malta has witnessed an increase of 67,869 people inhabiting the island. This is in line with the World Migration Report 2020, which found that most international migrants within Europe were born in the same region (IOM 2020).

Another reason appears to be linked to Malta’s strong labour market performance as evidenced by a high employment rate of 74.4% in quarter 2 of 2018 and a low unemployment rate of 4% in 2017 (European Commission 2019: 7). Indeed, various sectors have witnessed skills and labour shortages in recent years, such as the construction sector, finance, information and communication technology and healthcare (European
Skills and labour shortages are witnessed in high-skilled professions due to the persistent high level of under-qualification in Malta (26%) compared to that in the EU (22.8%) (European Commission 2019). As a result, the labour market relies heavily on international labour with the share of international workers having increased from 5.6% in 2008 to 19.2% in 2017 (European Commission 2019). Thus, economic pull factors in the Maltese economy may have contributed to increases in immigration to Malta. In line with Massey (1990), the networks maintained by these immigrants may have lowered the costs for others in their home country to resettle to Malta and have led to a critical mass of immigration that suggests a continued increase in the future.

Moreover, in line with migration patterns highlighted by Arar et al. (2019, 2020a, 2020b) and the World Migration Report 2020 (IOM 2020), in the past decade arrivals of refugees and asylum seekers who are fleeing their home country due to violent unrests and economic hardships (Bezzina and Vassallo 2019) have increased also in Malta. Seguna (2019) reports that the highest number of asylum applications were recorded in 2008 (2,607) and 2009 (2,389), while figures appear to be more stable in recent years (1,692 in 2015; 1,733 in 2016; 1,616 in 2017). Most applications are from individuals from Syria (436), Libya (409), Somalia (332), Eritrea (91) and Iraq (55) (Seguna 2019: 136), and a considerable share of applications are from children (397, 24.5%) or unaccompanied minors (14, 0.8%) (Seguna 2019). Hence, the motives and migration channels of migrants arriving in Malta are diverse and deserve in themselves further exploration, which the limited scope of this article cannot provide.

This recent increase in immigration may give the impression that Malta has been a fairly homogeneous population in the past, which is by no means the case (Frendo 2005). Indeed, like other islands, Malta has been subject to a series of colonial rulers throughout its long and rich history (see Figure 2) (Baldacchino and Royle 2010; Caruana et al. 2013). Each of these rulers left their mark on the island in terms of cultural, linguistic and religious heritage, and social, economic and political influences still felt in Malta today.
Besides colonial influences, large-scale emigration from Malta in the early 20th century in response to fears of overcrowding and search for better employment opportunities also left a mark on Maltese society and established cultural and economic ties with the hosting countries of Maltese migrants (Attard 1983, 1997, 1999). Cauchi (1999) reports emigration took place mainly to English-speaking countries in the 1920s and after World War II. Indeed, in the 1920s 87,000 (56%) moved to Australia, 32,000 (20%) to the UK, 20,000 (13%) to Canada and 11,600 (8%) to the US, while between 1946 and 1996, a total of 155,000 persons, namely 44% of the Maltese population, emigrated overseas (Cauchi 1999).

In essence, therefore, Maltese culture can be characterized as a culmination of these various international influences throughout its history, stemming from colonial rule, immigration and the links maintained by Maltese emigrating abroad. Nevertheless, the magnitude of the recent immigration and the short period of time in which it emerged have posed new challenges in terms of public perception and service provision, particularly in the education sector. It is for this reason that the article will further explore this impact in more detail.
Impact of Immigration on the Education Sector

As argued earlier, immigration has affected various sectors, including the educational sphere (Arar et al. 2020a, 2020b). This is true also for Malta. A comparison of the Censuses carried out in 2005 and 2010 (NSO 2007, 2014) demonstrates that in 2005 most migrants lived in the localities of St Paul’s Bay and Sliema, while in 2010 Birżebbuġa also featured. These figures therefore had “a social, cultural, demographic and ethnic impact...” (Caruana Cilia 2014: 1) on these localities and the schools within them. As Seguna (2019) ascertains, “mobility has therefore had an impact on certain towns and villages in Malta with the consequence that an imbalance in the distribution of international learners across schools has occurred.” (p. 161)

One of the principal aims of this paper is to study the data on student enrolments in compulsory education in public, church and private schools. This aspect, which the authors ascertain is of growing importance, has never been attempted in Malta. Unfortunately, data collection in Malta, such as that by the Ministry for Education and Employment, has not been meticulously compiled (Calleja et al. 2010; Falzon et al. 2012; Frendo 2005; Seguna 2019) since data has not been collected in a consistent or similar fashion over the years. It has also been collected by different entities within the Ministry for Education and Employment and the National Statistics Office. This has made the collation of data challenging and comparisons difficult. With no study having taken up such an enterprise, the authors believe that by delving into the data that has been collected over the years, the article may provide an overview of the development of international students in compulsory education in Malta and provide an analysis and interpretation of the data presented.
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International Learners in the Education Sector by School Sector Attended

As Figure 3 demonstrates, the total international learner population in Maltese schools has increased from 1,280 in Scholastic Year 2008-2009 to 5,640 in Scholastic Year 2017-2018. This means that within a decade the international learner population more than quadrupled, with substantial increases being witnessed in recent years. It is important to note that figures for the Scholastic Year 2014-2015 are unreliable.

It is evident that the number of international learners in Church schools is rather modest, with numbers increasing from 27 international learners in Scholastic Year 2008-2009 to 119 students in Scholastic Year 2017-2018. In state and private schools, a different scenario has been evident. State schools had 649 international learners in Scholastic Year 2008-2009, increasing more than six-fold to 4,203 in the Scholastic Year 2017-2018. Private schools, which make up the smallest sector in the educational sphere, already had a very large number of international learners in Scholastic Year 2008-2009 with 604 international learners. By Scholastic Year 2017-2018, the population of international students had increased to 1,318. When taking these numbers into consideration, it seems as though state schools have recorded the largest increase while the private sector has always had a steady influx of international learners. Articles in local newspapers have recently been commenting upon this increase. This public perception will be discussed in further detail later.

Looking in more detail at the composition of the international student population of State Schools (Figure 4), for which detailed data on students’ nationalities is available from Scholastic Years 2008-2009 to 2019-2020, data reveals that majority of international students are EU nationals. However, in recent years the share of Non-EU students has been on the increase.
Figure 3: Total international student population in Maltese schools by education sector

Source: Directorate for Research, Lifelong Learning and Employability 2019; MEDE 2019

Figure 4: International student population in state schools

Source: Directorate for Research, Lifelong Learning and Employability 2019; MEDE 2019
Main Nationalities Observed in Maltese Schools

Over the years the nationalities in compulsory education have changed. As Table 1 indicates, learners coming from the United Kingdom have had systematically the highest recorded numbers in all sectors, apart from Italy, Russia and Bulgaria. The top nationalities were also mainly EU citizens in the private sector, while Non-EU students were being educated in state schools. From scholastic year 2012-2013 there has also been a change in the nationalities of learners being educated in Maltese schools. Being a colonized island for many years could be one explanation for Malta attracting citizens from countries such as the United Kingdom and Italy. By becoming an EU member state in 2004, Malta continued to attract EU citizens as the figures in Table 1 indicate. However, more recently, and with a change in Malta’s leadership and direction, the main target has not only been Europeans. A bigger diversification of other nationalities away from the EU has been evident as reiterated by Arar et al. (2019, 2020a, 2020b) and Bezzina and Vassallo (2019), with growing numbers from Russia, Libya, Serbia and Syria.
Table 1: Main nationalities in Malta by sector of education and year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>2008-2009</td>
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<td>265</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
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<td>5.1%</td>
<td></td>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
<td>45</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
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<td>395</td>
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<td>2011-2012</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>431</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td></td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>Italy</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Syria</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016-2017</td>
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<td>767</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
<td>2017-2018</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>920</td>
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<tr>
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<td>344</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>4.1%</td>
<td></td>
<td>Serbia</td>
<td>336</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Directorate for Research, Lifelong Learning and Employability 2019; MEDE 2019; NSO 2020
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The Spatial Distribution of International Learners in Malta

Apart from analysing the overall increase in international learners in Malta and their countries of origin, it is also illuminating to study their spatial distribution in Malta. This is relevant since Massey (1990) has argued that links maintained by migrants with their home and host country lower the cost of immigration for others due to them having information on access to housing, amongst other things. It is, therefore, plausible to assume that this lowering in transactional cost translates into migrants settling in areas with an already existing population from their own home country. Moreover, Vertovec (2007) has argued that socio-cultural factors of migrants also influence their access to housing, work, services, identity and sense of belonging. The areas migrants settle could, therefore, give insight into their socio-cultural and economic background, since the availability of rental property and its cost in different localities of Malta will surely influence their place of residence.

Where, therefore, are migrants settling in Malta? And where do their children attend school? As stated above, the Censuses carried out in in Malta in 2005 and 2010 (NSO 2007, 2014) showed that in 2005 most migrants lived in the Northern and Northern Harbour area in the localities of St Paul’s Bay and Sliema. By 2010 a considerable share of migrants also resided in the South Eastern area in Bırżebbuġa. Regional statistics for the year 2017 (National Statistics Office, 2019) confirm again that the Northern, Northern Harbour and South Eastern districts of Malta record the highest shares of international residents. In addition, Gozo also witnessed considerable shares of international residents, with some localities reporting shares between 10–15% (see Figure 5). Since school attendance is based on the locality of residence, at least for state schools, higher concentrations of international students should, therefore, be observed in these regions and corresponding colleges.
Unfortunately, data on the share of migrant residents by locality is not available for every year to allow for comparisons with the share of international learners in compulsory education. Moreover, data on the total population and the number of international learners was not available for state, church and private schools for all years. Hence, it was not possible to calculate the share of international learners among the total student population among state, church and private schools or the total population for all years. Moreover, while the locality of residence determines in state schools the college a student attends, this is not the case for church and private schools, which draw their student population from all over Malta. Hence, the location of the school is not connected to the place of residence of the student, making an analysis of the spatial distribution of international students in church and private...
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schools limited. It is for this reason that the article focused on the analysis of the spatial distribution of international students in state schools, since for this sector data was available for Scholastic Years 2015–2016 to 2019–2020, both for the total student population and for the international learners.

Figures 6 and 7 show the share of international learners by college and their country of origin – EU or Non-EU. As can be seen from these figures, the share of international learners has increased in all colleges within a span of five years. In some cases, it increased considerably, namely St. Clare College (from 24.2% in 2015–2016 to 35.7% in 2019–2020), Maria Regina College (from 20.1% in 2015–2016 to 28.5% in 2019–2020) and St. Theresa College (from 8.8% in 2015–2016 to 15.8% in 2019–2020). These colleges are based in the Northern and Northern Harbour area and, thus, the area with the consistently highest shares of migrant residents in Malta. The substantial increase of international learners in these colleges suggests that these areas have both the highest shares of migrant residents and that their share has increased most rapidly over the years compared to other areas in Malta. It is evident, therefore, that some colleges and schools forming part of them require specific support to cater to this substantial student population and the specific educational needs they may have. This is in line with the findings from Bezzina and Vassallo (2019), which highlight that school leaders in general feel rather helpless on how to integrate international learners. Moreover, they call for closer cooperation of schools and education authorities with local councils and nongovernmental organisations to facilitate integration of migrants in society (Bezzina and Vassallo 2019), which appears all the more relevant in view of the high concentration of migrant residents in particular areas in Malta.

It is also noteworthy that there are differences in the country of origin of international learners in different colleges across Malta. Colleges in the Northern Harbour (St. Theresa College), the Southern Harbour (St. Gorg Preca College), Western (St. Ignatius College) and South Eastern area (St. Benedict College) have higher shares of Non-EU students than EU students. This suggests that different localities in Malta attract migrant residents from specific countries or regions of origin and that this is reflected in the student population attending
compulsory education in the college of that area. Again, this suggests that different colleges need specific support to cater to the needs of these students and their families.

Indeed, Figure 8 shows that the largest group of international learners in St. Theresa and St. Gorg Preca Colleges are Syrian (13.4% and 28.7% respectively) and that 19.1% of international students in St. Clare College are Libyan. These students may have witnessed conflict and trauma or may have missed several years of schooling before their arrival in Malta (Arar et al. 2019, 2020a, 2020b). Teachers, therefore, need adequate training to address both the educational and emotional needs of these students.

Figure 6: Share of international learners in state schools by college, 2015/2016

Source: MEDE 2019
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Figure 7: Share of international learners in state schools by college, 2019/2020

Source: MEDE 2019

Figure 8: Most common nationalities of international learners in state schools by college, 2019/2020

Source: MEDE 2019
Public Perception

With such an increase in international residents on the island one questions its impact on the public perception, such as tolerance and openness towards others from diverse cultures. Bezzina and Vassallo (2019) have indicated school leaders’ struggle with intolerant attitudes of parents and the wider community that hinder their work in integrating international students. This is in line with findings from the World Migration Report 2020, which argues that

> while the nature of the public discourse has changed over time, there is widespread recognition that the “toxicity” of the migration debate has further intensified over the last few years, with the politics of fear and division increasingly framing discussions. Disruption and disinformation are increasingly deployed as part of tactical pursuits of power, with negative impacts on public, political and social media discourse, on societal values, and on public policy issues such as migration, displacement and migrants (including refugees) (IOM 2020: 161)

Further literature analysis of recent research, studies and local newspapers has provided a broad overview of the perception within the Maltese community.

A recent study entitled ‘A passage to Malta’ (Cefai et al. 2019) explored the attitudes of Maltese students between the ages of 0 and 16, towards international children living in Malta. It illustrated that most international learners (80% and over) are highly engaged and included at school. However, 10% to 20%, especially those with difficulties in English or Maltese, do not always feel included.

The study showed that around one third of the learners had witnessed arguments and fighting within their classrooms and schools, especially in state schools and with students from Africa and the Middle East. Racial bullying was also witnessed, especially due to students’ ethnic origin, religion or inability to speak the national languages fluently. The latter is in line with findings from Arar et al. (2020a) with experiences of
international and refugee students in other countries. Cefai et al. (2019) also report that peers from the Western world were preferred, those from the Maghreb, the Middle East and sub-Saharan Africa were the least liked and mixed feelings were exhibited towards learners from Eastern Europe, the ex-Soviet Union and East Asia.

Learners in private schools had the most positive attitudes towards international learners, while students from Gozo were more negative. Moreover, younger students seemed to be more open to accepting international peers than older students. Although the majority of respondents were open to accepting others and learning about their peers’ customs and traditions, one fourth to one third seemed to be resistant to intercultural integration and appeared “to be cautious or against full integration of foreigners in Malta” (Cefai et al. 2019: 18).

Two other studies focused upon migrants living in Malta, especially those from Africa and the Middle East (Zammit 2012; aditus 2013). Results showed that they felt a lack of trust in the authorities who were meant to be protecting their rights. In another two studies (Fsadni and Pisani 2012; Sammut et al. 2017), parents of international learners mentioned how they felt discriminated against. They also confessed that their family values and traditions were not always respected, especially within the community and social services.

From these studies and the negative attitudes which have emerged, it appears that the Maltese population seems to be incognisant of Malta’s historical trajectory and that “externality management” (Baldacchino 2003) was crucial for its survival. The former Prime Minister, in his own words, had “campaigned against my own country joining the EU, but today acknowledges joining was the best decision we could have made…” (“Muscat urges” 2016). Therefore, one understands that big changes such as joining the EU, and their consequent repercussions such as migration, create fear and resistance. Just as Muscat had resisted joining the EU, the Maltese population also fear and are unsure of how the influx of citizens from other countries will affect the island. This seems to reiterate Baldacchino’s (2003) belief that the Maltese face ‘fears’ of ‘invasion’ and is
also in line with Vertovec’s (2018) argument that:

even slight but rapid diversification has notable effects. In places where a relatively small but fast influx of migrants have arrived, tendencies toward xenophobia are greatest. Therefore, it is not just the perceived size of migrant groups that affects people’s assessments of change, but it is the pace of change that some find distressing. (Vertovec 2018: 2)

Given that in Malta the increase in migrants has been both considerable and rapid, stronger repercussions in terms of public perception are probable, since Baldacchino (2003) reminds that due to Malta’s size even relatively small numbers of migrants will have an impact on the island.

Concluding Remarks, Possible Policy Responses and Recommendations for Future Research

The paper aimed at presenting an overview of international learners in Maltese schools demonstrating the diversification of nationalities and the spread of these international learners across the island.

As the analysis of the statistics over the last decade has shown, the number of international learners within compulsory schools has increased drastically and will continue to increase. The data showed that the increase of international students is limited in church schools, has been consistently high in private schools, while it had a substantial impact on state schools.

Predominant countries of origin are those with close historical, cultural and geographic ties, namely Italy and the United Kingdom, apart from other EU member states. However, in recent years, immigration has increased from Non-EU countries and countries with political and economic upheavals, like Syria and Libya.

In terms of spatial distribution, state schools in the Northern, Northern Harbour and South Eastern districts have the highest shares of international students, due to high shares
of international residents in these areas. Differences were also evident in the nationalities residing in these districts with some colleges having substantially higher shares of Non-EU students, particularly from Syria and Libya.

Finally, the public perception towards migrants and international students revealed negative attitudes, particularly among older students and towards international students from Africa and the Middle East. Likewise, migrants reported a lack of trust in authorities and felt subject to discrimination.

In view of these developments, it is extremely important for schools to work towards bringing about an inclusive environment. However, in view of the diverse impact identified, schools may require specific support to help students integrate, bearing in mind their educational and emotional needs. Support is particularly important for state schools, which have witnessed a particularly high and fast-paced impact, compared to church and private schools. Targeted support should be provided to colleges with particularly high shares of international students (St. Clare College and Maria Regina College) and colleges with recent stark increases in international students (St. Theresa College, San Gorg Preca College and St. Thomas Moore College). They need to be supported to create an inclusive education environment. Moreover, colleges with high shares of Non-EU students, particularly from Syria and Libya (St. Theresa College, San Gorg Preca College, St. Clare College, St. Margaret College, St. Benedict College and St. Ignatius College) should be supported to address not only the educational, but also the socio-emotional needs of their students. Further research is required to identify the specific support different colleges require in terms of educational, social and emotional needs of students and linking schools with families and communities. Qualitative research and case studies of integration practices, whether successful or less so, could provide useful insights into the support that is required and effective.

Support is also needed to address the public perception of migrant residents and integration of international students in schools, since the rapid and substantial increase in immigration has led to negative sentiments. The IOM (2020) recommends
fostering a balanced public discussion and greater scrutiny of social media content, as well as taking due account of the contribution of migrants to the community, strengthening research on migrants and their integration in Malta, and harnessing the benefits of new technologies to support their integration. The authors also recommend that data collection on migrant nationals and international students is strengthened to allow for more detailed and comparable analyses in the future. It is, therefore, crucial for the Directorate for Research, Lifelong Learning and Employability to study how best to collect data in a systematic manner so that comparisons, projections and analyses are feasible. Moreover, it is important to collaborate closely with church and private schools in this regard to ensure that data collection on international students in compulsory education is comprehensive for all sectors. This will allow for policy responses and planning with the students in mind.

Lastly, while some studies (Falzon et al. 2012; Calleja et al. 2010; Seguna 2019) have been carried out in Malta on the perception of international students in compulsory education and good practices for their integration, further research is necessary. It is therefore important for the Ministry for Education and Employment and heads of school to examine the perceptions towards international learners and work towards inculcating a more inclusive and intercultural ambience.

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Chapter 1: Internationalisation and Multiculturalism in Maltese Society


Chapter 1: Internationalisation and Multiculturalism in Maltese Society

Educators’ Constructions of Maltese Society

Dr Louise Chircop
Abstract

In the span of a few decades, Maltese society witnessed rapid social, cultural and political changes, transforming itself from a primarily monocultural society into a multicultural one. The introduction of progressive civil rights legislation brought forth new understandings of gender, gender identity and family constructs. The Catholic Church is slowly losing its potential to influence its followers. These changes might be seen as a threat to the moral fibre of Maltese society, or an opportunity to see beyond the insularity of an island state. The aim of this paper is to explore the yet largely uncharted waters of how Maltese educators construct Maltese society and social diversity, which ultimately influence their practices in school. The study draws on social constructionism as a theoretical framework. I argue that teachers’ constructions of, and attitudes towards social diversity in Maltese society cannot be taken out of the context in which these have been socialised, nurtured, and perhaps sustained or otherwise challenged. In-depth semi-structured interviews were held with 19 participants hailing from State, Church and Independent schools. Critical Discourse Analysis was applied to analyse the data gathered. Educators’ constructions of Maltese society and the social diversity within it reflected their location as citizens of an island nation, with some of the participants seeking to preserve their visions and traditions of an imagined community, while others looked outward and embraced change as something positive. They provided multiple constructions of Maltese society and social diversity, reflecting the geopolitics, history, religion and size of the island.

Keywords:
educators, Maltese society, social diversity, constructions
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Introduction

Through the course of human history, Malta’s location in the middle of the Mediterranean has made it attractive and accessible to the various rulers who occupied the country. As such, this could be considered an early form of the globalisation process that left an impact on Maltese language, culture and worldviews. Until the 1980s Maltese society was still generally insular, not only due to the fact that living on an island is bound to foster an introverted perspective (Smith and Ebejer 2012), but also due to having limited access to information and worldviews. Then, from the 1990s, the proliferation of mass media made it possible to observe different lifestyles and worldviews and increased the possibility for emergent movements to engage with the public sphere (Falzon & Micallef 2008).

The new millennium seems to have been a truly catalyst of change in Maltese society. Many Maltese acquired more liberal views regarding social norms and no longer felt shackled by the dogma of the Catholic Church (Pace 2012). The illusion of homogeneity that had permeated Maltese society was being slowly but steadily shattered as more minority groups started to make claims for equal rights. Moreover, immigration, demand for separation between Church and State, more civil rights with the introduction of divorce and civil union and later marriage between people of the same sex, as well as adoption, and a Gender Identity, Gender Expression And Sex Characteristics Act have all left their mark on society. All of these changes have compelled the Maltese to re-examine and reconsider who they are – as a nation and as individuals.

Within this context of social change, educators had to contend with a myriad of educational reforms\(^1\) which left them suffering from reform fatigue besides never being adequately prepared for all that was expected of them. In the meantime, the number of non-Maltese students started to increase dramatically. Students hailed from all over the world, many knew neither English nor Maltese – the languages of instruction – and educators were expected to deal with all the challenges presented by the new realities without at least basic pedagogical and intercultural training. Consequently,
educators found themselves inundated with constant challenges which they barely could address, and found little support from the Directorate.

This paper explores how the experience of social change mediates educators’ constructions of society and social diversity. More specifically, I examine how educators forge the boundaries of national collectivity within this context of change, since social constructions do not happen in a vacuum but are the product of people’s thinking.

Methodology

This study formed part of a doctoral project in which educators’ constructions of social diversity, their positioning in society and their practices in school were explored. Data was collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews with 19 educators – 11 females and 8 males – who were teachers and School Management Team (SMT) members in Middle or Secondary State, Church or Independent schools. Participants were recruited through the snowball sampling technique. The participants were of different political persuasions; while most were Catholic, although not necessarily practicing, there were three who were atheists, and one was Christian. Two participants were lesbian, two were cohabitating, and most were married. One participant was a returned migrant, one was a parent of a gay child and one was a parent of a child with a disability. Some of the participants were involved in religious activities, members of band clubs, active within political parties, and one was a member of a far-right group.

This paper is based mainly on the participants’ response to the question, “If you had to draw a picture of Maltese society, how would you do it?” and to the questions asked for clarification and elaboration that followed the participants’ replies. Most interviews were conducted in Maltese, and translated into English. However, I analysed the texts in their original version as a translated text can never be a perfect replica of the original (Kearney 2007). Moreover, idiom and contextual comments could be better captured in the original language. In order to understand the participants’ constructions of Maltese society and discuss the complexity and hybridity of identification
(Bhabha 1988) this paper is anchored in postcolonial theory (Said 1979). I also took a social constructionist approach (Hjelm 2014), and applied Critical Discourse Analysis to analyse the data (Fairclough 2003).

As a teacher myself, I have experienced school life, had to contend with and mediate school and national education policies, and in general lived many of the same experiences that other educators have gone through. This is not to say that all educators read school life as I do, but I can consider myself an ‘insider’. However, as a researcher, and at present not occupying a teaching post, I am also able to look at educators from the ‘outside’. This dual perspective leaves me well placed to recognise the underlying assumptions educators may have of society and social diversity. Simultaneously, my profession as an educator provides me with a critical frame of reference derived from my own experiences within schools, school policies and practices and the discourse emanating from both the educational field, as well as from the public sphere in general. Such a process demands that I apply reflexivity in order to ensure authenticity.

Findings

Educators’ constructions of Maltese society varied significantly, with a notable distinction among the participants, created by their intellectual engagement with discourses that are floated in the public sphere. These constructions varied on political and ethical matters, but not on the environment, which educators considered as an apolitical field. Conversely, educators’ positions became more widely distributed from left to right of the political spectrum, where the realm of the social was concerned.

Educators provided different standpoints, rooted in the various histories and experiences of each, thus providing a variety of constructions of the society in which they live. These standpoints further suggested that educators do not represent a homogenous public. On the contrary, the data show that they reflect competing locations according to social class, gender and sexual orientation, ideology, and cultural background, to name a few intersections.
1. A Divided Maltese Society

Maltese people are generally divided on many issues (Boissevain 1965; Mitchell 2002). This division often locates people on one side or another. For example, one is either Labour or Nationalist, pro-choice or pro-life, ħamallu or tal-pepé, and no grey areas are allowed. These labels are used to essentialise those who sport them, but more than that, they depict a society whose primary characteristic is division. This division is strongest in the political sphere, where criticizing one party automatically renders one as supporter of the other party. Consequently, one’s thoughts and actions can be conditioned by one’s concern regarding how these may be interpreted and how one would be positioned on one side or another. Moreover, the smallness of the island, its density and proximity of family, friends and neighbours, at times make it difficult to think outside the set parameters of ‘us’ and ‘them’. Therefore, alterity is constructed primarily from within Maltese society, a remnant of colonialism, “which seriously affected the attitude of Maltese toward fellow Maltese” (Frendo 1977: 22).

The participants did not fail to mention this division prominently, referring especially to party politics and how allegiance to one party or another renders most people unable “to think in a critical manner”. So much so that David, a social studies teacher, captures people’s adulation of their party leader and this inability to think for themselves in this way by a picture of people chanting “‘Hail Joseph! Hail Simon’ Together for sainthood”. David uses the metaphor of the patron saint to illustrate the kind of adulation that the Maltese reserve for their leaders. He refers to the entrenched cultural practice of chanting in front of the statue of the patron saint to emphasise the extent of the veneration and sacrality of patron saints that is transposed on to the party leaders (Boissevain 1965), who are idealised but not held accountable. Party allegiance has resulted in extreme polarization (Cini 2002) and this is further illustrated by Claudine, who describes the Maltese as not being able to see beyond red or blue, constantly antagonistic towards each other. She argues that this “affects all society, everything”. Claudine speaks of the primacy of tradition, which makes it difficult for many Maltese to support a different party than that traditionally supported by the family and thus to

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2 The most precise translation of ħamallu would be chav, which the Cambridge online dictionary defines as ‘an insulting word for someone, usually a young person, whose way of dressing, speaking and behaving is thought to show their lack of education and low social class’. Tal-pepé refers to people of the upper classes, who use English instead of Maltese as a sign of their social standing and privilege.

3 Joseph (Muscat) was the leader of the Labour Party and Simon (Busuttil) was the leader of the Nationalist Party when the interview took place.

4 Red representing the Labour Party and Blue the Nationalist Party.
break rank and challenge the hegemonic thinking. She claims that many Maltese accept ideas passively, giving political groups their consent and thus the power to control their (the people’s) actions. Therefore, she sees the division in Maltese society as benefitting only the privileged groups – the political class, an account Vercellono (2009) reiterates. Gramsci’s concept of hegemony cannot be more evident than in such narrations. The ruling class have made it their mission that the nation remain divided, feeding on the consent granted by their respective supporters.

While many of the educators criticised Maltese society for the division that has been created within it due to party politics, they did not challenge it but contributed to its continuation. Ruth, a Maths teacher, illustrates the reluctance of teachers to address the political divide, ingrained as it is in the Maltese psyche. She blames the scarcity of critical education and argues that most of the Maltese are unable to discuss politics in an objective manner. According to her, “we weren’t taught what Malta had gone through, as if we never existed ... mentioning Mintoff\(^5\), for example, was taboo ...” Therefore, even the education system itself, through the curriculum, contributes to the construction of division which, at times, educators feel that they are bound to perpetuate, either because they fear the repercussions that would ensue if they had to engage in a critical discussion about these constructions, or else because they prefer the ‘safety’ of not challenging the status quo. Ruth’s comment can be considered a self-critical comment on the role of teachers in such matters.

2. A Divided Maltese Society

In their constructions of Maltese society, educators focused heavily on issues of social change in Malta, regarding social change from two focal points: either as a threat to Maltese society and tradition or as a breath of fresh air, which is removing the stifling, conservative ideas and providing a more progressive shift in thought. The radical conditions of change, especially, but not only, in terms of new constructs of family and a more secular society have confused some of the educators and caused them anxiety and despair, as they lacked the ability to find adequate language to express the

feelings aroused by these changes.

One participant captures the struggle of negotiating between ‘old’ and ‘new’ ways of thinking. Nadia forms part of the Senior Management Team (SMT) of a school and in the description of Maltese society, she applies a metaphor from mythology and compares the Maltese to Janus, some looking at the future, some sitting firmly looking at the past and then some who are in between, “who are trying to understand the new and integrate it with their reality, with their way of learning.”

Nadia’s description illustrates a struggle which goes beyond the ‘us and them’ discourse of other participants. The division is not absent, but the split she describes is one of struggle between the past and the present. Nadia speaks of the divisive nature of Maltese society in terms of culture and change. Social reforms, coming in rapid succession, have instigated those deemed more conservative to insist on tradition as a response to the anxieties brought about by the threats of change (Boissevain 1992). Nadia’s metaphor of Maltese society is a perfect illustration of Mitchell’s (2002) description of the Maltese. He says that the ambivalence and anxiety shown by the Maltese were common manifestations of modernity and these were “reflected in the idea of Europe, which was seen as both a promise and a threat – a promise of increased security, affluence, democracy, modernity, but a threat to family, morality, community and tradition” (242). Moreover, Mitchell claims that, “This ambivalence – and consequent anxiety about present and future – are particularly acute at the edges of Europe, in marginal places such as Malta”, further adding that the dilemmas of European integration are “morally charged dilemmas which go to the heart of what people regard as their identities, their cultures and their traditions” (242).

Another teacher, Fabienne, constructs Maltese society as “frivolous” and “unconscious”. For her, the struggle between the traditional and modern is one in which in their quest for material acquisitions the Maltese have lost sight of respectful behaviour, tenderness and being in touch with what really matters. The drive towards an individualistic culture, has brought about a change in their behaviour towards others. Fabienne’s words have captured the idea of Janus in a totally
different way from Nadia. She describes how the Maltese wish to emulate the ‘European’ way of life but are finding challenges on how to relate to being European as intimately they still prefer their traditional practices. For Fabienne, Janus represents the long-established behaviour of general indiscipline and disregard for rules, the noise the Maltese generate and the chaotic atmosphere in which they live, as contrasting with the Maltese people’s constructions of a European way of living and behaving.

Steve described Maltese society as both insular and outward-looking, a ‘porous cell’, whose outside membrane simultaneously contains it, but allows both inward and outward movement. He argues that as a small island state, Malta, through its geographical location, projects a sense of “claustrophobia” and “protection”, as well as a sense of isolation that cannot be ignored. At the same time, globalisation has made it impossible for the Maltese to remain as isolated and inward-looking as before. The size of the island makes it more susceptible to outside influences, but within its walls, a lot of change goes on, instigated by internal activity. Thus, Steve sees Maltese society as fluid, whose internal movements can at times influence what happens outside of it, but its size and location allow for greater ‘foreign’ stimuli to affect it. Steve sees the inside – outside dichotomy as expressed through the metaphor of the cell – as something to be expected, and in itself not problematic.

3. Cultural Catholicism and Maltese Identity

The Catholic religion, like party politics, is another taxonomy of Maltese identity and affiliation, and one cannot operate outside of it. All educators mentioned religion, most of them according it hegemonic status. The ways in which educators spoke of the Catholic religion and its rituals show that these practices are ingrained in their constructions of society. Being Maltese translated automatically to one being Catholic and if one is not Catholic, then one is considered different, an outsider. Indeed, Frank observes that “We use it [Catholic religion] to distinguish the ‘us’ from the ‘them’”. This is a particularly significant observation on Frank’s part, as religion is often used by some Maltese, social groups, and even educators to
sanction discrimination and cultural racism.

Some of the participants felt that a Catholic identity constitutes a more deserving status, especially, but not solely when compared to those who are Muslim. For instance, Gary implies that Muslims should not expect to enjoy the same rights as Catholics. Referring to the crosses in classrooms, he argues that Muslims should not "interfere" with what we do in our schools", even though Muslims have never requested the removal of crosses. Words such as "interfere" and "our" locates non-Catholics, and Muslims particularly, as marginal to the collective Maltese identity. Moreover, by depicting all Maltese people as one homogenous group in terms of religious belief, he confirms another participant's observation that the Catholic religion is considered as part of the cultural identity of the Maltese.

Religious diversity in Maltese society is a cause for concern for many educators. David's picture of the village church pushed to the background, dwarfed by skyscrapers and flats, shows a Church that is losing its privileged position. David voiced this apprehension which I understood as being provoked by Islam's increased presence in Maltese society. I could feel he was perturbed by the increase of Muslims in Malta, because, while he did not admit to it point blank, he referred to them constantly throughout the interview. He mentioned his neighbour’s noisy Iftar and Eid celebrations; how they allegedly want to impose what parents give their children for their school lunch (no ham sandwiches); how Muslim men gather in the village squares and how they look at young girls and women. His comments about Muslims are always given a negative slant. He seems unable to conceptualise a Maltese society in which it is possible for Muslims and Christians to live together, where Muslims’ right to belong is not being constantly questioned.

The majority of the participants depicted the Maltese as one homogenous group in terms of religious belief, positioning those who are not Catholics as “foreigners”. While Fabienne, an atheist, acknowledges this depiction, she objects to the homogenising discourse of those who claim that the Maltese are all Catholic. Discussing the presence of the Church in the educational institution where she works, her displeasure is
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evident, and she sees it as an imposition. Fabienne challenges the idea of religious homogeneity, which many Maltese “ignore”, and calls for a more just representation of Maltese society.

4. New Constructions of the Family

The family was by far one of the participants’ greatest concerns. Those who spoke of the family felt that this institution is being threatened by the changes in Maltese society, clearly inferring to divorce legislation, same-sex civil unions and the possibility of same-sex couples to adopt. One participant, focused on the ‘death’ of the extended family and the flourishing of small, nuclear ones. The possibility of same-sex families were considered as being a “pseudo-reality”, that is, we pretend these families work, but in reality the civil rights accorded to them were simply a political gimmick to show how “avant-garde” Maltese society is.

Paul described Maltese society as “a sinking ship” due to what he perceived as loss of tradition and values. His idea of the family is the traditional one of mother, father and children, which in his own words is “the backbone” of society. According to him, secularisation and the Church’s loss of power and control resulted in the disintegration of society, especially if one accepts any other family construct outside the perceived norm. This idea of the ‘normality’ of the traditional family was voiced by other participants, who seem to paint a picture of opposites where a mum and dad meant a stable and well-to-do family, while single parents, reconstituted families and gay parents were considered to be a problem and often dysfunctional. Paul portrays a bleak picture of families and his is more of a stereotyped, sweeping statement than a realistic illustration. He associates the traditional family with sound values that will automatically transform the children within it into exemplary citizens. On the other hand, those children whose parents have separated or have other partners will effectively become troubled and troublesome. He pathologised the non-traditional families, marking them at risk and stigmatising both parents and children (Nelson 2006; Swadener, 2010; Usdansky 2009; Zartler 2014).

6 At the time the interview was held, the Marriage Equality Act had not yet been approved by parliament, only civil union.
5. A Contested ‘Whiteness’

The ambivalence of living on the fringe of Europe (Mitchell 2002) — wanting to be European but being culturally Mediterranean and North African — to an extent has composed a Maltese identity that is ambiguous. This desire to be European (Chircop 2008, 2010) could be the result of a colonial mentality, because as Said (1979) writes in *Orientalism*, the coloniser, referred to as ‘hegemonic power’, persuaded the colonised that ‘the idea of a European identity was a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures’ (7). Thus, the tensions between a European and a Mediterranean identity often conflate with a North African one. Ruth captures this tension in her use of physical attributes as means of identification and attests that

*if you look at our hair, how is it for the majority of the Maltese? Curly, verging on the frizzy, you see? If you look at our skin colour, normally it is a little dark, most eyes are dark. We are Mediterranean North African, our language is Semitic. When I go abroad, people think I’m Lebanese, they think I’m Moroccan ... No one ever thought I’m from England or Germany for example. So I cannot understand how the Maltese can associate themselves with these WASPs [White Anglo Saxon Protestants]...*

The perceived superior European identity has encouraged the Maltese to claim a national–European identity (Abela 2005–6). Frendo (1994) also argues that the Maltese have always felt ‘European’ to some extent. This contrasts with Sultana (2009) who paints a different picture of the Maltese who are ‘linguistically, culturally, genetically and even religiously’ (15) too similar to Arabs to deny these roots. Ruth embodies this ambiguity as she considers herself Mediterranean/North African, when many assert that the Maltese are European.

Malta’s geographical location has been the main contributor to an ethnically diverse population that inhabits the island. Some of the participants agree wholeheartedly, and as Maria said, “A pure Maltese does not exist”. However, others had specific characteristics of who is not Maltese, as when David described a student of his, "... a black girl, an Arab, Muslim..."
she had everything typically not Maltese.” He constructs the Maltese as being essentially white, not Muslim (presumably Catholic), and certainly not like an ‘Arab’. David essentialises both Arabs and Maltese in his description of the student, as he seems to think that there is one way of being Maltese, and another way of being Arab, and such characteristics are cast in stone.

Ruth contests David’s assertion and points out to the diversity that exists among the Maltese themselves. She spoke about mixed marriages, which are becoming more frequent in Malta, and how migration has created a more multi-faceted society. She further explains, “I see a black person and he speaks in Maltese, it really pleases me, because I think that finally in Malta one must not be white-skinned ... I’m hoping that Malta is changing, because after all what is society? What is Maltese?”

In contrast with the other educators, Ruth does not consider the changes in society as threatening, but as positive and healthy. That is why she is pleased to hear black persons speaking in Maltese. This leads her to question what entails for one to be Maltese. The overdetermined physical identification of the ‘black man’ does not represent a random choice of words. She chose the image of a black man, because black men are generally taken to be African immigrants, referred to in the vernacular as ‘illegals’, a misnomer which constructs them as outsiders and certainly not part of the citizenry. Thus, she is challenging the stereotypical notion that being a Maltese citizen requires one to be ‘white’.

While the participants could not find common ground for what it means to ‘be Maltese’, constructing the migrants as the different Other was quite effortless. Sandra explained that the Maltese are quite “suspicious” of everybody who is a stranger, who does not “have roots”. As did several participants, when Gary was asked to say how he would draw Maltese society, his picture contained only Maltese people, even though throughout the interview he mentioned migrants often. The suppression of migrants is an indication of how he does not consider them to be members of society. More precisely, he does not consider black migrants as part of Maltese society, since “they transform properties into dumps” unlike the “super-rich migrants from the north” who buy property and enrich the pockets of the Maltese.
6. The Dominant and the Undesirables – a Socially Stratified Maltese Society

Social class is another category which featured in educators’ constructions of Maltese identity. On issues of poverty and social class teachers positioned themselves in two constructs. There were those who pathologised those living in poverty and who politicised the choices made by working-class people, attributing them as being done consciously and systematically. The other group of teachers looked at the structural aspects that create those who are socio-economically disadvantaged, looking through the lens of social justice.

Michael, a school leader and a political party activist, described Maltese society as being made up of different layers, but spoke only of “the most disadvantaged, those who perhaps are coming from problems of poverty ... intellectual and material”. He does not pathologise those living in poverty, indicating that the problem is not the person but the situation s/he is in. For Michael marginalising the poor would only create more social problems. He acknowledges that structures and policies outside of the situations of those who are living in poverty need to be addressed in order for the latter to break the poverty cycle.

Frank also referred to social class when he chose Bormla, one of the Three Cities, as a backdrop for a photograph in which he would want to be. His reason for such a choice was due to the history which has to do with the Workers’ Movement ... it is an environment which is not straightforward. There are a lot of tensions ... it could be that the bourgeoisie is taking over everything ... I mean, tastes, if your tastes are not similar to those of the public sphere, the bourgeoisie, you are a chav, so to speak. Therefore, to an extent, the beauty of Bormla, perhaps more than others, is that it is still somewhat ‘savage’ (in a good sense). In this sense, that there are people who are still working class or underclass, and you see them, they [the bourgeoisie] have not yet hidden them well enough.

Frank gives recognition and acknowledgement to the working-class people in this particular area, an area which has been
stigmatised due to social issues that have resulted in social exclusion. He refers to the ‘savage’ atmosphere, or the feel of the place, because the inhabitants are raw and crude and have not acquired the habitus of the bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie has defined these people as ‘chavs’, because they have not acquired the tastes of the middle class, irrespective of the fact that they have neither the social, nor the economic and cultural capital to do so. Thus, Frank links the social-class struggle with the Three Cities. A significant concern that Frank brought up is the power of the middle class in the public sphere and how those who do not conform to the ideals of the powerful are located as the powerless ‘other’. These people rarely have a voice, as explained by Steve, who also refers to power and domination in the public sphere. He concedes that there could be many voices in the public sphere, as technically, not one citizen is banned from participating, giving one the impression of a flourishing democracy. Who actually participates, and whose voice is given due attention, is another matter altogether.

Mark takes another position, where he sees the middle class as victims of the “handful of people who have taken hold of Malta ... and those at the bottom, who are reaping fruit without having done any work.” Mark’s position contrasts sharply with Michael’s worried concern about how economic inequality impacts those on the poverty line. Reflecting his own class position, Mark depicts the middle class as almost a victim, toiling at work for the benefit of those who either evade taxes or else those who allegedly usurp the hard–earned money the middle class pay in taxes. Gary is of the same opinion with regard to those living in poverty. These educators consent that Maltese society is host to the ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’; however, some put the blame on those who are socio–economically disadvantaged for the precarious situation they are in. They do not take into account the different forms of capital (Bourdieu 1986) that sustain successful people. On the other hand, Michael acknowledges that economic structures and policies, among other issues, need to be addressed if the cycle of poverty and welfare dependence is to be broken. He puts the onus on the state to rectify the unjust practices that eventually keep most welfare recipients on the poverty line.
Discussion

This paper has highlighted the importance of understanding how educators conceive the context in which they live and work. Maltese educators are not disconnected from the political and social realm and thus are a living embodiment of the tensions radical change creates. Moreover, students are also living in this society which is going through a transformation, and thus they also bring this change with them into the classroom as migrants, students of diverse faiths and cultures, and as children coming from alternative family structures.

Within this context of sweeping social change, educators identified various social groups whose difference was attributed to their faith, migrant status, skin colour, sexual orientation and social class. Overall, differences challenge educators’ value systems and worldviews. The different other is perceived by educators as “that which disrupts its coherency”, thus the educator “tumbles into uncertainty, [their] past strategies for living challenged by the very strangeness of difference itself” (Todd 2003: 11). Educators felt that the social changes were making the different other more visible, shattering their myths of sameness in an essentialised Maltese identity. Their reactions to the other were thus of confusion, because they did not know what to say and do; of fear, because they felt threatened by their presence; of curiosity, as they were interested in what the other had to offer. Perhaps as a result of the social upheaval and ensuing confusion, educators spoke of some of those they identified as other, as if they did not deserve to form part of Maltese society because they did not live up to their expectations in terms of prestige and reputability. For instance, black immigrants were regarded as polluting the place where they live; Muslims were seen as not being eligible to voice their views and “interfere” with local norms; the socio-economically disadvantaged and working class were blamed for their predicament and also considered unworthy due to how they choose to present themselves. Butler (2015), argues that when the others are not given due recognition because of their difference, they are being “regulated in such a way that only certain kinds of beings can appear as recognisable subjects” (35). Applying her argument to educators’ constructions of social diversity, their claim that the others’ presence is not desirable due to their difference
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denies them due recognition and further marginalises them, because they can only be participants in society if they embody the norms of the hegemonic group.

A further point which is of significance is how educators identified the other from within the Maltese themselves first and foremost. This finding challenges the normative construction of Maltese as being homogenous, and in turn illustrates the fear of loss of identity some of the educators expressed.

As could be seen, the educators interviewed held a diverse range of understandings of what it means to be Maltese. However, few acknowledged and articulated the notion that discourses in the public sphere, and which they reproduced – such as those referring to social class, educational achievement and migration – are created to reinforce particular images which influence and produce particular knowledge “that fulfils certain political and ideological purposes and to exert, maintain or resist power” (Kubota 2004: 22). Consequently, most did not problematize how power functions through discourse and how it normalises injustice. Evidence to that effect was found in their views on migrants, for example. Thus, educators explored very little of the inter-related contexts which cause inequality, mainly, the socio-economic, the political, the affective and the socio-cultural. This was the rule, rather than the exception as the instances of injurious speech, openly racist comments and displays of minimalist tolerance attest.

Educators, with the exception of a few, were selective in who, in their views, deserved to belong in Maltese society and in schools, and they did not seem to question the implications on the notion of justice their views had. What is even more significant is that they essentialised and stereotyped the many different others they created, leaving little possibility for a counter-narrative that could challenge their perceptions. Moreover, they took an assimilationist stance in most instances, further engaging in oppression of the groups which they considered as different. This position in favour of assimilation puts those who are unassimilated at a disadvantage, unless they are prepared to take on an identity which is acceptable to the hegemonic group. Moreover, “placing a normative value on homogeneity ... gives members of the dominant groups reason to adopt a stance of self-righteous intractability” (Young 1990: 179). The clearest example that can be elicited from this study
is the issue of the Catholic religion as a state religion, and how educators used it in society in general, as well as in schools, to suppress any form of religious difference and marginalise those of other faiths.

The findings also show that educators’ dispositions towards diversity are central in understanding how they subsequently view it in the classroom. Garmon (2005) claims that student teachers enter the course with different dispositions towards diversity, shaped by different prior experiences. Therefore, it is not surprising that teachers react differently to difference. For instance, if one takes educators’ othering of the working class, one would distinguish the contrasting attitude of the participants. Some, informed as they were by left-wing politics, deconstructed the neo-liberal discourse surrounding issues of social class. In contrast, others endorsed these discourses, pathologising the working class, very similar to the conceptualisation of some pre-service teachers in Allard and Santoro’s (2006) study, where pre-service teachers considered those on welfare as ‘bludgers’ (123), or their working-class students’ experiences as ‘lacking’ when compared to theirs (124).

Conclusion

Educators’ constructions of social diversity cannot be taken out of the context in which educators’ worldviews are shaped, the ways in which they engage with difference, their fears and their understanding of the world around them. Consequently, these constructions are intensely diverse. It is significant that educators’ constructions of social diversity are not consensual, but constantly contested by other educators. They attempted to establish who belongs to Maltese society along racial, linguistic, religious, cultural and social class lines, but the lines of demarcation were constantly being redrawn by other educators.

Clearly educators are finding it difficult and stressful to engage with social diversity in school. They feel that they are ill-equipped to teach in an environment which is constantly challenging their beliefs and ideals, as well as their practices. Thus, educators’ professional training should be on two fronts. Educators need training in intercultural competences and pedagogies that enable them to meet the demands of
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a diverse class, thus making sure that they are conversant with teaching strategies that provide for the entitlement of all students in their care. In addition, professional development should target the intellectual growth of educators. Becoming more exposed to sociological and philosophical theories might induce educators to be more aware of the political implications of their actions, and strive to create a more equitable educational experience for their students.

References


Chapter 1: Internationalisation and Multiculturalism in Maltese Society


Chapter 2: Internationalisation and Multiculturalism in Schools

Internationalisation and Multiculturalism in Schools

Dr Viviana Premazzi
The increase in the population of foreigners residing in Malta and subsequently in ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity has had multiple implications, particularly with regard to the social composition of the community and its effect on social cohesion. The number of foreign minors has increased in the Maltese education system in the last few years, stressing the deep structural and socio-cultural changes in the Maltese society. This is a distinctively Maltese situation: this rate is not comparable with other countries where the “transformation” took a longer time. Another important aspect is the so-called polycentrism (i.e. the presence of a number of different nationalities within the classrooms). This is a peculiar element which intervenes in the daily life of schools, where managers and teachers have to develop strategies for managing a plethora of different socio-linguistic backgrounds in each classroom.

The school is one of the contexts that most reflects this diversity and can be identified as one of the privileged observatories to grasp, even if not in a complete and exhaustive manner, the changes a society is going through. Lack of guidance, knowledge and policy can be at the basis of the feeling of unease some teachers are experiencing while trying to accommodate differences or to develop inclusive practices. The centrality of the school in a debate on internationalization and multiculturalism is justified not only by its daily confrontation with foreign students, but also by its functions. In fact, the school, an important socialization agency, plays the role of transmitting cultural heritage, shaping and developing the human capital of the young generations. However, the expectations towards the scholastic institution and its capacity both as a trainer and promoter of equal opportunities are often disregarded.

In her article, Debono analyses how the increase in multiculturalism in schools in Malta has been experienced by pupils and teachers. She offers an interesting analysis of the term “multiculturalism” (Vertovec and Wessendorf 2010; Kymlicka 2010) and of the implications of using it in the Maltese context. She presents multiculturalism in opposition to the assimilation model and highlights the differences between the terms ‘multicultural society’ that is a society that includes two or more cultural communities, and ‘multiculturalism’ or ‘multiculturalist society’ that implies a response to the
cultural diversity found in a multicultural society (Parekh, 2006). As she mentions, “the term ‘multiculturalism’ in Malta is commonly used to refer to the increase in the number of people relocating to Malta from other countries, the so-called żieda fil-multikulturalizmu (increase in multiculturalism).” But around Europe the multiculturalist policies have shown their limits and failures, especially the increase of segregation of ethnic minorities and immigrants, forcing scholars to elaborate new reflections and politicians to adopt new policies and new models to promote social cohesion.

With ninety-seven different nationalities across the schooling levels in Malta, Malta’s National Curriculum Framework “places diversity as one of the core principles across the curriculum for all pupils to learn about minority groups, different languages and cultures” (Education section). But despite the intent, as shown by the Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX 2015), Malta still lacks in terms of policies regarding “teacher training, support to schools in the face of the increasing phenomenon of multiculturalism, support to migrant pupils, such as no support for social integration, immigrant languages, cultures or parental outreach”. On the other side, as is happening in other countries, in Malta the increase in cultural diversity is bringing changes in the perception of the national identity, a process of rediscovery of some specific markers of identity like the local/national language, Maltese, and the religious affiliation, Catholic religion (Cassar 2001), and the creation of ethnic boundaries (Barth 1994) between ‘Maltese’ and ‘non-Maltese’. The process suggested to promote a more inclusive school and society is that of becoming co-creator of meaning, “not given but constantly redefined and reconstituted” (Parekh 2006: 153). But this is not a natural process and needs to be stimulated, and considered in a post-multiculturalism scenario that embraces diversity and citizenship, as Ms Debono suggests, through: extra-curricular activities aiming at dismantling the ‘us’ and ‘them’ dichotomy and at improving inter-ethnic relations; multicultural syllabi that give more space to knowledge about different nationalities and ethnicities and ways how these cultural diversities can be expressed in the classroom; comprehensive religion lessons given to pupils according to their religious affiliation; multicultural training to teachers and converting ‘teacher training’ into ‘leader training’ which includes also Heads, Assistant Heads of Schools and Education Officers.
Ellul explores in his paper the importance of character education in a multicultural context. According to the author, “character education is a systematic approach that helps students improve their moral judgment and thinking. It helps students to acquire basic human values (...) to be inclusive and integrate different beliefs”. As the research highlights, the school community together with family, peers, schools, society at large, and the media play an important role in character education, supporting every individual to explore one’s values hierarchy, helping students to develop their character and flourish and fostering a culture of inclusion where everyone can feel safe and valued. As shown in the research results, a holistic and comprehensive character and values education, involving all the socialization agencies (family, school, the media) and using critical thinking and different narratives can promote empathy and respect towards others, no matter their nationality, culture or religion.

Schembri analyses in his article the process of reform, a “revolution” that the Maltese education system is experiencing since 2018 with the adoption of the Learning Outcomes Framework (LOF) — a shift from a content-based to an outcomes-based teaching and learning. As he explains, the LOF has been promoted by the Ministry for Education and Employment (MEDE) “as a way to decentralize teaching and give schools the autonomy to develop their learning programmes according to the diverse abilities and needs of the learners” (MEDE 2015). This curricular autonomy is extremely important in multicultural schools, like most of the schools in Malta nowadays. The article considers in particular the alignment of the LOF in the multicultural realities of primary schools in Malta, pointing out in the conclusion the need for a comprehensive strategy for a proper curricular alignment and rigorous training about multiculturalism and cultural diversity for teachers.

Lastly, Gauci Sciberras shifts the focus on adult learning and adult education, considering in particular adult learners of Chinese Mandarin language. If the first three papers focus more on the role of the school and the teachers, Ms Gauci Sciberras considers the point of view of the students and the factors that facilitate the process of learning a foreign language like Chinese. Motivation is key in the learning process, and motivation can have various reasons including the fact that
knowing a foreign language like Chinese is perceived as a tool to have more and better international business opportunities. An interesting reflection considering multicultural schools could be to promote also multilingualism, and so valuing the cultural and linguistic diversity of the Maltese schools. In fact, language represents an important factor influencing educational outcomes. Language proficiency is of key importance for immigrant children, particularly if they want to succeed in their educational career. The language skills of their parents, especially of the mothers, influence the language knowledge of their children. Teachers more aware of the multilingualism and the linguistic background of the children can also help to provide the support they may need.

A common feature of educational policy in European immigration countries in the 1980s was their slow adaptation to the changing realities of education for immigrant pupils. Piecemeal engineering was the rule, and coherent sets of policy responses materialized only slowly. The life chances and future careers of immigrant youth are shaped both by resources from within their own families and communities, and by the opportunities the educational institutions in which they are enrolled offer. Educational institutions in particular determine to a large extent these opportunities. In day-to-day practice, the sharply contrasting national integration policies were confronted everywhere with the same basic needs of migrant children. In essence, this meant that all countries (at national policy-making level) launched language programs, compensatory programs and preparatory programs for both primary and secondary school.

The differences between countries lay more in the specific methods the authorities applied to deal with these issues and in the relative priority assigned to various aspects (facets). In some countries, for example, compensatory programs were integrated into school curricula, while other countries opted for separate programs and classes for migrant children.

To fight against this risk of school failure relevant policies and significant actions have always been observed at subnational levels. Local authorities involving schools, associations, NGOs and immigrants’ communities to improve education and training of migrant youth have developed projects, initiatives and policies (Allemann-Ghionda 1997). This sector of policies
deals with the more general context of local integration policies. Some cities and districts may have been instituting action programmes for local integration policies in recent years, including the organisation of special integration offices within the municipal administration or the establishment of working groups and councils.

Despite the progress that has been made in the field of integration, policies in this area still contain contradictions, mostly with regards to a discrepancy between theory and practice. Regardless, a great number of projects and activities have been designed to favour the integration of foreign children and adolescents, especially at school.

Precisely in order to make effective the right to education and make the integration of migrant pupils easier, National, Regional and Local Authorities should establish programmes aimed at promoting and facilitating the reception and integration in the different social contexts, as well as to protect the pupils’ original culture and language.

As the papers show, when we speak about multiculturalism in school and how to promote an inclusive school and society, we have to consider all the stakeholders involved:

1) the family, studies of which continue to detect its influence on school career opportunities (and subsequently work), analysing the resources that parents can make available to their children: economic, cultural and social;

2) the scholastic context, from its technical-structural characteristics to the qualification and training available for the teaching staff, and of the technical-administrative staff in multicultural contexts;

3) the students, of which not only the biographical characteristics are noted, but also the conditions and the problems that they live through, the consumption patterns, the lifestyles that are intertwined in the ways in which they face the scholastic experience.

Analysis and discussions of the difficulties students may encounter in their schooling and in school integration have long called for a multi-factorial analysis of the causes
that contribute to defining failures up to situations of real abandonment and early school leaving. The influence of the context, as well as of the integration policies on the sense of belonging to the school as well as the society, is confirmed by the results of numerous studies (Eve and Ricucci 2009; Fravega and Queirolo Palmas 2003; Natale et al. 2008; Ravecca 2009; Crul et al. 2012). Looking at the relationship between school and immigrant pupils, the most important lesson emerging from the European cases is the importance of supporting youth integration programmes concentrating on the following core areas: language acquisition, education, integration into the labour market, social counselling and social integration. Attention to migrant pupils, or those belonging to an ethnic minority, especially at lower secondary school level, has been acknowledged as crucial for the definition of integration paths. In fact, it is exactly at this level that the bases for subsequent schooling are built: without language support, an educational basis, etc. foreign minors arriving from abroad when 11 to 14 years old risk pursuing exclusively vocational education. Also, low educational and low economic capital of the parents have a negative effect on school careers.

It is important that the schools feel they are not alone in dealing with multiculturalism, diversity and integration, and with legislations and policies they are put in the condition to develop effective inclusive strategies, starting from the needs of the students and their family, the training of the school staff and teachers, and the creation of long-term plans and projects to develop meaningful and effective interventions.

References


Chapter 2: Internationalisation and Multiculturalism in Schools

The Experience of Multiculturalism in Schools in Malta: a Qualitative Exploration

Ms Mariella Debono
Abstract

This paper focuses on the experience of multiculturalism in schools in Malta, an increasing social phenomenon in the past few years. The study is carried out from a sociological perspective and starts with discussing the various connotations of the term ‘multiculturalism’, also within the Maltese context. Drawing on a number of scholarly works such as those of Kymlicka (2010) and Parekh (2006), multiculturalism is seen as a political endeavour engaged first and foremost in developing new models of democratic citizenship beyond the legal aspect, citizenship as an evolutionary process cultivating a sense of belonging to a particular place at a particular time. The research methodology included a case study of a State Secondary school in Malta, which included interviews with Maltese and non-Maltese pupils, teachers, an Assistant Head of School, the Head of School and also two expert interviews. The question ‘How, if at all, does multiculturalism impact the experience of pupils and teachers at school?’ was explored. The relevant statistics from MIPEX and the NESSE Report were consulted, putting the case study in a wider national and international context. The data collected and its analysis show that the situation is one of a mixture of assimilation and indifference towards the increasing ethnic and national diversity in the school. The study concludes that a sense of belonging is not being cultivated among the non-Maltese pupils and that meaningful contact between pupils of different ethnicities and nationalities must be stimulated and not left to chance.

Keywords:

multiculturalism, diversity, identity, integration, citizenship, qualitative research, case study, interviews
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The Motivations

The increasing social phenomenon of multicultural schools in Malta influenced me directly as a teacher. For the last few years, my colleagues and I have had to face challenges related to: communication due to language barriers; ambiguities regarding the language to be used in the delivery of lessons and the material used in class; dilemmas emerging from differing religious beliefs and values; and conflicts between pupils of different ethnicities and nationalities. Things seemed to be moving by trial and error and on a day-to-day basis. I learnt from colleagues in other schools in Malta that they were experiencing a similar situation. My involvement in the field of sociology intrigued me to discover more about this social phenomenon of increasing ‘multiculturalism’ in schools in Malta from a sociological perspective.

As an educator and a social scientist, I was inspired by Banks’ words: ‘social science research has supported historically and still supports educational policies that affect the life chances and educational opportunities of pupils’ (1998: 5). Hence the start of this research at a time when the number of pupils with different ethnicities and nationalities is increasing in schools in Malta at an unprecedented rate.

I set out to research the pupils’ and teachers’ multicultural schooling experience in a State secondary school against a backdrop of the policies adopted by the Migrant Learners’ Unit within the Ministry of Education and Employment in Malta, the view of the Department of Inclusion and Access to Learning at the University of Malta, and reference to the National Curriculum Framework and to related statistics, namely the Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX) and the Network of Experts in Social Sciences of Education and training (NESSE) report.
The Context

The term ‘multiculturalism’ is a complex term. As Vertovec and Wessendorf explain, multiculturalism has come to refer to “a broad set of mutually reinforcing approaches or methodologies concerning the incorporation and participation of immigrants and ethnic minorities and their modes of cultural/religious difference” (2010: 4). According to Kymlicka, multiculturalism is a political endeavour “engaged first and foremost [in] developing new models of democratic citizenship, grounded in human rights ideals” (2010: 101). The meaning of citizenship here is built on Dahrendorf’s (1974) idea of the term which goes beyond the legal aspect, focusing more on its evolutionary character combining human beings’ aspirations for equality, liberty and life chances. The definition also tries to capture Parekh’s (2006) idea of ‘belonging’ as a citizen, that is being accepted and feeling welcome. Hence, citizenship here implies “the continuous evolution of rights and duties aimed at developing a sense of belonging among residents of a particular place in a particular time”.

The multiculturalist project can be seen in opposition to the assimilation model. This contrast can be clearly seen in Rodriguez-Garcia’s (2010) analysis of assimilation and multiculturalism. He refers to what might be called a spectrum of models ranging from “high assimilation” to “high multiculturalism”. The assimilationist model is based on monoculturality, where cultural diversity is recognised only in the private sphere (home), while in the institutional/public sphere, assimilation is promoted. On the other hand, the multicultural model promotes cultural diversity in both the private and public spheres. Both models “are practiced to differing degrees according to the particular countries” (Rodriguez-Garcia 2010: 253).
A ‘multicultural society’ is a society that includes two or more cultural communities, while ‘multiculturalism’ or ‘multiculturalist society’ implies a response to the cultural diversity found in a multicultural society (Parekh 2006). The term ‘multiculturalism’ in Malta is commonly used to refer to the increase in the number of people relocating to Malta from other countries, the so-called żieda fil-multikulturaliżmu (increase in multiculturalism). The terms ‘multicultural’ and ‘multiculturalism’ are sometimes used interchangeably, giving rise to confusion, hence the term ‘experience’ in the title of this study to reflect the various ways in which the term ‘multiculturalism’ can be understood and lived.

In recent years, multiculturalist policies have suffered a backlash in various countries. This can be seen in the attacks politicians, such as the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel (Weaver 2010) and ex-British Prime Minister, David Cameron (Kuenssberg 2011) made on multiculturalism recently, both declaring that multiculturalism has failed. The overarching criticism of multiculturalism is its failure to bring social cohesion (Vertovec and Wessendorf 2010). Rather than fostering unity between different cultures, it has been claimed that it promoted the segregation of ethnic minorities and immigrants and failed to bring unity between diverse cultures. According to Meer et al. (2015) the point of departure should be that multiculturalism has been adopted in different ways in different countries (such as the Netherlands, the UK, Denmark and Germany). Consequently the success or failure of multiculturalism takes different turns in different countries.

The same can be said of multiculturalism in schools. While generally speaking multiculturalism in schools is increasing in many countries all over the world, the process does not manifest itself in the same way across countries. Thus, different scenarios can be identified. Some scenarios are composed of ‘ethnically diverse schools and classrooms’, defined by Graham as a situation “when multiple ethnic groups are present and represented evenly” (2006: 318). Others consist of a native majority and a number of other nationalities and ethnic groups constituting smaller numbers, whose numerical weight may also vary between them. Many schools in Malta are a case in point. According to statistics provided by the Ministry...
of Education and Employment, in October 2016 there were ninety-seven nationalities, as shown on passport, represented in State schools in Malta across the Kindergarten, Primary and Secondary levels (including Middle and Secondary levels) of schooling.

The Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX) is a tool which measures migrant integration policies in all EU Member States, Australia, Canada, Iceland, Japan, South Korea, New Zealand, Norway, Switzerland, Turkey and the USA. In 2015, Malta ranked 33rd out of 38 countries with a MIPEX score of 40 out of 100, falling into the “slightly unfavourable” towards the integration of migrants category, bordering the “halfway favourable” category by just one point, the score for the latter being 41–49 (MIPEX 2015). In the area of education, Malta scored 19 out of 100 falling into the “unfavourable category” (MIPEX 2015). While MIPEX points out that Malta’s National Curriculum Framework “places diversity as one of the core principles across the curriculum for all pupils to learn about minority groups, different languages and cultures” (Education section), it argues that Malta still lacks a lot when it comes to: policies regarding teacher training, vis-à-vis multiculturalism; support to schools in the face of the increasing phenomenon of multiculturalism; support to migrant pupils, such as no support for social integration, immigrant languages, cultures or parental outreach (MIPEX 2015).

The fieldwork for my study was carried out in 2017, at a time when the so-called increase in multiculturalism was frequently making news in Malta. I set out to research how the increase in multiculturalism in schools in Malta was being experienced by pupils and teachers. This required a qualitative approach. Schofield (2001) points out that in recent years there has been an increase in qualitative research and studies into long-term effects of racially and ethnically heterogeneous schools. Schofield (2001) and others, amongst whom Graham (2006), Agirdag et al. (2011), and Santagati (2015), believe that non-cognitive outcomes, such as friendships, conflict and peer victimisation are as important as cognitive outcomes in understanding the schooling experience and its impact on the individual and society.
Chapter 2: Internationalisation and Multiculturalism in Schools

The Research Questions

The main research question of this study was, “How, if at all, does multiculturalism impact the experience of pupils and teachers at school?”, which was divided in the following sub-questions:

- To what extent do Maltese identity markers affect the multicultural schooling experience of pupils and teachers?

- How, if at all, does multiculturalism affect the school climate?

- To what extent is the multicultural schooling experience a product of teachers’ perceptions and behaviours?

- In what ways is the making of citizenship in the school affected by increasing multiculturalism?

Ethical Issues, Research Methods and Methods of Analysis

A qualitative approach was used to collect data. A case study of a State Secondary school in Malta was carried out. A qualitative study is a social scientific endeavour which, “although it is rarely used to identify broad patterns or trends, it can provide detailed, contextual and multi-layered interpretation” (Mason 2002: 175). The participants chosen from the school were given a voice, an opportunity to talk about their experience at school.

The school caters for pupils aged thirteen to sixteen years in their Years Nine, Ten, and Eleven of compulsory schooling. Each year has an average of ten classes. Being a State school, there is no selectivity process and pupils are enrolled from within a specific catchment area. At the time of the research, Years Ten and Eleven were girls-only classes, while Year Nine was co-educational. Year Nine pupils (aged thirteen) were my relevant population. There were two main reasons for this. First of all, Year Nine had the largest number of different nationalities, hence, it lent itself better to the study of the multicultural
experience; secondly, both girls and boys could be included in
the study since, unlike the other years, it was co-educational.
The following table shows the pupil sample.

Table – Pupil Interviewees’ Profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Parents’ Nationality</th>
<th>Religious Affiliation</th>
<th>Native Language/s</th>
<th>Maltese and English Languages</th>
<th>Time in Malta</th>
<th>Time in School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cody</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>both Australian</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>only English</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>from beginning of year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khaled</td>
<td>Libyan</td>
<td>both Libyan</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>Maltese and English</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>from beginning of year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>Maltese</td>
<td>both Maltese</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Maltese</td>
<td>Maltese and English</td>
<td>since birth</td>
<td>from beginning of year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julian</td>
<td>Maltese</td>
<td>both Maltese</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Maltese</td>
<td>Maltese and English</td>
<td>since birth</td>
<td>from beginning of year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>Maltese</td>
<td>both Maltese</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Maltese</td>
<td>Maltese and English</td>
<td>since birth</td>
<td>from beginning of year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>Maltese</td>
<td>father Lebanese, mother Maltese</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>Maltese and Arabic</td>
<td>Maltese and English</td>
<td>since birth</td>
<td>from beginning of year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malak</td>
<td>Maltese</td>
<td>father Palestinian, mother Maltese</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>Maltese and Arabic</td>
<td>Maltese and English</td>
<td>since birth</td>
<td>4 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farah</td>
<td>Maltese</td>
<td>father Palestinian, mother Maltese</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>Maltese and Arabic</td>
<td>Maltese and English</td>
<td>since birth</td>
<td>4 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niya</td>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td>both Pakistani</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Urdu</td>
<td>only English</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>from beginning of year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alek</td>
<td>Serbian</td>
<td>both Serbian</td>
<td>Christian Orthodoxy</td>
<td>Serbian</td>
<td>very little English</td>
<td>7 months</td>
<td>6 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Novak</td>
<td>Serbian</td>
<td>both Serbian</td>
<td>Christian Orthodoxy</td>
<td>Serbian</td>
<td>Maltese and English</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>from beginning of year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sami</td>
<td>Syrian</td>
<td>both Syrian</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>Kurdish</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>4 months</td>
<td>3 weeks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 2: Internationalisation and Multiculturalism in Schools

Strategic non-random purposive sampling was used to select both the pupil and the teacher sample. I chose teachers from the Year Nine teaching staff who taught different subjects so as to have a wide spectrum not only of different subjects, but also of different classroom settings. The teachers’ sample consisted of one P.E. teacher, one P.S.C.D teacher, one Religion teacher, one Social Studies teacher, one I.C.T. teacher, one teacher of ‘Maltese as a Foreign Language’ and two guidance teachers. Since Year Nine pupils were allocated two guidance teachers who meet pupils on a one-to-one basis, I decided to interview them both. All ethical requirements by the Research and Development Directorate (RDD) within the Ministry of Education, and the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) at the University of Malta were met before starting the research.

The main research tool used to generate data for this study was the qualitative interview. Seven interview guides were developed: one for the pupils, one for the subject teachers, one for the guidance teachers, one for the Assistant Head of school, one for the Head of School, one for the Head of the Migrant Learners’ Unit, and another for the Head of the Department of Inclusion. Thematic analysis, known also as interpretive content analysis, was used to analyse the data collected from the interviews with pupils and teachers and from the expert interviews. This type of analysis is frequently used in qualitative research. Themes were identified from the data leading to the identification of patterns.

The process started by familiarising myself with the data by listening to the recorded interviews. With increasing familiarisation I started to take note of key issues. The next step involved the identification of themes that were important in relation to the research questions. The themes identified from the expert interviews were: Background, Challenges, and Training. These are presented as descriptive narrative. The key themes identified from the field data were: Barriers, Bridges, Relations and Belonging. These provided the basis of the analytical narrative. An analysis and discussion of these themes provided the answers to the research question and sub-questions, and also the recommendations and conclusions of this research.
Key Themes and Findings

Expert Interviews Themes

The data collected by the expert interviews with the Head of the Migrant Learners’ Unit within the Ministry for Education and the Head of the Department of Inclusion within the University of Malta was divided into three themes.

The Background

The Head of the Migrant Learners’ Unit started by giving me a background of the situation that led to the establishment of the Migrant Learners’ Unit in 2013. He explained how unease started to be felt by teachers who, in the months preceding the establishment of the Unit, were directly struck with a sudden influx of migrant pupils in their classrooms. The Head of the Migrant Learners’ Unit explained how some teachers who were feeling unprepared for and frustrated with the increase of international pupils referred to the Malta Union of Teachers (MUT) for support and guidance. In turn, the MUT voiced the concerns of these teachers to the respective authorities. From then on, work started on developing a Unit to specifically deal with this rapidly emerging social phenomenon, hence, the establishment of the Migrant Learners’ Unit. The Head of the Migrant Learners’ Unit pointed out that one of the biggest challenges that schools in Malta face with respect to multiculturalism is the large number of different nationalities.

The Head of the Department of Inclusion at the University of Malta pointed out that today, compared to seven/eight years ago, there are more statistics and data on international pupils in schools in Malta. These statistics are provided by the schools themselves and by the Education Division within the Ministry of Education and Employment, yet, he says ‘we still don’t know what to do with these statistics’. In his view, we need different ways for how to deal with different issues and different nationalities. He argued that we should identify the challenges and what is causing these challenges ‘so that we unpack [the issue], then the next question will be, how can I address these specifics?’
Chapter 2: Internationalisation and Multiculturalism in Schools

The Challenges

One of the major problems the Ministry of Education faces is that of planning for the influx of pupils from countries outside Malta, especially since migrant pupils tend to turn up to apply for schooling at random times throughout the year. This ‘pattern’, according to the Head of the Migrant Learners’ Unit, has a negative impact on schools and classrooms. Including new pupils in the educational system during the scholastic year when classrooms are settled and the scholastic year is ‘up and running’ is not an easy task.

According to the Head of Inclusion, while language and also religion are seen to be the main challenges when speaking about multiculturalism in Malta, when ‘unpacking’ the challenges we may realise that there are other cultural barriers which are playing an important part in the situation. The interviewee explained how for instance, the long-term conflict between Serbia and Kosovo may be influencing the relations between pupils originating from these two countries. This is not a language or a religious barrier, the interviewee added; it is more political and probably the pupils are being influenced by the discourses at home. Likewise, the interviewee continued, certain cultural barriers may be filtering in where we do not expect them, such as a pupil’s religious background influencing their experience with science through morality and ethics.

Training

In the Head of the Migrant Learners’ Unit’s words, ‘[n]o teachers have been trained so far to teach migrant learners. We work with what we have.’ He emphasised the importance of training not only teachers but also administrators, including Heads and Assistant Heads of Schools and Education Officers. In the interviewee’s words, ‘I can’t train teachers and the Heads of School don’t know what’s going on. I can’t train teachers and the Education Officers don’t know what’s going on, because they have to guide teachers’. The Head of the Department of Inclusion is on the same wavelength, with his view that we should not speak about ‘teacher training’ but about ‘leader training’ because training all leaders in schools, that is teachers, Heads, Assistant Heads and Education Officers,
and not only teachers, is crucial in the educational process. He reiterated that training on multiculturalism and diversity is lacking in Malta. In his words, ‘[t]here is some work being done with children but very little if any being done with teachers and leaders. We have to support the teacher to support the child’.

Field Data Themes

The data collected by the interviews carried out with pupils, teachers, the Assistant Head and Head of school was classified into four main themes:

Barriers

The main barriers to fostering meaningful contact, integration and a sense of belonging were: language, religious affiliation, and lack of teacher training. The language and religion issues present themselves both in the classrooms and outside, such as in morning assemblies, breaks and extra-curricular activities. For those pupils who are not knowledgeable of the Maltese language and those who are not Catholics, integration in the school is very hard to come by, and hence the sense of belonging is scarce.

Bridges

Faced with these challenges in their everyday experience at school, the school’s administration, teachers and pupils react in various ways. Keeping in mind the lack of national policies related to the increase in multiculturalism in Middle and Secondary State Schools in Malta, these challenges are dealt with by improvising coping methods that help in building bridges to overcome the barriers. These coping methods include incorporating ‘Maltese as a Foreign Language’ in the timetable, translating exam papers and lesson resources such as handouts from Maltese into English, code switching by teachers while delivering lessons, asking pupils to support each other when the language barrier presents itself, communicating notices in the morning assembly in English besides Maltese, a ‘buddy system’ and support by guidance teachers offered to newcomers, and the school system explained to parents of non-Maltese pupils on a one-to-one basis.
Relations

The third theme focused on relations between pupils, especially in terms of friendships and informal support practices, and conflicts and peer victimisation. The majority of my teacher sample pointed out that Maltese and non-Maltese pupils do not mix a lot in the school’s playgrounds. The P.S.C.D. and guidance teachers, and the Assistant Head believe that non-Maltese pupils ‘stick’ together mainly for support. In one of the guidance teacher’s words, ‘it’s like they have clicked together, the foreigners, it’s like they have united. You see them in breaks and in corridors’. According to the Head of School, the language is the main reason why non-Maltese pupils stay together during breaks. The Head of School is of the opinion that pupils should be free to choose their friends. In their view, pupils choose friends not only according to nationality, language or religion but also based on factors like gender, hobbies such as sports, and others. In their words, ‘[t]hese foreigners like sports more than the Maltese, I think. You start seeing these cultural differences’. The Assistant Head reiterated this point by stating, ‘[i]t could be that they [non-Maltese] have a sporty culture more than us. During breaks the majority of those playing basketball are foreigners’. Even though non-Maltese pupils tend to group together especially during breaks, all teachers in my sample noted that there is some interaction between Maltese and non-Maltese pupils in the classrooms during lessons, though the P.S.C.D. teacher still pointed towards a strong Maltese and non-Maltese grouping in their lessons. In their view this is because in these lessons discussions on personal issues in small groups are held and the non-Maltese seem to find support in each other.

When the pupils were asked about their friendship patterns, the data revealed that the closest friends of the Maltese pupils in my sample were Maltese schoolmates whom they met in Primary or Middle School, while the closest friends of non-Maltese pupils were a mixture of Maltese and non-Maltese pupils. Various factors, including nationality, language, religion, length of stay in Malta, were influencing the formation of friendship networks. Since, like other State schools in Malta, the school receives newcomers throughout the entire scholastic year, the pupils were asked if they approach
newcomers in the school. The general answer was positive. The data revealed multiple instances of this help that was provided to newcomers by the majority of the pupil sample. Newcomers are approached, shown around, and provided with school materials, like handouts. A deviation from this pattern was discovered when one of the pupils in my sample who wears a hijab claimed that she would like to approach newcomers but she hesitates from doing so because of fear of rejection due to the hijab. Another reason for pupils to interact is to catch up with homework and other tasks that are carried out at school when they are absent. All the pupils in my sample use various means of communication to give or receive this support. Support is given mostly by best friends or in a group on social media, which in this case is cutting across ethnic, national and other differences.

Despite this support, both pupils and teachers in my sample and the Head of School pointed out that sometimes pupils differentiate between nationalities and this often leads to conflicts, revealing a pattern of ‘ahna l-Maltin u huma l-barranin’ (‘us’ the Maltese and ‘them’ the foreigners) both in attitudes and behaviours and in language. Cases of peer victimisation were reported at all interview levels: pupil, teacher, administration. This data pointed towards a low level of integration between Maltese and non-Maltese pupils in everyday life at the school.

Belonging

The fourth theme identified was termed belonging, and it investigated the pupils’ sense of belonging to a country and addressed the issue of transnationalism. The Maltese pupils in my sample felt a sense of belonging to Malta; however, the non-Maltese pupils felt a stronger sense of belonging to their native country irrespective of the amount of time they have been residing in Malta. Only one non-Maltese pupil prefers Malta to the other countries. However, unlike the other non-Maltese pupils, he has been moving from one country to another with his family from a very young age.

The data collected and their analysis are further elaborated below in the answers to the research questions.
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Answers to the Research Questions

The following are the research questions answered by means of analytical narrative.

1. To what extent do Maltese identity markers affect the multicultural schooling experience of pupils and teachers?

The extent of the influence of the Maltese language and the Catholic religion, as identity markers, on the multicultural schooling experience of pupils and teachers is large. My findings show that Maltese is the main language, used not only in the delivery of lessons but also in extra-curricular activities and in the school environment in general, such as morning assemblies and meetings with parents. This hinders the full integration of non-Maltese pupils who have no knowledge of the Maltese language into the educational experience, implying a lack of acceptance of difference by the system, a lack of active participation in the educational experience, and a lack of a sense of belonging to the system.

Multilingualism is making the multicultural project even more challenging. The multicultural schooling experience is influenced not only by the interplay of the Maltese and English languages, but also by other languages, considering that in the non-Maltese pupils’ families other native languages (in this study Arabic, Kurdish, Serbian and Urdu) are still practiced, and hence form part of the pupils’ identity and of their daily experience. As part of a multicultural project the challenge lies in recognising and balancing all the languages.

Another characteristic of multiculturalism in schools in Malta is an increase in religious pluralism. The Catholic religion is the only religion taught as part of the curriculum in State schools in Malta, and hence in the school studied in this research. Moreover, Catholic religious rituals and activities are ongoing throughout the scholastic year. The increase in the number of different religious affiliations represented in the school (two Christian Orthodox pupils, four Muslims and one with no religious affiliation in my sample) is making the
religious boundary between Catholics and non-Catholics more apparent. Having pupils staring and not participating in the morning assembly prayers, and the increase in the number of pupils exempt from participating in religion lessons and sitting on one side of the room stranded or doing another task which has nothing to do with that lesson, such as homework of another subject, or drawing or reading, and having pupils stranded in the school foyer until a Catholic religious activity is over, all point towards the large extent of the immersion of the school in Catholic religious rituals, activities and lessons which is pushing the non-Catholic pupils to the margins of the schooling experience.

The fear of Farah (a Maltese pupil in my sample) of being labelled ‘Arab’ because of being Muslim and wearing a hijab, indicate the strength of the Catholic religion as a national identity marker in Malta. At school Farah felt the need to assert that she is Maltese, that she was born in Malta and lives in Malta because her schoolmates could not believe she is Maltese but Muslim and also wearing the hijab. Being shy to take part in extra-curricular activities because of the hijab, and being afraid of being rejected by schoolmates because of being Muslim limits her relations and her participation and integration in the schooling experience.

The prevalence of the Maltese language and the Catholic religion in the school is no longer a comfortable zone. Rather, this prevalence is giving rise to a sense of unease and exclusion in an increasingly multicultural environment.

2. How, if at all, does multiculturalism affect the school climate?

Multiculturalism affects relations, referred to as the school climate, both positively and negatively. The findings of this study pointed towards a mixture of separateness and interaction, of positive and negative relations, in different situations during school hours. Despite the fact that the pupils in my sample have positive perceptions of national and ethnic diversity and are willing to learn more about diversity, positive relations and interaction do not result automatically from mere contact. At times mere contact may not even lead to interaction in
the first place. My research revealed there is very limited interaction going on between Maltese and non-Maltese pupils even though all pupils for instance are physically present in the same playground at the same time. Hence, there is contact but no interaction. The language is the main identifying marker influencing interaction between Maltese and non-Maltese pupils, with the non-Maltese pupils interacting mainly between themselves using the English language or other non-Maltese languages such as Serbian.

Instances of conflict and peer victimisation were also found. The findings indicate that when a conflict between a Maltese pupil and a non-Maltese pupil takes place, even though it may start on an issue unrelated to nationality, the Maltese pupils witnessing the conflict tend to side with the Maltese schoolmate, while the non-Maltese with the non-Maltese protagonist in the conflict. My fieldwork revealed that some Maltese pupils feel their identity is threatened by non-Maltese ones. This manifests itself in instances such as the opposition to the use of the English language instead of the Maltese language in class. Some teachers in my sample witnessed peer victimisation by Maltese pupils of non-Maltese ones, especially over the use of English in class, while some pupils in my sample also recalled instances were conflicts between pupils of different nationalities arose out of class.

The findings show that all pupils have a mixture of Maltese and non-Maltese friends, thus, the school climate includes a mixture of inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic friendships. Instances of support and meaningful contact between all pupils in the school, irrespective of nationality and ethnicity, could also be identified. These include willingness to provide support to newcomers especially those who start attending school after the commencement of the scholastic year which are mainly, but not only, non-Maltese pupils. This support is given both in an organised way by the school as in the case of the ‘buddy system’, and spontaneously between classmates regardless of nationality. Pupils also support each other irrespective of nationality and ethnicity when they are absent from school to catch up with the work done.
3. To what extent is the multicultural schooling experience a product of teachers’ perceptions and behaviours?

Teachers’ perceptions and behaviours are crucial in the multicultural schooling experience as they are leaders in the classroom and school. From my findings it is clear that almost instinctively teachers develop coping methods (such as code switching and translating teaching resources and exam papers) in their attempt to be as inclusive as possible; however, these coping methods are not enough and at times may not even work out. The role and behaviour of teachers is directly influenced by educational policies, including teacher training. The establishment of the Migrant Learners’ Unit, not so early in the day, is proof that teachers struggle in the multicultural endeavour entrusted upon them. Till now, teacher training vis-à-vis multiculturalism in Malta is extremely lacking. This was acknowledged by the Head of the Migrant Learners’ Unit, by the Head of the Department of Inclusion, by the Head and Assistant Head of the school and by my whole teacher sample. Even the MIPEX report mentioned the lack of teacher training in this area in Malta.

The perceptions of the teachers in my sample regarding multiculturalism are positive in the sense that the teachers are willing to learn more about cultural diversity. However, the data reveals that these perceptions do not automatically translate into inclusive behaviour. These positive perceptions need to be supported by training. The Head of the Department of Inclusion emphasised the need of leader training as one of the ways to deal with increasing individual diversity towards a higher level of inclusion. Both the Head of the Department of Inclusion and the Head of the Migrant Learners’ Unit pointed out that as teachers are leaders in classrooms, so are Assistant Heads and Heads in schools. In their view, while teacher training is imperative, it cannot be complete without training the Senior Management Team (SMT), that is, the Heads and Assistant Heads of schools. The teachers in my sample indicated that they felt that even the SMT were at a loss and were behaving by trial and error in the face of increasing multiculturalism in the school.
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4. In what ways is the making of citizenship in the school affected by increasing multiculturalism?

Insensitivity towards multiculturalism, despite the increase in pupils with different national and ethnic backgrounds, is felt. This does not induce a sense of belonging and active participation in the daily schooling experience by the non-Maltese pupils. Therefore, the notion of citizenship upheld in this study is not being cultivated. Situations such as a comprehension exercise on Islamic terrorists mentioned by Farah (Maltese Muslim) undertaken in class without the pupils having a background on Islamic terrorism to avoid stereotyping and prejudice; nothing directly related to multiculturalism organised; and no stimuli provided to improve the inter-ethnic school climate to make it more meaningful, all show this insensitivity. As Farah pointed out, difference, such as Maltese teenagers wearing the hijab like her, is not incorporated in mainstream activities in the school. For example, Farah said she would willingly take part in a stage production at school which in one way or another involves the wearing of the hijab. That will help her feel more included and thus comfortable to participate, she said.

Non-Maltese pupils in my sample still keep strong ties with their country of origin, especially due to relatives and friends there, indicating transnationalism as discussed by scholars such as Vertovec (2010), who points out that transnationalism is increasingly an important factor in international migration. Some of them practise their native language at home, others would like to practise it more and continue learning it because they fear they will lose it, others would like to go back to their country of origin because they miss their family and friends, while others visit often. Pupils carry with them to school identities originating from family background and other experiences and situations, such as religious background, outside the school. However, nothing is being done to acknowledge and incorporate these ties with countries of origin and different backgrounds in the schooling experience of pupils and teachers.
Conclusion and Recommendations

Bauman warns that balancing ethnic variety is not an easy process, rather he sees it as a “long and perhaps tortuous [...] political process” (2001: 136). Like Bauman, Parekh warns about the uncertainties and challenges faced by multicultural societies. In his words, “[w]ith all the good will in the world a multi-cultural society is bound from time to time to throw up issues that divide it deeply and appear irresoluble” (2006: 13). This study has shown that ethnic and national variety are truly not easily balanced. The sense of belonging to the school by non-Maltese pupils is lacking and an ‘us’ versus ‘them’ ambience, though not always visible, looms over the everyday schooling experience of pupils and is manifested in a lack of integration and inclusiveness, and instances of conflicts and peer victimisation.

To help overcome such challenges this study recommends first of all more research, especially at the secondary level of schooling. Secondly, providing multicultural training to teachers is imperative. Teachers feel lost in this school. Support needs to start with teachers, they can then in turn support the pupils. Moreover, ‘teacher training’ has to be converted into ‘leader training’. This will include also the Senior Management Team, including Heads, Assistant Heads of Schools and Education Officers. Leaders support teachers, teachers support pupils. Thirdly, multicultural syllabi have to be developed, giving more space to knowledge about different nationalities and ethnicities and ways how these cultural diversities can be expressed in the classroom. Another recommendation regards religion. If religion lessons are to continue (in State schools) they should be given to pupils according to their religious affiliation. This can be done by employing peripatetic teachers. Religious activities, if they are to continue, should be as comprehensive as possible, so as to not focus only on the Catholic religion. The final recommendation of this study points towards extra-curricular activities. Studies such as those of Vervoort et al. (2011) and Thijs et al. (2014) indicate that extra-curricular activities help
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to improve inter-ethnic relations. My data confirm this. Extracurricular activities in the school tend to dismantle the ‘us’ and ‘them’ dichotomy, leading to more interaction and meaningful contact between Maltese and non-Maltese pupils. Hence, the organisation of these type of activities is to be promoted and supported.

Despite the challenges multicultural societies pose, however, Bauman and Parekh are both optimistic, pointing out that the mixing of cultures is not only inevitable but also beneficial. In Parekh’s words: “no culture embodies all that is valuable in human life...[d]ifferent cultures correct and complement each other, expand each other’s horizons of thought and alert each other to new forms of fulfilment” (p. 167), while Bauman (2001) argues that despite being a long and very challenging process, balancing ethnic variety is a process that yields valuable results, and is thus worth striving for. However, mere contact between different ethnicities and nationalities does not lead to meaningful contact, as we have seen. Merely including non-Maltese pupils in this mainstream State school in Malta where the study was conducted did not translate automatically into integration and a sense of welcome, acceptance and belonging. Positive interethnic relations have to be stimulated and not left to chance, otherwise, as this study shows, negative relations will arise and uncertainties prevail. As this study unveiled, this gives a sour taste to the everyday schooling experience of both pupils and teachers, which is not a good starting point in the cultivation of citizenship that goes beyond the legal aspect.

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How is the Learning Outcomes Framework Responding to an Internationalised School Culture in Primary Schools in Malta?

Mr Heathcliff Schembri
Abstract

The Maltese education system is experiencing a revolutionary reform in the way the teaching and learning process is designed at all levels, including primary schooling. As of 2018, the island has started shifting from a content-based to an outcomes-based system, referred to as the introduction, or better, the enactment of the Learning Outcomes Framework (2015). The LOF is being promoted as a way to decentralize teaching and give schools the autonomy to develop their own learning programmes. This structure is in line and has been assembled to support the National Curriculum Framework (2012). Since the LOF is the first curriculum framework to be introduced in Malta since its membership in the EU in 2004, it is also devised to reflect other policy documents issued by the EU. This paper explains how the LOF reflects such documents and determines ways how the LOF is responding to internationalisation present in primary schools in Malta. A literature review of the current field scenario is presented. This is followed by an in-depth analysis of recent local policy developments and current practices which reflect how the enactment of the LOF in Malta is contributing to multicultural climates. The results indicate that although objectives are set, many are still not understanding why the enactment of the LOF, and how this promotes internationalisation in Malta. Further provision of professional training to educators and other stakeholders in primary schools, further support to schools, and proper engagement of all students are recommended to reach the set objectives.

Keywords:

primary education, outcomes-based education, multicultural education, internationalisation, Malta
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Introduction and Rationale

The Maltese education system is currently experiencing a ‘revolutionary’ reform in the way the teaching and learning process is designed in classrooms at all levels, including primary schooling. As of September 2018, the island has started shifting from a content-based to an outcomes-based teaching and learning and the move is referred to as the introduction, or better, the enactment of the Learning Outcomes Framework (LOF). I refer to it as enactment, rather than an introduction, because it was incepted and devised way before its introduction. The LOF is being promoted by the Ministry for Education and Employment (MEDE) as a way to decentralize teaching and give schools the autonomy to develop their learning programmes according to the diverse abilities and needs of the learners (MEDE 2015) in a particular school or college (i.e. a cluster of primary, middle and secondary schools within a catchment area). This LOF structure is in line and has been assembled to support the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) which was translated into law in 2012. In fact, the NCF explains that as a legal document, it is to be supported by a Learning Outcomes Framework (MEDE 2012: 4). It, therefore, appears that what Maltese policymakers refer to in a Letter Circular (MEDE 2017) as a ‘revolutionary’ change recently introduced in Malta, has been long overdue. It is being referred to as “qabża favur awtonomija akbar fit-tagħlim u programmi aktar rilevanti u addattati” which would translate to “we are leaping towards greater autonomy in teaching and more relevant, better adapted programmes ” (MEDE 2017), hence a ‘revolution’. This curricular autonomy is being given so that schools are free to develop programmes that “fulfil the framework of knowledge, attitudes and skills-based outcomes that are considered national education entitlement of all learners in Malta” (MEDE 2015). This has a lot of implications since a multicultural dimension has become a norm in Malta and schools are now being faced with an internationalised reality. In this paper, I will be attempting to unpack the LOF to see where it stands in its alignment to multicultural realities in primary schools in Malta.
Research Aims and Questions

The overarching aims of this paper are, therefore, as follows. Firstly, to develop a deeper understanding of what is the LOF, how it is structured, what it is trying to establish and how it is doing so. Secondly, to examine how the LOF compares to other Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) systems worldwide, as well as how the LOF tries to reflect a number of EU policy changes and requirements. Thirdly, to see what lessons, if any, can be learned from the LOF when it comes to an ever-growing internationalised school culture in Malta and if the LOF is helping or hindering such multicultural climates in primary schools in Malta.

With this in mind, the following core research questions will guide my paper:

1. What are the roots, rationale and objectives of the LOF?

2. How does the LOF compare to other OBE systems and reflect EU policies?

3. How is the LOF responding to an internationalised climate in Maltese primary schools and what is the way forward?

A Literature Review of OBE

1. Defining the Learning Outcomes Framework

The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) (2012) aims to promote collaboration among educators and learners to create an environment conducive to learning, where everyone learns from one another. It also aims at giving individual attention to all learners so that they are stretched to their highest potential, while supporting educational institutions to fulfil expectations both by the learners and their parents.
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The NCF also claims to provide quality time for all learners to develop holistically, while promoting key values such as social justice and solidarity, on which to base Malta’s future workforce (MEDE 2012).

Moreover, the NCF claims to be a reference, a living framework, a policy instrument and a response. The first three are straightforward and were already in the previous curriculum, the National Minimum Curriculum (MEDE 1999). As reference, the NCF is being perceived as an act which is based on the general agreement achieved by all stakeholders and others who have agreed on its enactment. As living framework, it is being seen as a flexible curriculum which can be adapted to new and ongoing changes and developments during its execution. As policy instrument, it is being perceived as a curricular framework which will help its execution, monitoring and evaluation. However, the most intriguing characteristic, and the one central to this paper, is that the NCF is a response to a changing Malta. The island has new demands, both on an individual and societal level, which need to be addressed, and such changes are also reflected in the education system. The NCF states such changes as “globalisation, ICT development, competition, shift of traditional values and new paradigms” (MEDE 2012: iii). These changes contribute towards an internationalized culture in Maltese schools, also due to the multicultural reality which has become a social norm. Attard Tonna and Bugeja (2016) explain how these new paradigms need to be addressed by moving away from a prescriptive curriculum and towards an OBE system.

This OBE system has been coined as the LOF and it is a “keystone for learning and assessment throughout the years of compulsory schooling” (Attard Tonna and Bugeja 2016: 3). This framework is built on Learning and Assessment Programmes spread over ten levels of achievement. It is based on 8 Learning Areas, 6 Cross-Curricular themes and 48 different subjects spread throughout compulsory schooling across the framework from the Early Years up to Year 11. This framework was “developed and verified by local and foreign curriculum experts, as part of a €3.6 million EU-funded ESF project” (Attard Tonna and Bugeja 2016: 2).
The LOF also promises to change the way things were/are being done in Malta. It promises to reduce the subject content and shift the importance to 21st-century skills, to smoothen the transition between the various stages of the curriculum, provide a wider selection of learning programmes and various recognized and certified learning pathways to meet the needs of all learners (Attard Tonna and Bugeja 2016). One way of doing so is by freeing schools from syllabi which are centrally-imposed and giving them a degree of flexibility to design their own learning programmes. Such an approach gives schools the right and responsibility to design and implement programmes which fulfil the framework of knowledge, attitudes and skills-based outcomes to give educational entitlement to all learners in Malta. In the light of this paper, this has various implications as by all learners, the LOF should also be addressing learners from a migrant background who contribute to a growing internationalized culture present in Maltese schools.

When implemented properly, the LOF is expected to allow for flexibility, lifelong learning and a new outlook on how assessment is devised in Malta. The latter requires "a change in the assessment regime and culture" (Attard Tonna and Bugeja 2016: 4), with different modes of assessment to complement it, such as adding 40% school-based ongoing continuous assessment to a 60% national summative assessment (MEDE 2019) to produce a global mark. While assessment of learning offers proof of achievement which helps in marking and reporting, such an addition of assessment for learning practices in OBE approaches offers plenty of information for the learners (and parents/guardians) to advise and facilitate future learning (Stiggins 2002 as cited in Davids 2017).

Apart from the teaching and learning process, the LOF focuses on being ‘student-centred’ and is described as progressive, holistic, respectful to the individual and diverse (MEDE 2015). This characteristic of learner-centeredness in OBE approaches where “the emphasis is not on what the teacher wants to achieve, but rather on what the learner should know, understand, demonstrate (do) and become” is central (Botha 2002: 5). This is done by establishing pre-set outcomes which need to be achieved by the end of a teaching and learning process. Such outcomes need to stem from real-
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life needs and present a mixture of “knowledge, competence, and orientations needed by learners to become thinking, competent and responsible future citizens” (Botha 2002: 5).

The LOF is divided into four cycles that can be seen in Figure 1 – Early Childhood Education, Junior Years, Middle Years and Secondary Years. Primary education involves Levels 4, 5 and 6 and is comprised of the last 2 years of the Early Childhood Education cycle and the Junior Years cycle. Each cycle outlines what learners learn, framed in terms of outcomes they must reach.

Figure 1: An indicative table showing the LOF as used by MEDE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attainment Level</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Diverse Needs</th>
<th>School Cycle</th>
<th>Educational Institution</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level of</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Early Childhood Education</td>
<td>Childcare Centres</td>
<td>0-7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1, 2</td>
<td></td>
<td>Junior Years</td>
<td>Kindergarten School</td>
<td>7, 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>3, 4</td>
<td>Learners with needs</td>
<td>Middle Years</td>
<td>Primary School</td>
<td>9, 10, 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>5, 6</td>
<td>Learners with needs</td>
<td>Secondary Years</td>
<td>Middle School</td>
<td>11, 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>7, 8 (Form 1, 2)</td>
<td>Learners with needs</td>
<td>Secondary Years</td>
<td>Senior Secondary School</td>
<td>13, 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>9, 10 (Form 3, 4)</td>
<td>Learners with needs</td>
<td>Secondary Years</td>
<td>Secondary School</td>
<td>15, 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>11 (Form 5)</td>
<td>Learners with needs</td>
<td>Secondary Years</td>
<td>Lifelong</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Early Years in the LOF is covered by Levels 1 to 4 and it encompasses childcare, Kindergarten and the first two years of primary education, Year 1 and Year 2. Concerning the Early Years, the LOF is being promoted as recognising and respecting the individual, as a developmental model for scaffolding learning and as relevant to the holistic wellbeing of the learner. It is also being promoted that learning outcomes (LOs) “should be conceptualised as a compass, not as a map: they point in possible directions that children can learn and grow, but do not lay down templates that all children must follow” (MEDE 2015). Moreover, a shift from subject-based curricula to a ‘highly integrated process’ is being encouraged, and canonical theorists such as Vygotsky (1962), Piaget (1969) and Bruner (1986) are quoted. The LOF documents continuously refer to these theorists, hinting to their work done
on Scaffolding, Constructivism and Spiral Curriculum (without labelling it).

The implementation of the LOF started in September 2018 with a rollout in the Kindergarten 1, Year 3 and Year 7 classes. Between March and June 2018 members of Senior Management Teams (SMTs – i.e. Heads and Assistant Heads of Schools) and all prospective Year 3 teachers for scholastic year 2018–2019 were trained on the introduction of the LOF, as well as on the Los, and on how to link continuous assessment strategies and reporting strategies to the equation (MEDE 2018). MEDE envisaged a gradual, year-by-year rollout over the following 4 years until all classes from Kindergarten 1 to Year 11 would be following the proposed ‘revolutionary’ approach to curriculum design, delivery and assessment. A similar staggered implementation happened in South Africa with the introduction of Curriculum 2005 (C2005) in 1998 (Aldridge, J.M. et al. 2000). This and similar OBE systems will be reviewed later on.

An initial investigation of the roots of the LOF reveals that it is a product of a collaboration between the Maltese Government (the client) and Institute of Education (IoE) subject specialists from the University College London (UCL) (MEDE 2015). This poses questions about the relevance of the expertise of UK academics in providing consultancy on the curriculum for the education system in Malta – which in turn is also meant to reflect several EU policies mentioned earlier. Botha (2002: 8) suggests that a curriculum “must be indigenous rather than imported,” as training the teachers to enact the new curriculum would be easier.

2. The Roots of the LOF

Outcomes-based education (OBE) presents the notion that the best way to learn is by first determining what needs to be achieved (learning outcomes or learning goals). Once this has been set, the strategies, processes and techniques can be put into place to achieve the outcomes or goals (Gandhi 2012). A firm believer and lead supporter of OBE, William Spady, defines LOs as “clear learning results that we want students to demonstrate at the end of significant learning experiences.”
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and “actions and performances that embody and reflect learner competence in using content, information, ideas, and tools successfully” (Spady 1994: 2).

Botha (2002) explains how the OBE system finds its origins in the USA at the beginning of the 1990s when the education system was characterised by low-performing and low-achieving learners (Watkins 1997). However, the roots of OBE can be traced way back some 500 years ago during the Middle Ages in Europe, when apprenticeship training models were used by crafts guilds (Spady 1996 as cited in Gandhi 2012). Fast forward to the 20th century and OBE can also be noted in 1949, when William Tyler identified educational objectives which were essential for systematic planning. He presented core elements such as purpose, content, organisation and evaluation which needed to be addressed when developing and planning to teach (Gandhi 2012). He argued that such elements helped to identify the required attitude by the learner to know the context in which the content was going to be implemented. This curriculum design, led by the importance of having learning objectives, is argued to be the philosophy underpinning OBE nowadays (Arjun 1998 as cited in Malan 2000). Tyler (1949) put forward four questions as the basis for such curriculum design:

- What educational objectives should the school aim to achieve?
- How does one select learning experiences that are likely to be useful in attaining these objectives?
- How should learning experiences be organised for effective instruction?
- How would the effectiveness of learning experiences be evaluated?

Such systematic planning might have helped in promoting the level of standardization which LOs usually promote and various curriculum practitioners use Tyler’s rationale as a way to design their curricula. Allais (2012) explains and questions how OBE systems rely heavily on standardization especially
when it comes to LOs which capture a ‘sameness’, which is then believed to be able to ‘cross boundaries’ and travel from an OBE system in one country to another one in a different country. This rationale also formed the basis for Wheeler’s well-known model of curriculum design (Malan 2002).

Following Tyler and Wheeler, Bloom (1956) discussed mastery learning and approaches to attain standards by producing a taxonomy for educational objectives. This helped to “determine whether learners had attained acceptable standards compared to desired learning outcomes” (Gandhi 2012: 6) and argued that with an appropriate learning environment which provides enough opportunities and support, learners would be successful in the assigned tasks.

This was followed by an approach in the 1960s in North America by the name of competence-based education. This was a response to criticism by many who put forward the argument that learners were being exposed to or taught knowledge and skills which were not essential after they left the education system. Malan (2000) explains how competence-based education was driven by explicit LOs linked to the skills which learners needed in the world of work. This was paired with adaptable learning programmes, which are very much reflected in the LOF’s learning and assessment programmes.

Following competence-based education, Glaser (1963) put forward the notion of criterion-referenced instruction (learning) where testing occurs in terms of stated criterion (Gandhi 2012). This was characterised by a measurement system which uses specific LOs to position the behaviour of a student in a test on a scale ranging from ‘no proficiency’ to ‘perfect performance’. Such an assessment is still the preferred mode of assessment in OBE (Gandhi 2012). This implies a paradigm shift from a traditional approach which explains how learners are meant to learn content to a more postmodern approach which focuses on whether learners learn something well (Botha 2002). This is also reflected in the LOF where teachers are meant to tick a number of Broad Learning Outcomes (BLOs). The latter are multiple core LOs per Learning Programme which the teachers in Malta tick for each learner against a set of criteria on a scale: started to be achieved, partially achieved, satisfactorily
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achieved and fully achieved. This is very much aligned with Glaser’s 1963 competence-based measurement system.

There are several theories and assumptions about the whole teaching and learning process, as well as about the systemic structures in which such an OBE process occurs (Gandhi 2012). Spady (1994) brings forward three assumptions: that learning and being successful can be achieved by all learners, that when there is a culture of success this will multiply into further successes, and that schools (and other institutions) can control the conditions for success to take place.

What was the predecessor of the LOF? The Directorate for Learning and Assessment Programmes within MEDE had/has some syllabi which were outlined by LOs. These are currently being phased out and replaced by the LOF during the rollout (e.g. during the scholastic year 2019-2020, the previous syllabi for Year 4 were phased out and replaced by the LOF). One may question why the need for such a ‘revolutionary’ reform if the previous syllabi were already based on LOs and had an OBE approach. The answer might lie in the fact that there are two basic types of outcomes (Killen 2000). The previous syllabi in the Maltese education system were aligned to the first type of outcomes: those which act as performance indicators to measure learners’ performance in test results, completion rates and employment once the syllabi have been exhausted. Such an approach promotes the mastery of traditional subjects heavily related to academic content, with some cross-curricular outcomes which involve problem-solving or collaborative work (Gandhi 2012). This approach is also reflected in what Spady (1994) refers to as traditional/transactional (content-based) learning system. The LOF in the Maltese education system is aligned to the second type of outcomes as outlined by Killen; they are less tangible and are related to what the learners know, what they are capable of doing, and what results they can show at a specific point during their educational journey. Such an approach promotes long-term education based on cross-curricular outcomes which all relate to roles which the learner will take in due time as a responsible citizen or worker in the world of work and family (Gandhi 2012). This approach is also reflected in what Spady (1994) refers to as a transformational (outcomes-
based) learning system.

All these different (and similar) approaches to outcomes-based systems lead to present-day OBE which expects that the quality of an educational process must be judged by focusing on outcomes which the learners must reach. Hence OBE “is primarily concerned with focusing on what learners learn, and how well they learn it (measured academic results) and not on what learners are supposed to learn, particularly learner performance as measured in a chronologically oriented time frame against a “normative’ standard” (Botha 2002: 5). In an OBE approach, or better, OBE philosophy (Killen 2000), the teacher’s role shifts to one which facilitates learning rather than acting as an authoritarian and sole provider of knowledge. In this manner, the learners are stimulated to actively participate in their learning journey by using critical thinking (Davids 2017). Spady (1994) adds that OBE needs to be done consistently, systematically, creatively and simultaneously.

Malta is not the sole country to introduce an OBE approach. Various countries worldwide have moved or are moving towards and giving more importance to LOs in their educational systems as well as in their qualifications structure (Cedefop 2008, 2009: Allais 2012: Gandhi 2012). Some of the countries which have favoured an OBE approach in the past are Canada, New Zealand, Qatar, South Africa, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom and United States (Malan 2000 as cited in Gandhi 2012). Australia and New Zealand implemented OBE in the early 1990s (Kilfoil 1999). In Australia, it kickstarted with a competency-based training approach in the world of work, which then moved into vocational education and later in compulsory schooling (Andrich 2002). On the other hand, in New Zealand, OBE was only operational in vocational education as secondary schools and universities refused to accept an OBE approach (Kelly 1998). Aldridge et al. (2006) explain how such an overhaul in an existing education system to gradually phase in an OBE approach happened in South Africa. They explain how such a move was done to align to the international trends of moving from content-based curricula which endorse examinations and result-achieving towards a system which promotes and facilitates lifelong learning. As with the Maltese scenario, South Africa too introduced its OBE
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approach in a staggered manner. This was called Curriculum 2005 (C2005). It began its implementation in 1998 and by 2006 this curricular reform was implemented in primary education. However, C2005 was short-lived as there was an official rejection of the OBE curriculum in 2009 (Allais 2012).

3. The LOF and EU Policy

Both the NCF and the LOF are structured on the EU’s eight Key Competences Framework (MEDE 2019) and are reflected in the Maltese policies and structures as Learning Areas. Since the LOF is the first curriculum framework to be introduced in Malta since its membership in the EU in 2004, it is also devised in a way to reflect other important policy-related documents issued by the EU Commission, namely: the Key Competences for Lifelong Learning – A European Reference Framework (2006); the Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in Education and Training (2009), and Europe 2020 – A strategy for smart sustainable and inclusive growth (2010) which is the follow-up to the Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs (2006). Although it is based on so many different documents, the LOF is still being described as a unique model addressing Malta’s needs; it is explained that the policymakers “looked at different models used in Europe and beyond and agreed with DQSE on creating a Malta model by adapting and enhancing various approaches” (MEDE 2015).


The aim of this framework evolves from the notion that the EU is incessantly faced with a globalized reality which presents its member states with new challenges. All EU citizens need an array of key competences to survive and thrive within an interconnected reality which is continuously changing. One way of equipping EU citizens with such competences is by using education as a dual role: social and economic. The framework suggests 8 key competences which are built on the individual competences and needs of all learners. One of the learner groups highlighted in this framework is ‘migrant’ learners (although throughout this paper I will be using the term ‘learners from a migrant background’ to use a people-first
language). The 8 key competences are 1) Communication in the mother tongue; 2) Communication in foreign languages; 3) Mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology; 4) Digital competence; 5) Learning to learn; 6) Social and civic competences; 7) Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship, and 8) Cultural awareness and expression. These key competences are being addressed through the LOF as eight Learning Areas and further as six Cross-Curricular Themes. These themes are embedded within the LOF in three ways: through the subject LOs, the pedagogy approach and the activities, events and policies of the schools. The 6 themes are: 1) Literacy, 2) Digital literacy, 3) Education for diversity, 4) Education for sustainable development, 5) Education for entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, and 6) Learning to learn and cooperative learning.


This framework is based on four strategic objects: making lifelong learning and mobility a reality; improving the quality and efficiency of education and training; promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship; and enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training. When it comes to an internationalized culture in schools in Malta, this framework addresses various characteristics. This is reflected in pursuing work related to life-long learning, develop cooperation on expanding learning mobility, pursue work on language learning, address issues related to the professional development of teachers and trainers, develop cooperation on basic skills in reading, mathematics and science, and pursue work on early leavers from education and training. Another strategic objective is to address and develop cooperative work on migrants by developing mutual learning on best practices for the education of learners from migrant backgrounds.

3.3. Europe 2020 – A Strategy for Smart Sustainable and Inclusive Growth (2010)

This strategy puts forward three equally important priorities: smart growth, sustainable growth and inclusive growth.
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Throughout the strategy, there are important characteristics which are reflected in the NCF and the LOF, as well as other practices happening in Malta. Member states are expected to develop a new agenda for migrants' integration to enable them to take full advantage of their potential. The NCF argues that "Malta has become a multi-cultural society and [...] all schools should be in a position to provide children and their parents with language support in Maltese and English so that they achieve a basic working knowledge of these languages at the earliest possible to allow them to integrate quickly" (MEDE 2012: 22). It also explains that, as a framework, it needs "...to address the needs of learners from diverse social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds including children of refugees and asylum seekers for whom the curriculum should include access to an educational programme which is embedded within an emotionally and psychologically supportive environment that respects their individual circumstances" (MEDE 2012: 4). This was addressed by MEDE by setting up a Migrant Learners’ Unit in 2014 and will be discussed later on in this paper.

A second characteristic of this strategy is to ensure efficient investment in education and training systems at all levels. This is problematic with the rollout of the LOF as most of the teachers who are teaching Migrant Learners classes in primary schools are supply teachers, with little or no training (Times of Malta 2019). A third characteristic directly related to the LOF is to improve educational outcomes in each section of the structure, including the primary years. These outcomes need to be improved through an integrated approach (as promoted by the LOF) by encompassing key competences, reflected in the Cross-Curricular Themes.

The Maltese Scenario

1. Primary Schools in Malta

Malta was a British colony and this is reflected in the way the educational system is organised and functions nowadays. All learners in Malta between the ages of 4 and 16 have the right to free education, irrespective of their age, sex and belief. There are state and non-state schools in Malta which can be placed in three categories: state schools, church schools and
independent schools. State schools are free to all learners and can be found in nearly every town and village in Malta. The state also pays for transport to and from the school, books and other material; however, school uniforms have to be paid by the parents themselves. Those who opt for church-run schools pay annual donations to help with the school costs. On the other hand, those opting for independent schools have to pay for school fees, school supplies, uniforms and transport (Government of Malta, undated).

During the scholastic year 2017-2018, there were 47,289 enrolled learners in compulsory education as follows; 58.1 per cent in state schools, 28.7 per cent in church schools and 13.2 per cent in independent schools. Out of the total enrolled learners, 26,532 attended primary schools distributed as follows; 15,153 in state schools, 7,813 in church schools and 3,566 in independent schools. Out of the total amount of learners in compulsory education in Malta during 2017-2018, 11 per cent were learners from a migrant background as follows: 3,499 from EU countries, 2,767 from non-EU countries and 7 were unspecified. Amongst learners from EU countries, there were 920 Italian, 813 British, 344 Bulgarian, 167 Romanian and 155 Swedish. Amongst learners from non-EU countries, there were 571 Libyan, 336 Serbian, 306 Syrian, 200 Russian and 116 Ukrainian (NSO 2020).

The compulsory primary education cycle lasts for 6 years, from when the learners are aged 5, up to when they are 10 years old and they are placed in classes ranging from Year 1 to Year 6. As for curricular matters, primary schools started to adopt the LOF as follows: the LOF was introduced in Year 3 during the scholastic year 2018/2019 and it was introduced in Year 4 during the following scholastic year of 2019/2020. It will then be introduced in Year 1 and Year 5 during the scholastic year 2020/2021 and will eventually be introduced in Year 2 and Year 6 during the following year. By the end of scholastic year 2021/2022, the whole primary education cycle will be running on the LOF. Since the framework works with levels and not just year groups, learners in Year 1 and Year 2 are meant to be working at Level 4, those in Year 3 and Year 4 are meant to be working at Level 5 and those in Year 5 and Year 6 are meant to be working at Level 6.
2. The Migrant Learners’ Unit

An influential report titled ‘Integrating Students from Migrant Backgrounds into Schools in Europe: National Policies and Measures’ explains how “a student who is well-integrated into the education system both academically and socially has more chance of reaching their potential” (Eurydice 2019: 11). It then outlines several challenges which are faced by learners from a migrant background and which affect their learning and development. The three types of challenges are related to the actual migration process, the general socio-economic and political context and the learners’ participation in education. The report also explains general trends happening within the EU: that learners from a migrant background are lagging behind their native-born peers and that learners in the primary education cycle who are not able to speak the language in which they are being taught are experiencing a lack of sense of belonging and are exposed to more bullying at school (Eurydice 2019).

In 2014, MEDE set up a Migrant Learners Unit (MLU) to cultivate and devise a structure which promotes and helps the provision of education for learners who are coming from a migrant background. In 2017, around 10% of learners in state schools in Malta were non-Maltese, deriving from 55 different nationalities. The unit is responsible for both operational and business plans to ensure such a provision. This encompasses the setting up of teaching spaces, human resources recruitment, provision of resources for administration of service, development of learning and curricular programmes based on pre-set schemes of work, liaising with parents of learners from migrant background, collaboration with other Ministries and participation in local and international collaborations including those with NGOs in migrant-related initiatives (MEDE, MLU, undated). The MLU offers an Induction Course to all learners from migrant backgrounds who cannot communicate in Maltese and English and this is done because these learners would not be able to cope with the mainstream curriculum, so such an Induction Course promotes and ensures the emotional wellbeing of the learners. The Course, which usually lasts one scholastic year, also equips learners with
communication skills which will help them to integrate with the community. The learning programme used during the Induction course is based on the primary school curriculum (the older syllabi and not necessarily the LOF) and includes subjects such as Mathematics and Art. However, these subjects are taught to learn languages. Apart from the MLU Induction Course (which is an in-class type of support), there are other services such as pull-outs, paste-ons and follow-ups. This contrasts with other countries such as Czech Republic, Latvia, Slovakia, Scotland and Montenegro where all learners coming from a migrant background are directly placed in mainstream classes and follow a mainstream curriculum (Eurydice 2019). Several other initiatives are taken on by the MLU, amongst which the LLAPSI+ project which addresses language learning and parental support for integration, a Making Friends Bringing Friends after-school club, and summer courses titled Language To Go. The MLU within MEDE forged a collaborative nature with The Human Rights and Integration Directorate (HRID) which was set up in 2015 as part of the Ministry for Social Dialogue, Consumer Affairs and Civil Liberties. The Integration = Belonging - Migrant Integration Strategy and Action Plan Vision 2020 has a number of implications through the recommendations about the education provision of learners in Malta deriving from a migrant background (MEAE 2020).

3. An inclusion policy in Malta

The MLU seeks to promote the inclusion of newly-arrived learners into the Maltese education system – this is also reflected in the Policy on Inclusive Education in Schools Route to Quality Inclusion (MEDE 2019) which in turn is drawn on policies deriving from an international dimension such as The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and United Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006). This policy aims to create more transparency on what constitutes inclusion and to widen the spectrum in a way to include all possible forms of diversity. It also argues how schools need to foster safe spaces to motivate and safeguard all learners in Malta and to celebrate the strengths and individuality of all learners. The Inclusive Education policy
explains the need for regular review of the national syllabi and LOs (i.e. the LOF) to ensure “that content is sensitive, flexible and representative to the diversity of the Maltese society in its coverage” (MEDE 2019: 18). It also puts forward the need for assessment approaches to be aligned to an equitable approach to all education for all learners. Both needs have serious implications on the LOF, its structure and its desired outcomes.

The policy also provides a Diversity Wheel which has two direct sections related to learners coming from a migrant background. These are the Multiculturalism Language Diversity and the Religion & Beliefs Diversity sections. The former relates to learners who are coming from ethnic minorities, are asylum seekers, or have difficulties and need support to learn English and/or Maltese as an additional language. The latter relates to learners who have various religious beliefs or are committed to different religions.

Reflections – The LOF vis-à-vis a Multicultural Malta

In this section, I will present some reflections and suggestions for the way forward with regards to the LOF and multicultural climates in primary schools in Malta.

1. The Need for a Strategy

Davids (2017) explains how one of the challenges with the way things are being done in the education system is the new ‘language of learning’. This changes the process of education into one which has economic transactions (Biesta 2005). If learners are only seen as consumers and if they only approach education with set needs in mind, then the roles of the teacher and the learners are jeopardized. This ‘language of needs’, as explained by Biesta (2005), changes education into a commodity without giving much importance to who the learners are and what they bring to the education system itself – in turn, to prepare them for an unknown future with encounters which are still yet to be experienced and known (Davids 2017). In this light, it is suggested that a clear strategy and an aligned policy would be introduced in Malta.
with regards to learners from a migrant background. In such policy, the LOF would be central to what content, knowledge, skills and attitudes learners from a migrant background in Malta need to be provided with, set against the ones which they have already acquired. The strategy would also need to address curricular alignment between what is being taught to learners from a migrant background and what is expected to be covered once they transit to mainstream education. Such a strategy would fulfil not only “the efficiency and effectiveness of the educational process” but also “the content and purpose of education and its role in society” (Davids 2017: 3). Another aspect which the strategy would need to address is the teaching of home languages, since, as Eurydice (2019) reports, it is a rare occurrence that learners from a migrant background study their home language at school.

This proposed strategy would also need to assess the LOF in terms of how culturally-responsive it is (Banks 1993; Gay 2010). Is there space in the LOF for recognition and provision of opportunities to strengthen the native languages and cultural practices of learners from a migrant background? Are there discourses of bicultural perspectives over perspectives which serve the dominant culture in the LOF? Does the LOF allow for teachers to be/become culturally responsive?

2. Curricular Alignment

Although there are suggestive schemes of work for teachers working within the MLU, there needs to be more curricular alignment between what is being taught during the Induction Course at the MLU and the LOF. Teachers within the MLU are urged to make use of different teaching methodologies and approaches with their learners so that the targets would be met. They are also given leeway to choose other activities and resources than the ones which are suggested in the schemes of work, as the latter are only generic and need to be adapted according to the needs of the learners. The suggestive schemes of work tackle foundational approaches to content, covering mostly languages (English and Maltese) and just a hint of other subjects (PSCD, Drama, Art, Music, Cultural Awareness and Digital Literacy). It is also noticed that Mathematics is given little importance in these suggestive schemes of work when
in reality most learners from a migrant background would have already mastered Mathematical skills elsewhere in their home/deriving country. This has serious implications on the preparation for mainstream education when learners would then be fully immersed in all the subjects from LOF-driven teaching and learning, without proper preparation to do so.

3. Initial Training to MLU Teachers

There needs to be a systematic initial training provided to all teachers who would be teaching at the MLU. This training should also explain the LOF structure, its aims and objectives and how learners progress from one level to the other. This has serious implications since learners from a migrant background in Malta who are following the Induction Course have the most supply teachers. One in every ten supply teachers recruited in Malta is being assigned to teach the Induction Course (Times of Malta 2019) and during March 2019, 27 supply teachers were offering their service at the MLU. This has been noted as the highest number of supply teachers within all Maltese schools by an extensive margin. While the Induction Course is commendable and the recruitment of supply teachers is unavoidable, there needs to be proper initial training for teachers to understand how to align the Induction Course to the LOF, since when the learners are ready from the one-year Induction Course, they will be transferred into mainstream education.

4. Further Training to Mainstream Teachers

Systematic rigorous CPD training is also suggested to be given to all teachers in mainstream education. These teachers have already started to implement or will be implementing the LOF in their primary classrooms, and all mainstream education will be stemming from the LOF as of September 2022, when the LOF rollout will be completed. Teachers in mainstream education need to be informed of the curricular doings in MLU classes so that they are better equipped with receiving these learners. There is also the need for general ongoing CPD training about OBE and the LOF itself. Some teachers have limited access or resources to the LOF itself and so have a lack of understanding of what OBE is and what it is trying
to achieve. Here it is suggested that primary school teachers in Malta need to be better equipped regarding the LOF through (further) CoPE sessions, ongoing CPD courses and in-school support during Curriculum Time sessions. Research by Chisholm et al. (2000) as cited by Aldridge (2006) explains that two of the challenges of implementing a new curriculum could be related to schools which have a lack of resources and teachers who are poorly or defectively trained for the shift. These were also outlined by Chisholm and Peterson (2003) together with the fact that teachers were not familiar with the terminology used in OBE. Allais (2012) also outlines that one of the problems with the implementation of the previously mentioned C2005 was that South African teachers were not sufficiently professionally equipped to do the work demanded by an outcomes-based curriculum (Jansen 2002). A long-term strategy for implementing the LOF is recommended as with any other OBE approach, and several smaller steps need to be planned, as this will give more time for teachers to get accustomed and trained on the new approach (Botha 2002).

Conclusion

This paper aimed to define the roots, rationale and objectives of the LOF by examining OBE approaches worldwide and how the LOF is reflecting a number of EU policies. It has also attempted to unpack how the LOF is responding to an internationalised climate in Maltese primary schools and offered suggestions for the way forward.

Davids (2017) draws on the work of Jansen (1998) who presents three criticisms of OBE and categorizes them as political, epistemological and philosophical challenges. The first challenge explains how numerous teachers have limited access to information and resources related to the OBE approach and subsequently, they have a lack of understanding of what OBE is, what are its aims and what it is trying to achieve. The second challenge is a philosophical one and questions the justification of OBE in light of a schooling system which needs to be democratic. It is contradictory that learners are provided with content which they are expected to use creatively, and then later informed that the “desired learning outcomes are already specified” (Jansen 1998: 6). The third challenge of OBE
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is that learners demonstrate what they have learnt in relation to predetermined LOs and this "eluded not only the important issue of values in the curriculum, but eludes (still today), what education is for" (Jansen 1998: 6). At the core of these challenges presented by Jansen there is an echoing of Biesta’s (2005) concerns regarding the language of learning, and “what it actually is that schools are doing when their only concern is meeting the perceived needs of learners” (Davids 2017: 4)

These three challenges can be related to the Maltese scenario and I pose the following questions: do teachers understand what the LOF is trying to achieve, is there more to the LOF than merely learning outcomes which have already been specified, and is the LOF echoing what education really is in contemporary multicultural Malta? The need for a strategy, proper curricular alignment, rigorous initial training to MLU teachers and continuous further training to teachers in mainstream education are central for the future development of Maltese education within such multicultural climates.

References


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Keeping the Student at the Focus – Character Education in a Multicultural Context

Fr Mark Ellul
Abstract

This paper will explore the effects of social interaction in a multicultural society on the formation of character and a values system in children. It will discuss how the school community can create a culture that supports every individual to explore one’s values hierarchy while helping students to develop their character and flourish. It will argue that schools can help to foster a culture of inclusion where all can feel safe, valued and enabled to bloom. Schools that are firmly committed to developing the whole child give importance to character education. Character education is a systematic approach that helps students improve their moral judgment and thinking. It helps students to acquire basic human values. Character education becomes even more important in a multicultural context; it provides the essential tools that help one to be inclusive and integrate different beliefs. Humans are social beings and interact with others; this interaction helps individuals to change their attitudes to integrate within the group. The family, peers and schools provide groups of interactions that influence the children’s character formation. They can provide groups of belonging where one can feel safe and widen one’s belief system. The sense of trust created within groups of belonging provides a positive experience where one can examine one’s beliefs and develop them. The role of the media and virtual groups should not be underestimated; in today’s culture, they play an important role in values and character development.

Keywords:

character education, values education, values formation, schools and values
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Introduction

Humans are social beings; they form part of groups that foster belonging. These interactions with others help individuals to form their character, developing a values hierarchy which enables people to be valued individuals in society. This paper will explore the effects of social interaction in a multicultural society on the formation of character and a values system in pupils. It will discuss how the school community can create a culture that supports individuals to explore one’s values hierarchy while helping students to develop their character and flourish. It will argue that schools help to foster a culture where all can feel safe, valued and enabled to bloom.

Over the past decades, Malta witnessed an economic boom. This prosperity led to more work being created and the immigration of other nationals to Malta. The culture of commodification might lead towards perceiving the other as a means to achieve one’s ends, rather than treating others at par. Character and values education based on moral and ethical principles helps to instil sensitivity towards the other.

Within the family, children learn to relate and internalise values that are perceived as important by the family, which tend to be limited and skewed towards certain beliefs. Holistic values formation continues within society (Kunduroğlu and Babadoğan 2010). It is in a society where the individual obtains a particular outlook on life.

The Effect of Family, Peers and the Media on the Individual

Through interactions with others, we understand what society perceives as essential, and we integrate it while discarding what is perceived as unimportant. Family, friends and the media depict situations which enable us to evaluate social interactions. The preference for specific actions over others allows individuals to formulate a values hierarchy (Cannon et al. 2016).
The affection which children experience within the family influences their personal development (Iulia 2015), aiding to build trust in others. This trust affects the self-confidence, trustworthiness, awareness and interests of children (Mekonnen 2017). These attitudes naturally trickle onto other aspects of life and might affect the interactions that children have with peers (Jerrim and Sims 2019). Moreover, these attitudes will ultimately impact on the academic achievement of children (Li and Qiu 2018).

Different family demographics result in children having different access to resources. When speaking of indigenous children in Australia, Rahman (2013) indicated that different socio-economic experiences inhibited children from having a positive experience of schooling. Conversely, parents who had a high level of education were more actively involved in schooling, helping them to engage with school demands successfully (Mtemeri 2019).

Furthermore, Rahman (2013) posits that indigenous people might have a different understanding of the world, which could pose problems within a school system. Students with a different cultural baggage interpret the world differently. Since a multicultural society allows for different viewpoints that are the product of different socio-cultural backgrounds, children might end up finding themselves caught up within these cultural paradigms. If one is not aware of the different perspectives, these can pose problems within a classroom setting, and what adults might interpret as misconduct or arrogance would not be because the pupils are unruly, but because their upbringing has led them to interpret the world differently and thus, react accordingly.

Schools and other educational institutions such as nurseries provide the first stable peer group. Peers play another integral role in influencing the formation of a values hierarchy. Within the peer group, children learn to negotiate their ideas in a context beyond the family (Çubukçu 2012). The group becomes more defined during adolescence, during which time adolescents choose their groups and try to assert their individuality. It is within these groups that adolescents continue to develop their personality.
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Groups are regulated by behaviours, attitudes, norms and beliefs (Coates 2017), and individuals within the group are expected to abide and behave according to the norms of the group. The group helps the individual to re-examine and readjust one’s belief system, and each of the different groups provides a values system and a ‘curriculum’ of how to deal with and relate to their society (Casey 2017).

In today’s virtual world, the ‘curriculum’ is not limited to a group of peers who one physically encounters. Value readjustment is reinforced through the power of the media, which alters the way we interpret society. Virtual friendships have shifted relationships from qualitative face-to-face relationships to quantitative relationships determined by Likes (Graafland 2018). The amount of Likes on posts determines and directs the thoughts of adolescents.

Within this context, peers from all over the globe might influence ideas and the values hierarchy. While in the past, the parents and one’s location could have limited access to diverse ideas, now they are just a few clicks away. Within the Facebook culture of Likes, users Like posts with which they self-identify, and in so doing they use “the Like to share their values with others” (Ozanne et al. 2017: 6). The pressure of the media thus constantly tests the values dear to the family or the community. The virtual peer group and adverts from all around the world continuously enforce some values while putting others into question. Thus, one continuously readjusts one’s values belief system to the norms accepted by the general society, even if this is virtual.

The online media thus presents another form of peer and social pressure on the values hierarchy formation. Vogel et al. (2014) posit that there is a correlation between the use of Facebook and self-esteem, thus highlighting today’s reality that the effect of online media on values formation and schooling is similar to face-to-face interactions, as it affects one’s emotions and the same psychological and moral constructs affected by physical contact.

Children need guidance to reflect critically on their surroundings, and to comprehend how their understanding
of values fit within the whole system of family, peers and the global picture as presented by the media. Schools are the educational institutions that exist to pass information and skills from one generation to another. Nevertheless, the school community should be guided to empower students to interact with society critically, reflect on their actions and enhance their interactions, rather than simply convey information and reproduce society (Tzanakis 2011).

**Schools as Institutions That Help in Values and Character Formation**

Social values relate to those principles and beliefs that influence the quality of interpersonal relationships” (Taguma et al. 2018: 3). Schools help pupils to understand and examine social interactions; in so doing, they transmit values (Hopman et al. 2014) and provide a platform from where one can explore and test social values. Schools support and direct a core set of emotional competencies and ethical dispositions that are the foundations of character (Cohen et al. 2009). These core emotional and ethical dispositions ultimately direct the values hierarchy of the individual.

Adults in schools help the child to reinforce virtues and discover latent skills. Schools thus have a significant role in the character and moral development of children (Çubukçu 2012). These institutions help individuals to acquire basic human values and transform them into the desired behaviour (Cohen et al. 2009). All activity happening within schools, including adhering to policies, the teaching of the curriculum, and the instruction process, play a role in character education. The attitudes of adults and interaction with peers further reinforce character development.

Character education is a systematic approach that helps students improve their moral judgment and thinking. It instils basic values such as courage, loyalty, respect for others and self, honesty, responsibility and kindness; these values form the basis of every healthy relationship (Lickona 1996).

Character development does not happen in isolation, but within a social context (Smetana et al. 2013). It links the moral domain
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with the conventional practices of society (Nucci et al. 2015). Nucci et al. (2015) propose that teaching should not be solely based on didactic instruction but rather on discussions and hands-on activities as these will facilitate social interaction, which in turn will create opportunities for teachers to make an input on a moral level.

Moreover, instruction should also present complex tasks and dilemmas where students would have to engage in higher-order thinking. These tasks help individuals to move beyond their concept of self by integrating the ideas of others while understanding their needs. Such activities also increase the socio-emotional capacity (Nucci 2019) of the individuals.

At its core, character is about moral choices (Nucci 2019). However, while traditionally character was defined in terms of manifested virtues (Carr 2008), it is challenging to limit the definition of character to the individual’s exercise of virtues (Nucci 2019). Different cultures have different definitions of virtues, and the context determines whether one exercises a particular virtue or not (Nucci and Turiel 2009).

When analysing character development, although at times inconsistent, it becomes evident that decisions are rather coherent when applied to typical situations (Nucci 2019). One can thus interpret the character as acting in a sensible manner rather than a consistent way (Nucci 2019). It becomes the application of a particular virtue in context through “practical expertise” (Annas 2011). During childhood and older ages, typical patterns can be observed in moral decision-making; however, during early adolescence, decisions might be atypical (Nucci 2019). Peer pressure comes into play during this age range, affecting a young person’s actions.

Thus, when focusing on character development one should focus on coherence, not consistency, across contexts (Lerner and Callina 2014). Character development is the process where one becomes aware of one’s surroundings and develops into a moral agent (Berkowitz 2012). One learns to calculate how one’s actions affect others (Killen 2007).
Schools are the communities that can allow for this development to happen under the guidance of caring adults; the social interactions that happen at school on a micro-level mimic society. Thus, these social interactions can be considered as training grounds that train individuals on the moral aspects that are valued by society. Schools could be those institutions that offer a safe environment where students can critically reflect on how their actions are affecting others. Indeed, if provided with the right conditions at school, students might be helped to reflect on what they learn on a didactic level and extend it to the moral level by understanding how their knowledge might affect others.

Schools as Normative Institutions

To help every individual flourish and discover one’s potential, the school community should be responsive and sensitive to the culture surrounding it. It is the analysis of culture that helps schools to provide the best instructional needs for students (Gay 2018). Teaching should consider the socio-cultural background of the students, as this will help teachers to be responsive to the actual needs of every individual.

Keeping in mind that teachers have a crucial influence on character formation, Thornberg (2016) stresses the need for reflective practice when teaching values. Teaching should be adjusted so that every student feels welcome (Brokamp 2017) and empowered. Being attentive to the child’s needs requires that the school educates the child as a whole and directs the teaching to the particular needs of the child. Teachers should thus reflect on the prescribed curriculum and understand how they can integrate this curriculum to respond to the needs of students.

Being student–centred allows for more effective teaching and a decrease in behavioural issues. Taking this student–centred approach motivates the students to learn and helps them to analyse their surroundings critically. Schools that adopt this approach provide a suitable platform from where holistic education can take place.
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“Holistic pedagogy concerns the development of the whole student and acknowledges the cognitive, social, moral, emotional and spiritual dimensions of education” (Tirri 2011). This pedagogy is not limited to the prescribed curriculum as dictated by syllabi. Moreover, nor is it limited to the confines of the classroom and it helps them engage better with their surrounding cultures.

Schools that embark on values education programmes devise their curricula to help students acquire a set of values which they deem important for the given society, which values in turn help students to evaluate their daily actions within their community. Values and character education thus strive to form students into people who can positively contribute to society.

School curricula have the task of forming and mediating the desired values in their students (Duman 2014). Although values could be topics of particular lessons within values and character education, pupils will pick these up through the interaction between other individuals. Most of the students’ school life is in the classroom. Thus, the relationship with the teachers, the teaching style and the demography of the class plays a vital role in how the students experience school life.

The teacher can lead students to formulate their perception of success by capturing the motivational factors that influence behaviour, which in turn inspire students to pursue and achieve in educational activities (Abazaoğlu and Aztekin 2016). Consequently, teachers become agents who provide students with opportunities for problem-solving and decision-making, helping them to foster positive interpersonal skills (Cannon et al. 2016; Dovigo 2017).

Schools should make extra efforts to include every individual within the community. They should help in the adjustment of individuals whose cultural baggage has provided them with a different set of norms. Every individual has differences in one’s baggage; it is this training that will help the individual to make the right decisions at the right moment (Cannon et al. 2016). Teachers should offer choices to children. These choices help students integrate virtuous decisions within their character (Çubukçu 2012).
Teachers who adopt the holistic pedagogical style teach for life and not for the exam, and instil a sense of responsibility in pupils to recognise learning as a tool that helps them become sensitive to their surroundings. This sensitivity opens students to become more self-aware and more emphatic to the needs of others and creates a safe environment where pupils could bond. Thus, schools will be catering for the primordial need of human beings by creating places of belonging where students can bloom (Riley et al. 2018).

The relationships which students form with peers and teachers provide different lenses through which the individual interprets school. Most of the students’ school life is played out in the classroom. The students’ experience of the school culture affects their behaviour and emotions (Roeser et al. 2000) and impacts learning. Consequently, teachers become agents who can control the environment where effective learning takes place, and the character can be trained while moral values are fostered.

Being drawn to positive values and integrating them creates what Cameron (2011) calls a heliotropic effect – a positive aura that generates a positive feedback loop which attracts the individual towards more positive attitudes. This positive culture helps students to become more socially connected and enhances self-esteem (Loukas et al. 2006). Furthermore, it helps students to work harder, be more disciplined and more self-reliant (Cannon et al. 2016). Moreover, as stated by Kuperminc et al. (2001), a positive culture buffers individuals from the adverse effects of damaging situations happening within or outside the school, and as affirmed by Burton et al. (2004), helps them to become more emotionally stable.

The ancient concept of mimesis proposes behavioural, psychological, cognitive and intrapersonal imitation that helps the individual to become a good person (Tsouna 2013). However, while schools are vital entities that develop values (Çubukçu 2012), and the adults present at a school play an indispensable role in values education as they are models and mentors (Arthur 2011), the teaching of values should not only be limited to the confines of the school. All stakeholders should work together and strive to form students into people who can
positively contribute to society. All stakeholders should thus be actively involved in teaching the values that the society and the school community deem as necessary. Society should thus support the narrative that sustains moral values.

One manifests one’s values hierarchy through daily activities, and thus their development is difficult to measure (Sosik and Cameron 2010). Values and character development happen over an extended period and require constant feedback. Moreover, when providing feedback, one should be attentive to one’s natural bias and subjectivity toward specific values or character traits (Cannon et al. 2016). The feedback needs to be the result of careful observation and coaching.

The following section will outline the methodology of this small-scale study. It will be followed by a discussion of the findings. Suggestions that can guide policymakers will then be put forward.

Nature of the Research

Through research, one tries to understand reality. The methodology used depends on the ontological and epistemological stances which one takes to interpret reality. Case study methodology helps to analyse complex issues happening within a confined system (Ary et al. 2018). This study employed an intrinsic case study approach (Stake 1995) to understand how this particular school develops values. Intrinsic case studies focus on the particularities of the case (Grandy 2012); this limits the generalisation of the study beyond its specificity. However, a single case can permit analysis of theoretical propositions based on real-world discovery; it can provide alternative links to a theoretical framework, and clarify unclear theoretical relationships (Fletcher and Plakoyiannaki 2012). The specific dynamics can never be repeated (Vicsek 2010).

Nevertheless, Thomas (2010) argues that a case study would represent the characteristics of the general population. One could deduce inferences from case studies if the case and its context are richly described (Simons 2015). Moreover, the
theoretical framework which directs this study might also influence another study.

Interpreting the Case

The study tried “to understand individual and shared social meanings” (Crowe et al. 2011: 4) through an interpretative approach. One cannot describe something without adding an interpretation to it (Pringle et al. 2011); knowledge is shaped by the psychological, cultural, biological sensitivities and limitations of the researcher; thus, true objectivity is impossible (deRoche and deRoche 2012b). Begoray and Banister (2012) suggest that researchers must have an ongoing critique and critical reflection of their biases and how these influence every process of the research. These ensure that the study takes into account the participants’ and the researcher’s understanding of the phenomenon (Pietkiewicz and Smith 2014).

Focus Groups

Four focus groups were held with students aged 11-15 since this is a stage when students become more independent and where peer pressure plays a significant role. Moreover, they are mature enough to understand the concept under study. A representative sample was asked to participate in the study; those who were willing to participate were invited for a focus group. Although there were different ethnicities, the sample included Maltese boys mostly coming from middle-class families. The parents have good educational standing and can support their children in academia, even if this is limited to following their children’s progress and seeking the support of the school when needed. The students had quite a stable level of care, their parents being very supportive. These particularities might skew the results to the positive when speaking about character and values education.

Since the students were under the age of consent, parents/guardians had to sign a consent form in the name of their children to participate in the study. At the start of each focus group the rationale of the study was explained, we discussed safety during the discussion, allowing others to speak and creating an atmosphere of mutual trust. To further reassure
the participants, it was made clear that their identity would be kept anonymous. The participants were once again thanked for choosing to be collaborators in this study.

The opening question was then put forward for discussion. Semi-structured interviews were carried, and although questions were prepared, rather than being led by the written questions, the general discussion that emerged during the focus group led the way. Nevertheless, during the focus group session, reference was made to the questions so that all areas would be addressed. Students were asked to provide their perceptions on how the school prepares them for life. We also discussed what values they think that the school has taught them and whether this complements what they had learnt from the family, society and the media. Another part of the discussion revolved around how the school experience affects their character and values development and their contribution towards the school community. Throughout the discussion, students were asked to provide concrete examples without mentioning individuals.

Focus groups help to provide rich and detailed data (Carey and Asbury 2016) about the issue under investigation without being too interfering on the personal level. The group context can help individuals who would otherwise be too shy to participate, to narrate their own story. Robson and McCartan (2016) indicate that participants are empowered to make comments in their own words while the group itself helps to provide the necessary checks and balances so that extreme views are weeded out. In this light, focus groups help to generate data that explain how social norms and processes are interpreted within the group (Parker and Tritter 2006). One drawback is distinguishing between the different participant voices. A dominant individual could take over the conversation, limiting the input of others within the group (Carey and Asbury 2016). Care should thus be taken so that all participants’ opinions are heard and given due weight.

At the end of every focus group, students were given instruction that should they need to add anything to the focus group contribution, even if anonymous, they can do so by writing their comment and posting it in an indicated letterbox away
from the researcher’s office. This offer provided further safety for students who felt shy during the focus group and evened out possible peer pressure that might have existed during the focus group.

Table 1: Methods of data collection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who</th>
<th>Method and mode of data collection</th>
<th>Participant Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 7-8 students (age 11-13)</td>
<td>Focus Group - narrative</td>
<td>Two groups of 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 9-10 students (age 13-15)</td>
<td>Focus Group - narrative</td>
<td>Two groups of 6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analysis of Data

All collected data was qualitative and thematically analysed using NVIVO. This thematic approach linked back to literature and led to a clearer understanding of what was being researched.

While analysing data, both analytical codes, which give more meaning to the particular group, and also axial coding, which illustrated the phenomenon being described, were used (Cohen et al. 2018). These codes allowed for the creation of themes and hyper-themes, and also allowed for different themes to be linked together to arrive at more definite conclusions.

Ethical Issues

Power denotes an asymmetry of relationship and may manifest itself in various spheres of the community. While acknowledging the researcher’s position, for this study participants were considered as collaborators in a bid to instil an atmosphere of trust and mutual understanding (Demirdirek 2012). It was also assured that the voices of all participants in the research were well represented. The representation of all voices allowed for a better understanding of the participants’ perspective rather than imposing the researcher’s biases and perceptions on their thoughts.
A letter explaining the purpose and use of the research was given to all participants invited for this study (BERA 2018). This letter explained the issues of anonymity, confidentiality and withdrawal. Thus, participants gave their informed assent, through the letter signed by their parents/guardians. Students needed the approval of an authorised third party (deRoche and deRoche 2012a). To protect the identity of the participants, they were referred to collectively as – student 1 (S1), student 2 (S2), etc. (Bush and James 2009). All data was securely stored according to the Data Protection Regulations.

Findings

Safety and belonging are two of the basic needs of individuals to function well. It is thus of utmost importance that pupils feel safe at school. According to Riley (2018), this safety results in better bonding between individuals. Participating pupils saw the school as their second home, showing that it provides the safety which one associates with home. Feeling safe and being present in a caring environment helps pupils see themselves and others positively and reduce misbehaviour.

A caring environment helps to nurture values. Hitlin and Piliavin (2004) see values as ideal attitudes and guiding mechanisms. The pupils perceived teachers as friendly and caring; this helped to boost their self-esteem (Schaps and Battistich 2002). They commented that teachers would tackle a problem to the end, until it is solved, even when problems were initiated online. The fact that teachers’ care affected the pupil’s confidence and trust in significant adults. Trust reduced competition in favour of cooperation and mutual respect. In fact, Berkowitz and Bier (2004) indicate that character is built through positive social relations.

Most students, when speaking about values which they acquired from home, indicated that there is a continuation between home and school. They discussed that what is dear to them at home is even encouraged at school. In fact, they said that this helped them trust each other. The students also discussed their rapport with other ethnicities and beliefs, values such as respect, a sense of communion, honesty, mutual help and appreciation for all transpired from the discussion.
They presented a positive vibe and hope; they also alluded to the fact that through online media, they interact with friends beyond the boundaries of the island. One can state that these are the bases of a community which influence a positive outlook to life (MacKie 2017).

Students also indicated that teachers help them to achieve more. The emphasis on achievement was made more explicit from the youngest focus group. They perceived achievement as a means to better themselves; the older pupils linked achievement to their future aspirations. Schools are seen as a means to pass on skills to the pupils. It transpired that the pupils appreciated enquiry-based, hands-on teaching. When discussing science, pupils indicated that they learned to be more inquisitive.

An interesting contrast between year groups was seen through the discussion on discipline. As pupils progressed through the years, discipline was seen more as a mutual agreement rather than obeying rules. Older pupils commented that ‘when you break school rules, the authorities help you to see what was wrong so that next time around it will not be repeated’ (S13).

While discussing the effect of the social media on their outlook of life and how this affected their understanding of character and values, although students stressed the importance of face-to-face interaction, they did not distinguish how the media affects them personally. The discussion then revolved around the virtual friend groups, their country of origin and their beliefs. Students then realised that their interaction with these virtual friends shapes how they interact with their family and at school.

Through the focus group discussions, it transpired that the school leadership is not perceived as aloof but reachable. Pupils indicated that leaders take personal care of them and appreciated that leaders come down to their level. They also acknowledged that through the leader’s knowledge of the institution, one would influence and shape the culture. Their acknowledgement calls for a style of leadership which is more in touch with the people, and a move from management to leadership (Cauchi Cuschieri 2007).
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Conclusion

This paper contended that values and character formation involve family, peers, schools, society at large and the media. The surrounding social environment, educational intuitions – such schools and other extra-curricular activity centres, as well as the home setting, all offer experiences where one can exercise, develop and integrate values and virtues that form one’s character.

The students who participated in the interview confirmed that values and character are built through different sources. Even though at the school where the research was carried, there is a limited ethnic representation, still aspects of tolerance and inclusion were discussed. These aspects emanated even in the group dynamics during the focus group. It transpired that at the school, there is a culture that supports inclusion and tolerance. These statements confirmed that the development of values and character is sustained by a narrative that transcends groups of belonging. A positive school culture sustains the language of values and helps the students to integrate them into their daily decisions and actions. This integration helps them to be more sensitive to the needs of others irrespective of culture or creed.

Education is a powerful tool to develop future generations; thus, when planning educational reforms and policies, educational leaders should consider the whole network that affects the development of children. It is useless to focus on the curricular or the pedagogical aspect while bypassing the effect of the family, peers and the media. Holistic educational reforms should see that the family is supported to the extent that they are empowered to support the developing child. The socio-economic background of the family should be backed by more incentives that allow for genuine support of children. A holistic view of education calls for the supporting of a culture which sustains the narrative of tolerance and respect for all. Educational campaigns should not disregard the power of the media in transforming the thoughts and the values system of children and society at large. Consequently, media education should empower critical thinking that sustains a narrative which supports the formation of character and value. It is
within this culture that schools can effectively provide a holistic education that develops a moral child.

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The Language of the Future: The Motivation of Adults in Malta to Study Mandarin Chinese as a Foreign Language

Ms Christiana Sciberras
Abstract

China’s economic growth and opening up to the western world have led many people in the West to study Mandarin Chinese as a second or as an additional foreign language. Due to the rise of China, many people in the West are seeking to learn Mandarin Chinese in order to be able to communicate better with the endless opportunities that such a great culture and economy bring with it. As Hu Jintao said in his address to the Australian Parliament on the 24th of October 2003: ‘The Chinese culture belongs not only to the Chinese but also to the whole world’, suggesting that the Chinese actually welcome foreigners to learn their language and culture. In fact, many adults in the Western world are choosing to learn Mandarin Chinese as a foreign language for a number of different reasons, among which to improve their future career prospects. The current study aims to find out what motivates adult learners to choose to attend courses in basic Mandarin Chinese language and culture in Malta.

Keywords:

Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language, non-native teachers of Chinese, adult education, foreign language teaching.
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Literature Review

According to a number of studies, motivation is an essential property of a learner of a foreign language, as without motivation it would be almost impossible to learn a foreign language successfully (Dörnyei and Csiz'er 2005; Fu 2013; Jurisevic and Pizorn 2013). Dörnyei and Csiz'er (2005) list seven components that form part of the motivation learners have to study a foreign language. They discuss the learners’ positive attitude to the target language (TL) and culture, the benefit of learning the TL, attitudes towards speakers of the TL, interest in the culture associated with the TL, the importance and the economic power of the community that speaks the TL, the importance given to the study of foreign languages in the learners’ surroundings, and also the self-confidence of the learners in learning the TL. These seven components of learners’ motivation are very relevant to this research paper as they are all related to the participants’ motivation to study Mandarin Chinese in adulthood.

Motivation to learn a foreign language is examined in a number of ways, among which by Deci and Ryan (2000), who speak about intrinsic and extrinsic motivation for foreign language learning; the former is a want to learn a foreign language for personal enjoyment, because one really wants to do it, because the learner wishes to communicate with speakers of the TL, because they are interested in the culture of the TL and because the challenge of learning a foreign language gives them joy, while the latter is learning a foreign language for a particular reward such as better job prospects. Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation contribute to the participants’ motivation to learn Mandarin Chinese.

I believe that in the case of Malta, as Khalid (2016) mentioned about Pakistan, foreign language learners are more likely to become additive multilinguals because the vast majority of the learners, especially adults, would have already studied Maltese and English throughout all of compulsory schooling and an additional one or two foreign languages throughout the final five years of compulsory schooling. In addition to this, for multilingual learners of Chinese in Malta, Chinese is an additional foreign language and it could never replace the
official languages Maltese and English.

Research about the motivations of a number of learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in different parts of the world suggests that a number of people choose to study English because it is an international lingua franca (Crystal 2003) and so through the medium of English they could promote their home culture to the rest of the world better. According to Orton (2008) many Chinese learn EFL to promote the Chinese cultural identity and culture to the western world. In addition to this, a number of persons choose to study a foreign language so that through it they could work for their country in the fields of international trade and diplomacy with the country of the foreign language they have learned. This might be very close to the situation of CFL in Malta: surely a number of learners choose to study Chinese in order to widen their prospects of working in China.

This has motivated the current study as one of the aims of the current research is to find out why adult learners decided to choose Mandarin Chinese over the language options available. Did they decide to choose Chinese because of the huge number of native speakers it has? Or because many other learners worldwide are also studying Mandarin Chinese as a second or as a foreign language? Or because they have a general interest in foreign languages and they want to choose a very different foreign language? Such questions all lead to what the motivations are for learners to choose to study Mandarin Chinese in Malta.

Instrumental motivations are more related to wanting to learn a foreign language to gain something such as a certificate or a diploma, to pass an exam or to have better job prospects. In his discussion on motivation, Dörnyei (2009) mentions the learners’ need for achievement and new challenges and also the motivation to study a foreign language in order to broaden one’s mind. Dörnyei (1998) also investigates who learns which foreign languages, where and why. He also investigates the level of proficiency foreign language learners wish to achieve.

According to Fu Xiao (2013), the teacher has an important role in maintaining and protecting learners’ motivation, in
reducing anxiety and in providing language exercises that are level-appropriate for the learners, so that success in them will lead to more motivation. The first lesson should be positive and make learners feel safe and that the task of learning the target language is doable. They should also feel successful: that they have achieved something great; this could be the ability to introduce themselves or to say a greeting in the target language. Teachers could also maintain motivation by guiding learners to set goals, to involve learners in the lesson and to arouse their curiosity and attention.

In addition to motivation, this study briefly mentions beliefs about the target language. Horwitz (1988) comes up with five points that summarise the ‘Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory’ (BALLI). The first point discusses the difficulty of language learning; I believe that this is very relevant to the current study because Mandarin Chinese tends to be perceived as a difficult language, but in fact, it is different from and not necessarily more difficult than languages people in the West are used to. The second point discusses foreign language aptitude which is an essential part of foreign language learning. The third point discusses the nature of language learning. The fourth point discusses learning and communication strategies, and the fifth point discusses motivations and expectations of foreign language learners. Horwitz (1988) lists a number of motivations and beliefs in relation to foreign language learning such as a cultural interest in the language, the desire to travel to the country where the target language is spoken, to foster friendships with native speakers of the target language, to have better job prospects, to preserve one’s heritage language and to enable communication with native speakers of the target language. The motivations mentioned above, along with others, will be investigated in the current study.

**Methodology and Background to the Study**

This research was born out of the need to find out about the motivation of adult learners who decided to start and to successfully complete one of the evening courses held for adult learners in Mandarin Chinese language and culture in Malta.

Malta is officially bilingual: both Maltese and English are
the official languages of Malta. Both languages are taught equally throughout compulsory education in all schools and all students are expected to gain competence in both languages. In addition to Maltese and English, when children are around 11 years old, they move on to secondary school where a foreign language is introduced and is taught throughout the five remaining years of compulsory schooling. In the third year of secondary school, students could choose another foreign language if they wish. The foreign languages that have been widespread in most schools are Arabic, French, German, Italian and Spanish. Mandarin Chinese has been on offer at St. Margaret’s College (Bormla) since academic year 2017/2018, but the number of students who actually choose Mandarin Chinese is low. Mandarin Chinese is also available in a few church schools in Malta. The Directorate for Lifelong Learning (part of the Ministry for Education and Employment) offers an evening course in Mandarin Chinese language and culture in addition to other foreign languages, namely Arabic, French, German, Greek, Italian, Russian, Turkish, Japanese and Spanish.

All the participants in this study are Maltese nationals and bilingual in both Maltese and English. Most of the participants are multilingual; they would have previously learned other languages either in compulsory schooling or at the Directorate. A total of 24 adult learners participated in this study. 9 of the participants are males and 15 are female. 18 out of the 24 participants are under the age of 40, 6 are over the age of 40, two of whom are close to retirement age. The fact that most of the participants are young is in line with research on adult education conducted by Borg, Mayo and Raykov (2016) and with the Adult Education Survey 2016 conducted by the National Statistics Office (NSO) Malta (published in 2018).

All of the participants in this research project completed compulsory education and all of them had furthered their studies beyond compulsory education. 7 (29%) of the participants achieved post-secondary education. 8 (33%) of the participants had a graduate level of education and 9 (37%) of the participants had a post-graduate level of education. The participants’ level of education led to their current employment; the vast majority of the participants, 87.5% are
in a professional job, 1 participant (4%) is retired (but did a professional job before retirement); 1 (4%) of the respondents has a technical job while another 1 (4%) participant is a university student.

All of the 24 participants are citizens of Malta: an EU member state whose official languages are Maltese and English. In the context of Malta’s multilingualism, one of the questions about the background of the participants asks what other languages the participants have knowledge of. The language options available to tick are the languages currently taught in schools; so the first two languages on the list are Maltese and English – Malta’s official languages, compulsory throughout all the levels of compulsory schooling and both essential to function in Maltese society in many different contexts. In addition to this, all the participants ticked both Maltese and English. This could also be seen during the lectures as both languages were used in addition to Mandarin Chinese; in fact, as teacher, the researcher translated in both Maltese and English when it was necessary. In addition to this, both the learners and the researcher as teacher switched to Maltese when explaining certain grammar points as both parties thought that certain grammar points could be better outlined in Maltese than in English. This could be because certain grammar points might be closer to certain Maltese grammar points. The researcher feels that future research is necessary on typology; possibly a comparative study of language typology of Mandarin and Maltese in order to better understand how Maltese learners learn grammar structures in Mandarin.

In addition to Maltese and English, the questionnaire also gave the options of Arabic, French, German, Italian, Russian, Spanish and the option to specify any other language. The foreign language that is the most popular among the participants is Italian; in fact, 91% claimed to have knowledge of Italian. 55% of the participants also claimed to have some knowledge of French. 25% of the participants claimed to have knowledge of German and 12.5% of the participants claimed to have knowledge of Spanish. The fact that this study was conducted in a multilingual context where both the learners and the teacher have knowledge of a number of foreign languages suggests that they might be more open to learning an additional foreign
language (Cook 1999), in this case Mandarin Chinese, because this is not their first experience in learning a foreign language. It is of significance that three (12.5%) of the 24 participants wrote Chinese in the section where they could list any other foreign languages that they have knowledge of and that are not listed on the questionnaire. These participants had been studying Mandarin Chinese for quite some time, suggesting that possibly, the longer a person studies a foreign language, the more likely they are to claim it as a foreign language that they know.

The linguistic situation in Malta could be compared to the linguistic situation in Pakistan where a number of languages are spoken simultaneously and where the learners are additive multilinguals (Khalid 2016), as when they learn a new language they add it to the repertoire of languages that they already know. Khalid’s (2016) study about EFL in Pakistan is very relevant to the current study, as according to Khalid, Pakistani learners of English are very proud of their first language (L1) and study English as a second (L2) language for a mostly instrumental reason; to have better career prospects. This is similar to this research as the participants are also additive multilinguals; they are adding Mandarin Chinese to the languages that they already know.

Discussion of Results

The participants were asked why they decided to enrol in a course to learn Mandarin Chinese at this stage in adulthood, when the vast majority of the participants have completed their studies and have a stable job. The participants were given 7 possible reasons to choose from, they could choose more than one option and they were also given the opportunity to list any other reasons if they wished. The first option was ‘Mandarin Chinese is the language that has the biggest number of speakers’ and only 3/24 (12.5%) ticked this option. The second option was ‘I wish to learn Chinese for work or business purposes’. 10/24 (41.6%) of the participants chose this option. The third option was ‘I wish to learn Chinese to be able to travel to China for business’, 8/24 (33%) of the respondents chose this option. The fourth option was ‘Chinese might be important in the future at work’. 14/24 (58%) of the respondents chose
this option. The fifth option was ‘I wish to learn Chinese to be able to travel to China for pleasure’. 11 (45%) of the total 24 respondents chose this option. The sixth option was ‘I am fascinated by Chinese language and culture’. 10/24 (41.6%) of the respondents chose this option. The seventh option was ‘I wish to learn a language that is very different from the languages that I already know’. 10/24 (41.6%) of the total 24 participants chose this option. The data in this paragraph is shown in the figure 1.

Figure 1: Why are you studying Chinese?

Most of the participants claimed that they were studying Mandarin Chinese because it might be important in the future at work. This suggests that while the teaching of Mandarin Chinese is still in its infancy in Malta, many people are already seeing the benefits of studying Mandarin Chinese for work or business purposes. Travelling to China for pleasure and because they are fascinated by the Chinese culture are also very popular options.

The participants were also asked how they felt after completing the course in Mandarin Chinese language and culture. The questionnaire had six options to choose from and participants could tick more than one option. The first option says ‘Mandarin Chinese is too hard for a Western person to master’. 3/24 (12.5%) of the participants chose this option. The second option says ‘Mandarin Chinese is too complicated
to understand’. 2/24 (8.3%) of the participants chose this option. The third option says ‘Mandarin Chinese is too alien and different from the languages that I have learned before.’ 3/24 (12.5%) of the participants chose this option. The fourth option says ‘Learning Mandarin Chinese is too stressful’. 1/24 (4%) of the participants chose this option. The fifth option says ‘I enjoyed learning Chinese’. 16/24 (66.6%) of the participants chose this option. The sixth option says ‘Mandarin Chinese grammar is quite simple, but characters and tones are very difficult to master’. 17/24 (70.83%) of the participants chose this option. The data in this paragraph is shown in the figure 2.

Figure 2: Participants’ opinions on completion of the course

Figure 2 shows that the vast majority of the adult learners agree with the statement ‘Chinese grammar is quite simple, but characters and tones are very difficult to master’. This could be because Mandarin Chinese is the first non-alphabetic and tone language that the learners are being exposed to and so they feel that it is very different from the languages that they already have knowledge of.

The questionnaire to also asked which language skill was the most difficult to master. The respondents could tick more than one answer. The options were the following; ‘understanding PinYin’ was ticked by 3/24 respondents (12.5%), ‘pronouncing tones’ was ticked by 7/24 respondents (29%), ‘speaking to
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In addition to the options presented in figure 3, the adult learners also had the opportunity to write any other skills that they found difficult to master during their course in Mandarin Chinese language. One of the respondents said that understanding rapid natural dialogue was quite hard. Another adult learner said that the concept of the measure word and which measure word to use in which context was quite a hard skill to master. Another two participants mentioned the characters as one of them said that it was hard to understand how to look up characters in a dictionary when one does not know how they are pronounced while another adult learner said that remembering how to write the characters and their respective pronunciation was one of the hardest skills to master while learning Mandarin Chinese. As one could see in the data in Figure 3 and in the additional comments, writing
and recognizing the characters is the most difficult task to master, according to the respondents. The researcher, who also taught the courses that the respondents attended, believes that this is due to the language background of the participants, because like her, they are Maltese nationals and the languages they had previous knowledge of are mostly EU languages which use the Latin alphabet, unlike Mandarin Chinese which uses a system of quite abstract characters in its writing system.

After discussing what the greatest challenges the participants faced while studying Mandarin Chinese language, they were asked whether they would like to continue studying Mandarin Chinese language in the future and why they would choose to do so. 18 out of the 24 participants (75%) said they wish to continue studying Mandarin Chinese language in the future while 4 out of the 24 participants (16.6%) said that they do not want to continue studying Mandarin Chinese language in the future.

Most of the participants who claimed that they wanted to continue studying Mandarin Chinese language in the future said it was because they had found it fascinating and very interesting. Other participants said they wanted to continue studying Mandarin Chinese language because they often visit China for business or work purposes and they also need to communicate with the Chinese people for business or work purposes, so being familiar with the language would be very useful for their respective jobs as many claimed that they wanted to continue studying Mandarin Chinese language in order to be able to keep up simple conversations in Mandarin Chinese and to make their business trips to China easier. Other participants who did not claim to be studying Mandarin Chinese language for work or business purposes, said that they wish to continue studying the language because it’s an enjoyable and interesting challenge and that they enjoy it when they manage to keep up a short conversation in Mandarin Chinese, for example in a restaurant or shop. Another one of the respondents said that she might continue studying Mandarin Chinese language.
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Conclusions and Recommendations for Further Studies

In line with the results above, one could conclude that the majority of the adult learners were motivated to enrol in Chinese Mandarin language and culture courses mainly because Chinese is useful at work in the future and because they wish to travel to China for business and pleasure. Most of the participants also claimed that they enjoyed learning Mandarin Chinese. The idea of enjoyment in learning Mandarin Chinese further adds to the motivation of the participants to continue learning Mandarin Chinese. This study also shows that very few participants agree with the statement that Mandarin Chinese is too hard for a Western person to master. This is because the participants in this study were highly motivated to learn Mandarin Chinese, especially for business reasons.

The researcher believes that further studies need to be conducted on the idea that Mandarin Chinese is too difficult for a Western person to learn. This is because very often, when the researcher introduces herself as learner or as teacher of Mandarin Chinese in Malta, many people seem to have an attitude that it is too hard and almost impossible to learn, so further studies need to be conducted to find out about attitudes towards learning Mandarin Chinese. The researcher also feels that further studies need to be carried out to find out about which aspects of Mandarin Chinese multilingual persons learn the fastest and which aspects of the language take the longest to be learned. All in all, if a person is really motivated to learn a particular foreign language, it is possible to achieve fluency if the person is committed to study and practice.

In addition to further studies on teaching pedagogy of Mandarin Chinese as a foreign language in the European context, the researcher also suggests further development in the teaching of Mandarin Chinese in Malta. The researcher suggests that Mandarin Chinese, is to be made available as a foreign language option in all public schools in order to enhance multilingualism in our schools. Such availability would, on the short term, enhance multilingualism in our schools, and in the long term, enhance multilingualism and more international opportunities.
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Chapter 3: Working in International and Multicultural Schools

Working in International and Multicultural Schools

Ms Antoinette Schembri
The term super-diverse is being used to describe contemporary society. Super-diversity, coined by Steven Vertovec in 2007, was intended to describe the different ethnic groups existing in society in general. Ontologically, this term takes into account the movement of people from one country to another and celebrates the fact that all people are different and unique and can contribute in different ways to society. In the past twenty years, the movement of people in the world increased, and this had led to a situation where we are now speaking more in terms of mobility, rather than in terms of migration when people move from one place to another.

This fluidity of people movement affects greatly the education sphere. Education is at the core of society, as through education one strives to have a better humanity. While education is a holistic process, schools form an integral part of this development. Schools are a microcosm of society and in the past few years, they have also become more diverse and susceptible to the movement of people.

Thus, education is an important facet of this super-diversity in a neo-liberal society. Education is important for individuals from a social, academic and also a personal perspective (Gill and Thomson 2012). Schools are important places where students attend to also meet their friends and forge future alliances and networks. In addition, besides being a means for social integration, they also serve as communities of academic or vocational learning which, in the future, will translate to social equality. The Maltese National Curriculum Framework (2012) emphasises the concept that no child is left behind. This is precisely why all students, irrespective of race, sex, class or income levels should have the same access to education.

Apart from the social and academic aspects, one has to look at education as a means to the development of the individual. All students need to feel competent, autonomous and have feelings of relatedness with those around them (Ryan and Deci 2017). Thus, the students’ fundamental psychological needs are catered for and this ensures that such students regard the education given as a life-long process. This trajectory can only be followed if educational leaders support all students in their endeavours. This can only be done if such educational leaders
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possess the three basic psychological needs, which are competence, autonomy and relatedness. These ensure that the education leaders garner the necessary satisfaction from working in a learning organisation. Thus, it is important that the Senior Management Team in a school fosters a climate of good working relationships as this will ultimately affect the students’ wellbeing and also the quality of teaching and learning.

Migrant Students in Malta

To meet this end, the Maltese government set up the Migrant Learners’ Unit in 2014, where migrant students are inducted into the Maltese school life. The Maltese government believes that schools are the ideal places where a culture of learning and integration is promoted. However, integration cannot take place without the migrant students being conversant with Maltese and English, the two languages of instruction in Maltese schools. Consequently, those migrant students who lack knowledge of these two languages are given special courses while activities are organized for them, which aim to help them integrate better into the school community.

One cannot stress enough the importance that migrant students feel integrated and welcome in their school environment. This can only be done through having staff who are informed about multiculturalism and also students who are receptive to students who are different from them. Thus, in Maltese society, education is an important social structure which aims to enhance people’s sensibilities and make them more aware of the advantages of living in a multicultural society. Hence, Maltese schools can be harbingers of change.

The Maltese situation is complex, as not all schools have the same school culture. State school colleges have different realities from church and private schools. They experience different categories of students and this dichotomy might not be found in either private or Church schools. In the case of Church schools, the current ballot system makes it very difficult for students beyond the age of the ballot, whether Maltese or foreign, to enter such a school.
On the other hand, migrant students from a low socio-economic background do not enrol in private schools. Yet, one must not get the impression that private schools do not have migrant students. Such migrant students that normally join these schools represent a different social category from those that register to attend a government school. Despite this contrast, it is very important that educational professionals working in the different educational sectors are made aware of the importance of responding to the students’ needs, especially when preparing the lessons and also in informal everyday talks with the students.

However, this scenario has its advantages. Students attending government schools are more prone to be exposed to this super-diversity. The schools become a microcosm of this multi-ethnic reality. Each student has his or her own socio-economic background, while their home environment is unique for each and every pupil. This has implications for those who work in schools.

The School Environments under Discussion

Thus, the theme which will be analysed in the following pages is entitled, ‘Working in International and Multicultural Schools’. As discussed above, this is highly pertinent to the situation in Maltese schools right now. In this section, a number of contributions have been brought together. Each paper, in its own respect, examines a particular aspect of the complex and, at times, problematic nature of super-diversity in the Maltese school context. The Maltese classroom is becoming increasingly diverse. Falzon, Pisani and Cauchi (2012) had already predicted, eight years ago, that this trend was destined to increase and that our schools become ‘progressively more multi-cultural and multi-lingual over time’ (35).

Thus, eight years after this prediction, it is also time to have a snapshot of the current situation. Super-diversity is analysed through four different papers which deal with the internationalisation of schools in Malta. The analysis will move away from a descriptive situation but will focus on the new
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Challenges that educators are facing and what are the real-life situations today which were not present a decade ago.

Vassallo looks at multicultural education from the perspective of educators coming from different schools and nationalities. He studied their perceptions towards multiculturalism both before and after undertaking a course, of which he was the course tutor. This was done through the use of concept maps and the keeping of a reflective journal by the teachers following this course. He took into account the links between the different notions expressed through these concept maps and analysed how deep and critical they were both before and after the twenty-hour course. The end result was that educators were more open to ideas of multiculturalism after the course. Teachers expressed a better understanding of multicultural education and what it entailed.

Seguna and Spiteri look at super-diversity through a lecturer’s perspective. The paper delves into an aspect of super-diversity at an independent sixth form. It seeks to analyse how the lecturers working in this sixth form understand intercultural diversity and how it affects the implementation of the curriculum. How do the lecturers’ personal experiences with ethnic and culture diversity inform their thinking? This paper explores the lecturers’ beliefs and what influences their ideas and practices of intercultural education in the classes they teach. This was done through a qualitative study involving interviews with seven lecturers. The outcome of this research has yielded that educators’ best interests in their students must be supplemented by a curriculum which takes into account that students might have different cultural backgrounds.

Farrugia Buhagiar and Sammut Debono write about the work done at the Migrant Learners’ Unit. This unit was set up in 2014 to cater for the teaching of English and Maltese to those migrant children who do not possess one of these two languages. The authors look into the policy behind the setting up of this unit and how learners are identified for induction. Different aspects of life in the classroom at this unit are discussed. Training of teachers who teach at the induction hub is also examined, whilst there is a discussion about the community liaison team. Thus, the paper takes the reader through the whole process,
from registering to enter the school to the assessment and attendance at the induction hub.

Schembri analyses the voices of five young migrant students, and what their perceptions are at a secondary level Government school. These five migrants were all in year 9, when this study took place. Her study was conducted through informal conversations and participant observation. Through her research, she sought to find how the students felt with regards to their integration within the school. She concludes that while national policies regarding migrants should be in place, all schools should have individual policies which are relevant to their context. Each and every school in Malta has a different migrant reality, and migrant students can be integrated by developing an appropriate school culture of inclusion and integration tailor-made for the school.

Conclusions

These four papers thus give us different perspectives on what is at work in some of our schools and how these schools are coming to terms with super-diversity. The first general conclusion is that multiculturalism is affecting schools at various degrees and levels. There is nothing new in this. What is new and this results from these works, is that these four papers expose the complex intersectional variety of identities, experiences and other factors that make up life in the present Maltese schools.

What these studies are showing is that we need to follow Slim's (2018) advice and ‘resist reducing real people to simplistic categorizations’. One has to appreciate the ‘complexity of human identity and power relations’ that make everyone’s experience distinct and individual. In other words, these studies have again confirmed that education is human-centred, which means that the child, whatever his background, and wherever he comes from, is and should remain at the centre of the teaching activity. Only with good relationships in a school can the student flourish and be intrinsically motivated to learn. Having ownership of the learning means that the student knows that learning is a means to get equality in society. Learning through one’s volition means that the student
appreciates that learning is not only about equality, but it is also about being integrated in society. When these aims are achieved, the student will feel integrated and this will enhance his or her wellbeing. Respect should be upheld in all educational institutions and it should work both ways. Only thus can relationships of trust be built which will help in the integration of all stakeholders as a professional learning community.

While much has been done by the government towards the integration of students who come from other countries, the second conclusion from reading these four papers in this section is that schools should have a coherent framework of policies which take into account the views of staff working in schools, and also include the voices of the migrant students themselves. It is only through such educational structures where all those involved take away their biases and are truly conscientious and empathic towards others, that all students within our schools, irrespective of race, ethnicity and creed, can be enabled to flourish and reach their full potential. Only when such flourishing is achieved, can we say that our schools are really inclusive learning organisations.
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Tracking Conceptual Development in Multicultural Education: A Mixed-Methods Approach

Mr Brian Vassallo
Abstract

The plurality of cultural differences permeating the walls of Maltese classrooms has offered researchers in Multicultural Education an opportunity to use various research tools in their quest to access progress in teacher education programs. Programs purporting to impart or somehow develop the skills of educators to embrace multiculturalism in classrooms have been devoid of effective tracking methods to determine their effectivity. This paper examines the variations in beliefs and concepts of 29 teachers attending a twenty-hour course on multicultural education focusing on knowledge, understanding, competences and critical abilities needed to teach students from culturally diverse backgrounds. Teachers attending training were exposed to a range of pedagogical practices including the use of micro groups, case study illustrations, videos from Youtube™, whole group activities and connecting experiences. The course participants were asked to draw concept maps highlighting their understanding of Multicultural Education before and after the sessions. Besides, participants were asked to write reflective journals during and at the end of the course. Evidence suggests that after being exposed to training in Multicultural Education, participants are more willing to engage in critical self-reflections and to adopt changes in teaching strategies so as to include all students under their care, irrespective of cultural background. The research also asserts that there were substantial changes in concept formation in all categories under study which were highly beneficial to participants as they progressed through the sessions as evidenced by both concept maps and reflective journal analysis.

The paper touches upon the role of various stakeholders in education to provide professional training in Multicultural Education for all educators. It also advocates for human and financial capital to reaffirm our nation’s commitment towards an educational system that promotes a level playing field for every child, thus ensuring fair opportunities for fuller participation in an increasingly diverse society.

Keywords:

multicultural education, concept maps, reflective journals, training programs
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Introduction

Multicultural education (henceforward ME) has over the years meant different concepts to different people, usually shaped by various necessities and evolving experiences. Theorists in ME for example (Banks and Banks 2002; Gay 2010a, 2010b) have argued that multicultural education is an inherent part of education and not an add-on in response to an expected predicament.

However, it is clear that ME is still struggling to become a salient part of the curriculum directly offered to all students. In fact, other authors, such as Elkin and Becirovic (2017) argue that educators have downgraded it to some topics within social studies, fine arts and language arts. These attitudes somehow contort the scope behind ME philosophies and severely limit its implementation to superficial activities in schools. The major hurdle from implementing effective multicultural strategies in the classroom are teachers themselves who voice sceptical arguments ranging from “lack of time” (Vittrup 2016: 40), “lack of feasibility” (Premier 2010: 40), and “addition to an already overburdened curriculum’ (Raihani 2014: 213) – such convictions being rooted in the erroneous perception of ME as an added content that educators must append to the existing curricula as a result of new political decisions. The good news, however, is that the opposite is true.

Literature Review

ME professes more than mere content. It purports to encompass inclusive and innovative teaching strategies (O’Conor et al. 2009; Obiakor and Rotatori 2014), an improved learning environment (Itkonen and Dervin 2017; Sallii and Hoosain 2001; Vassallo 2008, 2014), supported instructional delivery (Grant and Sleeter 2011), contextual leadership (Vassallo 2016a, 2016b) and evaluation (Grant 2005).

Banks and Banks (2001) and Neito (2000) strongly believe that teachers need to project ME as a springboard to promote justice and equality, high academic outcomes, but most of all democratic citizenship. To infuse these theoretical conceptions into practical learning, educators need a
repertoire of skills to systematically weave a tapestry of topics into the central core of curriculum, teaching strategies, school headship, policymaking, guidance and counselling, classroom climate, and performance assessment. Harnessed by a strong multicultural content, inclusive attitudes, multiple perspectives and enriching experiences, teachers embark on the exciting journey to rediscover ways to teach reading, mathematics, languages, science, social studies and a host of other topics.

The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE 2002) emphasizes that teachers need to have the necessary skills to meet the impending needs of a “diverse community of students [as they move across] different developmental stages, have different learning styles, and come from diverse backgrounds” (4). However, Zhao and Zhang (2017) found that teachers often lacked knowledge about people from various backgrounds and/or were unwilling to teach students from differing backgrounds, especially when the background is different than theirs. According to Milner (2006), such needs are frequently accompanied by fears and reluctance to confront issues of race and cultural diversity during teacher-training programs. This is why Carson and Johnston (2000) advocate for a “pedagogy of compassion” and insist that it is a teacher’s fundamental duty to notice students’ anguish in the classroom and to respond compassionately. This view is compatible with critical race theory, in that teachers are asked to respond actively to racism and its connection with other forms of oppression and inequality such as sexism, classism and nativism (Howard and Navarro 2016). On similar grounds, Jackson et al. (2016) assert that improving multicultural skills is, in itself, an act of compassion, a moral commitment and a pledge for social justice. Moreover, Marchitello and Trinidad (2019) are adamant in claiming that “teacher preparation programs often fail to expose teacher candidates to diverse perspectives and experiences” (5).

1. Concept Maps, Critical Analysis and Learning Theories

Canas (2003) views concept mapping as a procedure of making sense out of a set of differing concepts. They can be
organized into graphical illustrations by linking phrases and sets of ideas, forming new propositions.

There is numerous literature which suggests that concept maps are highly effective tools which enable deep critical analysis. Pioneering work by Novac and Gowin (1984) presented concept maps as graphic devices depicting a set of concept meanings within a proposed framework. Concept maps provide a visual diagrammatic representation of conceptual meanings used to scaffold meaningful learning, both at an individual or group level. Analysis of such diagrammatic representations provides opportunity for adult learners to assimilate novel concepts into existing cognitive schema.

Concept maps can be ideal tools to foster cognitive development in adult learners as they scaffold new knowledge on previously acquired knowledge to form new mental schemas. Concept maps can assist educators in developing the capacity to learn new knowledge and structure content in a variety of subject areas (Kinchin et al. 2019). Moreover, concept mapping provides additional opportunity to enhance cognitive development over time, as well as prompts the ability of learners to think critically by learning how to learn. It can also be employed as an assessment tool for developing plans and solving problems.

On similar but distinct grounds, Constructivist Learning Theory (Ausubel 1963; Merriam and Bierema 2014) explains that learning is how people make sense of their experience. Inherent to this theory, the learners construct their own meaning derived from their immediate experiences and engage in a process, shaping and reshaping their own learning. Therefore, there isn’t a single interpretation of the learning experience, but countless interpretations as learners indulge in new experiences, reflect, and attach new meanings to them (Ngussa and Ndiku Makewa 2014). Hay et al. (2010) explored concept mapping as a substitute means of testing. They observed that learners believed that integration of life experience was important to their learning process, and delved into more complex connections in content when concept maps were used rather than traditional assessments. They concluded that working with concept maps provided learners with a better tool than
traditional methods of learning and assessment.

Yelich Biniecki and Conceição (2015) made use of concept maps to synthesize knowledge from theoretical frameworks, research and analysis in a training course consisting of online group discussions, collaborative teamwork, concept mapping and experiential learning. Study results indicated that learners who used concept maps performed significantly better at prioritizing information, integrating concepts and constructing new knowledge. The researchers concluded that the use of concept maps was particularly useful when learners were actively engaged at infusing new theoretical concepts because they could critically analyse multifaced concepts, and connecting them with their existing repertoire of knowledge. The insights that learners gained during critical analysis using concept maps proved invaluable at weaving new meaningful connections and at forging knowledge constructively. Lemos and Conceição (2012) argue that concept mapping is an excellent strategy to help learners forge new linkages and connect content to their life experiences.

Transformative Learning Theory aims at changing a learner’s preconceived ideas and his/her assumptions of worldview. Hence, learning focuses on the process of constructing new ideas and the role of the facilitator is to accompany the learners into a journey of critical reflection, with the ultimate goal being an overall learner’s development of thought and understanding (Mezirow 1991; Boleyn 2014).

Furthermore, Kandiko Howson et al. (2013) emphasised that:

Having a series of concept maps can facilitate dialogue between students’ personal understanding of public knowledge and the understanding of others, such as instructors and peers. Reflection on maps created over time can allow both student and instructor to engage in dialogue about the student’s development of thought and understanding. (82–83)

Therefore, concept mapping is envisaged in literature as an ideal tool to transform learning at individual and team levels, including between learner and facilitator, the entire class
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and facilitator, between and among teams in any learning environment.

This is more evidenced in Social Learning Theory which places particular emphasis on the importance of social interaction as a vehicle for learning with others (Bandura 1977). Therefore concept maps can be employed as a group strategy to enhance group cooperation, critically analyse problems and offer potential solutions for change through observation and modelling (Bandura 1977). Reflection and collaborative learning with concept maps can be pivotal at fostering a tandem of collaboration which catalyses both facilitator and learner to engage themselves in activities within a relevant social context. Through social modelling the learner refines his/her attitudes towards learning new concepts and uses feedback to keep him/herself motivated at task (Tuan and Thuan 2011).

2. Reflective Journals as a Research Tool

Dewey (1933) defines reflective inquiry as the “active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in light of the grounds that support it and further conclusions to which it tends” (9). Hence, the process of reflection is a deliberate act which focuses on an idea and considers its implications in the future. Deliberate reflection reduces the chance of erroneous decision-making and allows a person to make informed choices based on the examination and re-examination of information collected from many experiences, thus resulting in purposeful thinking.

Reflective writing therefore aims at creating cognitive awareness into earlier experiences and actions and strives to instil confidence in the learner. It encourages autonomy by placing the student’s responsibility at the very centre of his/her learning journey (Chi 2010).

Knapp (2012) believes that journal writing assists students to reflect on what she calls ‘apprenticeships of experience’ (21) that enabled facilitators of learning to own more responsibility of their student’s learning. Reflective journals have been used by researchers to enhance learning theories such as
constructivism (Knapp 2012), by preservice teachers to examine past experiences for meaning (Moore 2003), and by educators linking theory to practice (Beeth and Adadan 2006). Knapp (2012) found that journals may enable facilitators of learning to be more supportive of preservice teachers’ experiences, while Beeth and Adadan (2006), Davis (2003) and Moore (2003) suggested that teacher educators may need to create more reflective experiences for teachers and assist them to reflect more purposefully, and find ways to effectively link theory and practice. Writing journals provides a log of experiences and written evidence of personal progress (Spalding and Wilson 2002), establishes connections among several episodes of the writers’ lives (Moon 2006), and enables writers to effectively link theory to practice (O’Connell and Dyment 2013). This, in turn, allows the writer to explore his/her current understanding of experiences and sets them in the context of his own beliefs, values, and existing knowledge (Colley et al. 2012).

Cornish and Cantor (2008) argue that through reflective journaling, participants become able to track their own learning and growth over a timeframe, improve their self-assessment skills, and take control over their own learning, through deconstructing and reconstructing their values and beliefs. On similar grounds, Mills (2008) noted that reflective journals offered writers the opportunity to become more involved in the learning process. Besides, reflective journals allowed participants to consider how new experiences and knowledge can be applied to future circumstances (Ghaye 2011; Minott 2008), thus supporting professional development, decision making and improved teaching performance (Smith 2011). Hence, reflective journals provide the fabric upon which the participant tests his/her newly acquired knowledge, skills and dispositions in different contexts (Connor–Greene 2000), thus encouraging personal growth, self-assessment and learning (Mair 2012). Reflection allows the adult learner to become aware of the integration of new knowledge sources. Reflective journaling strengthens the relationship between educators and facilitators, and thus enriches the learning processes (O’Connell and Dyment 2013). Reflection allows the adult learner to become aware of the integration of new knowledge sources.
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Through concept mapping and self-reflective journaling, adult learners can prioritize ideas, critically analyse concepts, and make decisions about what is meaningful to them. Learning how to think and evaluating content helps educators to construct new knowledge at a deeper level. Facilitators using concept maps can then facilitate and negotiate meanings with learners themselves.

Methodology

The researcher’s scope in this study was to gain insight into how educators’ concepts of ME changed from before to after an intensive course in ME. The focus centred on the participants’ initial conceptualization of ME to their evolved conceptualization at the end of the course. The researcher divided the learning outcomes of the course into four major categories, namely Knowledge, Understanding, Competences and Critical Abilities, and sought to measure the effect of an intensive course by delving deeply into each of these learning outcomes.

1. Participants

The participants of the research were a total of 29 educators enrolled in a voluntary multicultural education course of 20 hours. The cohort was composed of educators of Maltese Nationality (21), complemented with participants from Germany (1), Lebanon (1), Albania (2), Greece (2), Morocco (1) and Libya (1). Like in most courses within the educational sector, the predominant number of participants were female (nf =26). Men amounted only to 10% of the total cohort (nm=3). The lecturer of the course, who is also the author of this paper is Maltese.

2. Course content

The course consisted of a once a week interactive lecture of 2.5 hours for a span of 8 weeks. This amounted to a total of 20 hours. The course was intended to offer participants the following learning outcomes:
Table 1: Learning Outcomes

Knowledge:
At the end of the sessions the participants would be able to:

a) apply basic knowledge about cultures into professional development sessions,
b) apply theoretical knowledge into practical understanding of their surrounding cultures,
c) create bridges between cultures that facilitate instructional processes,
d) plan for culturally inclusive schools.

Understanding:
The participant would be able to:

a) examine his/her multicultural attitudes and how these impinge on his/her daily decisions,
b) understand why incorporating cultural frameworks is important in the work of a school leader,
c) discuss with colleagues the importance of incorporating cultural aspects in various aspects of their work,
d) understand the impact of different cultural systems on education,
e) interpret cultural symbols,
f) compare cultural systems,
g) apply knowledge of cultural systems to assist colleagues, students and parents dealing with cultural incompatibilities,
h) shift from one cultural frame of reference to another,
i) mediate cultural incompatibilities.

Competences:
At the end of the sessions the participants would be able to:

a) utilize dimensions of cultures as an integral part of their planning,
b) elicit the perspectives held by members of staff on issues related to multicultural schools,
c) clarify the major priorities and associated effective practices employed by members of staff in multicultural schools.

Critical Abilities:
The course participant will be able to:

a) engage in self-reflective analysis about his/her own culture and how it impinges on his/her work as educator,
b) be able to partake in discussions leading to a high level of critical analysis using the models researched during lectures,
c) reflect on their legal, ethical and moral responsibilities to provide the best education students coming from all racial, ethnic and cultural groups present in their educational establishments.
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3. Data Collection

The researcher used methods from both the quantitative and the qualitative paradigm. The quantitative part consisted primarily in measuring the number of responses (entries) on the pre-concept maps and then comparing them with the post-concept ones. The qualitative part consisted in analysing whether there was a significant difference in extent and depth of responses (that is, the ability of the participant to move from simple conceptualizations to more complex ones).

The researcher outlined the mechanics of concept mapping to the participants (see appendix). Course participants were invited to construct concept maps with ME as the central theme. This was done at intervals: before the actual lectures, after 4 lecture periods and also after the last lecture.

Right after pre-concept and post-concept mapping, participants were asked to reflect upon and write a brief paragraph (reflective journal) on the reasons/motivations behind their choices of linked concepts. After completion, participants were asked to a) identify similarities and differences between the pre- and post-concept maps, b) reflect upon why some conceptual changes occurred whilst others did not, c) highlight the most important conceptual change they identified and how this would support them in their teaching and learning interaction with the students.

4. Scoring a Concept Map

Concepts are linked to each other using connectors. The lines connecting two concepts express the interdependence between concepts. In this study, the author adopted a scoring system as illustrated in the diagram below (Diagram 1). Depth of connection between relevant concepts determines the hierarchical level of the map. Hence, an initial link scores a 2 while a second (deeper) link scores a 4. Crosslinks are links between established hierarchies. Since crosslinks demonstrate an even deeper level of understanding, they score a 6 (see diagram 1, below).
Analysis of Results and Discussion

Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to analyse data. Data from concept maps was analysed to determine to what extent post-concept maps differed from pre-concept maps in terms of the number of relevant responses. The researcher also wished to examine whether there were significant differences in responses generated from pre-concept onto post-concept maps ones (e.g.: from simple to more complex patterns of linkages).

Results from the concept mapping are summarised below:

**Table 2: Variations in participants’ responses on pre-concept and post-concept maps**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Outcomes</th>
<th>Pre-Concept Maps</th>
<th>Post-Concept Maps</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of links</td>
<td>Number of deeper links</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competences</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Abilities</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: \(P_{\text{Pre-C}}\) = Points in Pre-concept mapping, \(P_{\text{Post-C}}\) = Points in Post-concept mapping
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The table shows that although the knowledge category scored almost equal points between the pre-concept (P_{Pre-C} \approx 228) and post-concept maps (P_{Post-C} \approx 248), the number of deeper links (N_d) increased from 5 to 15, while the number of crosslinks (N_c) increased from 1 to 8. This demonstrated that course participants widened their knowledge of ME after the course. This is supported by data from reflective journaling. In the early stages of journal entries, a teacher stated “Presently, I don’t feel that I know enough to be a truly effective teacher in a multicultural class... I just feel lost.” This contrasted heavily with another response from a subsequent diary entry... “It feels positive that in Multicultural settings there is an enrichment of the multicultural self and also a sense of shared knowledge with colleagues and students.”

The change in journal responses emphasized the need for knowledge about students’ learning styles. They also expressed the opinion that the program has instilled in them a compelling need to become more knowledgeable about the cultures and communities in which their students live. They believed that this would give them valuable insights into classroom management practices and issues of behaviour and discipline. Garnering such knowledge would equip teachers to create bridges between cultures that facilitate the teaching processes, create a psychologically safe learning environment and plan for culturally inclusive schools.

The majority (55%) of course participants expressed positively their increase in knowledge base. Six particular participants affirmed that lack of knowledge and understanding can lead to developing stereotypes. Two participants stated that one of the perpetuating stereotypes is that culturally different students are of less intellectual functioning. In the post-concept reflective journaling, 11 participants expressed their surprise as to how the study of existing racial attitudes served to deepen their understanding of body language, dress, nutrition, childrearing and religions as expressed in different cultures. Nineteen out of 29 centred their response on the importance of creating safe learning environments for all students under their care, irrespective of cultural origin. They stressed that being able to reach out to all students is of fundamental importance towards effectively leading a
multicultural classroom. Thirteen out of 29 participants (47%) emphasised that teachers need to apply classroom strategies built on the principles of ME. The most striking difference in reflections between pre- and post-concept journaling is the common belief expressed by all participants (100%) that the promotion of multicultural education should extend beyond the walls of the classroom and make its way in policy-making processes where community members, including migrant communities share the overriding values of tolerance, mutual respect and appreciation of cultural differences.

Darling-Hammond et al. (2019) clearly argue that lack of teachers’ knowledge on their students’ multicultural composition invariably results in a diminished classroom performance, due to lower expectations. When analysing differences between initial and final journal entries, it became clear that lack of cultural knowledge from teachers may result in children suffering from ‘isolation’, ‘invisibility’ and ‘inappropriate labelling’, hence the necessity of creating an environment responsive to all students and their needs. This ensures that students strive to be as successful as possible in their educational journey.

The understanding category also showed a decrease in the number of links (from 119 in the pre-concept map to 68 in the post-concept map). However, it was noted that participants demonstrated a deeper level of understanding by exhibiting an increase in both the deeper links and the crosslinks. In fact, the majority of participants (72%) believed that the program equipped them with the skills needed to develop a deeper understanding of cultural norms other than their own. This heightened level of understanding is crucial towards bridging the cultural differences between home and school culture which often influence negatively the teaching and learning in classrooms. Participants (38%) also believed that this sensitivity needs to be cultivated during teacher education training. Teacher education programmes should therefore focus on influencing teachers’ perspective and understanding of cultural diversity in classrooms and beyond (Alismail 2016). This will eventually result in schools succeeding in thoroughly preparing students for a globalised society.
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Excerpts from a reflective journal show increased cognizance that ME is not just adding specific aspects to various school subjects but about “looking through different lenses” (Vassallo 2016, p. 25). This transforms ME into a new approach, an altered attitude, varied teaching material, and the reality of diverse learning styles as well as implicit assumptions. This paves the way for more inclusive syllabi that have a sensitising effect on students’ development in their approach towards cultural diversity. Different communication styles reflect philosophies and worldviews that are the foundations of cultures. New understandings give us a broader view of our world and the opportunity to see a mirror image of ourselves.

The competences category exhibited the most dramatic of changes in the learning outcomes of participants. While the total number of points tallied to 174 (pre-concept mapping), the total score at post-concept map level tallied to 432, an increase of 258 points. A closer look reveals an increase in the number of links (57), an increase in the number of deeper links (21) and an increase in the number of crosslinks (10). Reflective journal entries widely complimented the large number of deeper links and crosslinks exhibited in post-concept maps. Participant responses ranged from ‘understanding students’ interests’, ‘clarifying expectations to students’, ‘planning teaching for individual, small groups and whole class’, ‘adapt to children’s learning style’ and ‘specifically target the cultural composition present in the classroom’. Responses show that cultural competence is a dynamic task involving reaching out towards students of different cultures, ongoing self-assessment and a heightened sensitivity that allows us to understand the student outside one’s own cultural context. Teachers’ multicultural competence is crucial towards supporting and creating an optimal learning environment for children.

The critical abilities category also showed a marked increase in links (11), deeper links (12) and crosslinks (11). Similar to results from pre- and post-concept mapping, it transpired that competency featured heavily in the reflective analysis of course participants. A number of strong self-reflections emerged during analysis of reflective journals. The importance attached to competency in understanding one’s own biases and cultural
orientations was mentioned a total of 15 times. Participants stated that misconceptions acted as psychological obstacles to the implementation of high-quality and effective teaching. On parallel grounds, concept maps took different points of reference after taking the course, with participants reporting that ME has to start with a critical self-examination of our beliefs and biases.

Moreover, a deeper look at excerpts extracted from reflective journals reveal a correlation between an increase in critical thinking abilities and anti-immigrant attitudes among participants, that is, the higher the level of critical abilities, the lower the levels of anti-immigrant attitudes. Reflective journaling gave further scope for transformation and change, inducing the participant to be an agent of change himself/herself. In an excerpt from a reflective journal, a teacher wrote: “Being able to incorporate all the differences present in my class is a mammoth task. I am only responsible for content and assessment, not in ensuring equity and justice.” However, after the sessions had finished the same teacher felt compelled to retrace his/her steps and stated,

I was sceptical at first but I decided to experiment a bit by integrating content [Banks 1995] into my usual lessons. Soon, I realized it provided me with an opportunity to test my students in higher learning skills, such as inquiry and problem-solving.

In particular:

I noticed that students themselves started to use the ethnic capital present in the classroom to test mathematical concepts, for example they were able to draw bar graphs representing their ethnic backgrounds (e.g.: population) with relative ease. I noticed that whilst working on mathematical distributions, students were enticed to exchange information about their cultures, critically analysing important historical events and achievements.

With reference to competence in understanding one’s own biases and cultural orientations, one must point out that
teacher bias and misconceptions can act as serious obstacles to the implementation of high-quality and effective teaching (Gallavan 2000).

During reflective journaling, 13 course participants stated that one could not assume that because there are laws which promote justice and democracy, then justice and democracy exist. They insisted that it is the primary duty of SMT members to delve into social inequalities and critically examine what is meant by democracy and how to achieve it. For such a change to happen, teachers must stop working towards “cultural blindness” (Epure 2011) and begin teaching the value of “multiple identities and multiple perspectives” (Vassallo 2014:13). In their post-reflective journaling, 14 participants emphasized that critical multiculturalism ‘shakes’ (participant entry) the very essence of our educational system because it poses questions, from both critical and social justice viewpoints. Seven course participants strongly believed that engaging in a deliberate process of knowledge construction effectively decimates various forms of inequities and injustices embedded in the educational system. This would transform itself into a driving force which aims at empowering stakeholders to engage in culturally responsive and responsible practices.

Findings from quantitative analysis corroborate the qualitative method employed in the study. In both cases, the analysis shifted from describing ME simply as the challenge of teaching linguistic and culturally diverse students, to a critical reflection of instructional strategies employing not only the principles of ME but the enactment of equality and social justice in the classrooms, together with a heightened urge to reach out to the outside community — this being the principal aim of the course.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Literature review is inundated with examples of teachers’ continued professional outcomes that used concept mapping to foster critical analysis skills within cognitivist, constructivist, transformative and social learning frameworks. Concept maps have proved to be ideal to track educators’ conceptual development in ME programs. Also, by making connections
between concept mapping, reflective practices and teacher education, we can broaden our horizons and bridge more effectively the theory-practice divide.

Educators can become more effective multicultural practitioners by using concept maps either in conjunction with a course leader or as a self-assessing tool. Both the process of concept mapping and that of reflective journaling can help educators to better understand the needs of the learners they serve. By making connections between results from concept mapping and reflective journaling, multicultural practitioners can further connect theory to practice. This paper demonstrates that concept maps are an ideal platform to integrate with processes involving critical and reflective analysis.

Educators must first understand their own personal and cultural values and identity. By inculcating a willingness to transform oneself, reflecting and working wholeheartedly, educators should be able to change their strategies to include all students irrespective of their cultural diversity. By harnessing effectively the tools garnered during ME courses, educators can create new effective solutions and challenge their students to think past their beliefs, engage in multicultural dialogue, and present alternative viewpoints as to how they want to see their future workplaces.

Constructing, implementing and reviewing courses in ME based on sound research practices is an effective way to address social inequalities shaped by differences in race, ethnicity, and social class. Teachers need to understand multiculturalism in order to provide an education based on justice and equity. The research presented here suggests that many teachers feel the need for more training in ME because of the multiplicity of cultures in their classrooms and the genuine desire to reach their needs more effectively. However, many seem unsure as to how to implement the principles of multicultural education effectively. Teacher-training programs should reflect upon ways to integrate ME into existing curricular frameworks whilst providing coursework and training opportunities to assist teachers applying constructive methodologies, that is, connecting theory to practice and continuing to raise
questions that need to be addressed in future research.

The author strongly advocates for the re-examining of the whole philosophy behind teacher-training programs. Merely mentioning ‘respect’ and ‘equality’ every now and then in pedagogy courses does not do any real justice. Graduating as a teacher implies becoming a reflective and empathetic educational practitioner who challenges the status quo and is truly sensitive to the real needs of students. The basis of effective teaching in multicultural classrooms is the synergy erupting from a strong relationship between teacher and student based on mutual trust, sensitivity and understanding – keeping the interest of the student at the very centre of practice. Such a synergy, however, needs to be complemented by multicultural training resources such as books, I.T. equipment and others. Besides, there needs to be additional investment in human capital which enhances the linguistic and cultural proficiency skills of all stakeholders. For all this to happen, a direct injection of finance is needed.

A potential limitation in the study was that the researcher himself is also a trainer in the area of multicultural and diversity education and this might have presented potential biases to the study. The sample is small and was generated through a voluntary call. Hence, the courses involved participants interested in the field of multicultural education. Larger samples might yield a different interpretation of results and implications to teaching and learning processes. However, the rich and detailed concept maps and self-reflections provided the researcher with enough insight to chart future directions in both research and training development.

Appendix

Instructions on the use of pre-concept maps and post-concept maps on a Multicultural Education Course

A concept map is a method which will help us to organize and represent knowledge on what we understand by the term Multicultural Education.

1) Simply begin by writing Multicultural Education in the middle
of the paper and encircle it. This will be our main concept (idea) for this module.

2) Then, branch out to demonstrate what your current ideas about multicultural education are. In other words, “What comes to mind when you hear the word multicultural education?” Link/categorize concepts and ideas together as you think is appropriate.

3) Write a short paragraph outlining how your drawn links contribute to your existing knowledge, understanding and competences and critical reflections on Multicultural Education. Use examples to illustrate your points.

4) After the course you will be asked to draw another concept map to demonstrate your newly constructed knowledge, heightened understanding, increased competences and deeper critical reflections on Multicultural Education. You will also be asked to write another paragraph to give you the opportunity to illustrate your newly developed concepts, with examples.

Thank you.

Brian Vassallo
Course Tutor
Chapter 3: Working in International and Multicultural Schools

Post-Concept Map Example

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How can Intercultural Diversity be understood? The Lecturers' Response

Dr Damian Spiteri  
Dr Anita Seguna
Abstract

Education set-ups across different age cohorts and countries often pride themselves on having students from various nations. The objective of this paper is to understand how, within a Maltese context, lecturers at sixth form level understand and consider intercultural diversity when implementing the curriculum. It also studies how lecturers’ personal experiences with race and culture inform their thinking on a meta-reflective level. Previous research has shown the importance of the use of reflection in teacher education (Davis 2006) and the use of portfolios for learning and assessment (Chetcuti et al. 2006) but little research has been carried out on teachers’ perspectives of teaching intercultural classes at a sixth form level. The study aims to fill in this lacuna in the literature by exploring what lecturers believe influences their ideas and practices of intercultural education in the classes they teach. There are clear implications of this study for policy, particularly showing that good will and having the best of intentions need to be augmented by a curriculum that is flexible enough to accommodate for students from different cultural groups if student learning is to be optimised across the board.

Keywords:
teaching pedagogy; race/culture; power and influence; student-centred or curriculum-centred teaching; inter/multiculturalism.
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Introduction

The mobility of both people and capital, global interconnectedness, edu-business, comparisons made by international organisations, technological and 21st century innovations and other similar pressures (Deppe et al. 2018) are impinging upon education worldwide to take account of what is required for learners to cope in a constantly changing multicultural and global reality (Fielding and Vidovich 2016; Yemini et al. 2014; Seguna 2019). Therefore, exploring lecturers’ appreciation of intercultural diversity has become a necessity. It is unlikely that any country exists whose young people do not expect to have contact with people from different countries at some stage of their lives. Waldow (2018) believes that any school’s programme which does not contain ‘some element of ‘internationality’ nowadays would arguably encounter questions about its value and legitimacy, at least in many Western democracies” (250). These authors’ claims imply that the provision of educational programmes that promote understanding and intercultural sensitivity are called for across the educational trajectory: schools, Sixth Forms\(^7\), and institutions of further and higher education. It is in these settings that children and young people are most likely to come across people from cultural and ethnic backgrounds that are different to their own.

Going back in time, as Hobsbawm (2005) claims, the world in the 1780s was "at once much smaller and much larger than ours" (7). Inhabitants were knowledgeable of the geographic area they lived in, and most people "lived and died in the country, and often in the parish, of their birth. As late as 1861 more than 9 out of 10 in 70 of the 90 French departments lived in the department of their birth" (Hobsbawm 2005: 10). Countries were effectively more isolated from each other, there was less ease of access to travel from place to place, and thereby less possibility for people from different parts of the world to interact with one another. Fairly recent political events, such as the fall of the Iron Curtain, and ongoing happenings, such as the expansion of the European Union (EU), decreased costs of air-fares as a result of improved technology, and the proliferation of the use of the internet, has meant that young people are likely to encounter far more peers from different cultures.

\(^7\) In Malta, a Sixth Form is an educational institution which educates students to achieve their Intermediate and Advanced examinations which may lead them to university.
cultural backgrounds than they would have at the times that Hobsbawm is referring to.

Many of today’s classrooms and lecture-rooms provide a learning environment to students of different faiths, cultural outlooks, and customs and practices. This implies that lecturers need to be adequately responsive to multiple perspectives if they are to engage with students and deliver lessons that students find relevant, interesting, up-to-date and informative. Spiteri (2020) points out nonetheless that “student satisfaction is quite complex to gauge. This is because it engages students in subjectively evaluating their wellbeing and this can change fairly easily” (53). For this reason, it is not only foreign students but also local students who may have to adapt to changes in society. Within the Maltese context, the recent institution of same-sex marriage and adoption rights and the legal facility for married couples to divorce are likely to have been almost unthinkable a decade ago. These changes carry the implication that teachers need to also remain abreast of the evolving social and cultural context they and their students are living in.

Migration in Malta is not a new concept. Malta’s heterogeneous population, which was once believed to be homogeneous (Frendo 2005), is a vivid example of internationalisation and can be traced back to the Knights of St John, an international community. Outbound and inbound migration have always been evident. Apart from people who come to Malta to find work, including EU nationals who are exercising their right to freedom of movement, Malta has also received migrants, mainly from sub-Saharan Africa, who have asked the Maltese government to grant them asylum or offer them some form of national or international protection. “The Maltese governments have also created initiatives to attract international people to invest in Malta. The Malta Individual Investor Programme, the Malta Retirement Programme, the Malta Global Residence Programme, as well as work permits for foreigners, are all measures which are in place to attract migrants” (Seguna 2019: 135).
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Research Question

This study answers the question “How do lecturers at a Sixth Form in Malta adapt their lessons to be responsive to the different cultural backgrounds of their students?” The question thereby explores the influences of intercultural diversity on lecturers and of the multicultural factors that lecturers see as influencing the pedagogy they adopt. By promoting an understanding of classroom dynamics, the study provides information that could be used to bring about potential changes in educational programmes in Malta.

Literature Review

Intercultural diversity in educational settings needs to be understood with the context of policies of inclusion or exclusion since they can impact on how people engage with social difference (Letki 2008). Speaking in a general way, Atkinson (1998) points out that “people are excluded not just because they are currently without a job or income, but because they have little prospects for the future” (14). Atkinson highlights that when people are viewed as ‘different’, they are liable to be excluded. Exclusion comes about particularly when people are classified as ‘the other’ and thereby not as ‘one of us.’ Even a superficial overview of the literature would show that within schools, and equally as emphatically within Sixth Form contexts, educators play an essential role in creating a school climate which is welcoming, in which students feel safe, and in which they do not feel that they are strangers or that they are being turned away or rejected. Intercultural education promotes safety since central to it is “naming and actively challenging racism and other forms of injustice, not simply recognising and celebrating differences and reducing prejudice” (Berlak and Moyenda 2001: 92). Sharma and Portelli (2014) point out that, when prejudices prevail at schools, deficit thinking results. The authors explain that when deficit thinking is adopted,

differences from the ‘norm’ are immediately seen as being deprived, negative, and disadvantaged. It never questions the legitimacy of what is deemed to be normal nor does it consider that differences may actually go beyond expected norms. It discourages teachers and
administrators from recognizing the positive values of certain abilities, dispositions, and actions. (255)

This clearly shows that in order to promote social equity at Sixth Form, and to create a truly inclusive atmosphere, students’ individuality needs to be respected. This is because even though traditional assimilationist theories are based on an assumption that young people prefer inclusion to exclusion (Raaum et al. 2009), there are times when children and young people may opt out of wanting to know something, at any point throughout their years at school, and thereby either not make a whole-hearted effort to join in during lessons or not participate at all (Spiteri 2008).

An important aspect of intercultural education is offering viable alternatives to certain lessons or perhaps to certain practices that some students may find objectionable. Intercultural diversity calls for personalised teaching which impedes a ‘blame the victim’ or ‘deficit’ approach where some students are seen to lack the skills in areas where other students are competent (van Dijk 1992; Portelli 1996). As Sultana (1997) explains, teachers occupy political roles since “their actions and non-actions will work in the interests – or against the interests – of the young people they are responsible for” (410). To further compound matters, there are “multiple and conflicting interpretations, meanings and implications” (Goldberg 1994: 7) of what constitutes effective multicultural education, leading to an anomalous situation characterised by “popular but regressive practices wrongly framed as multicultural education” (Gorksi 2006: 164).

The way cultural attributes are perceived are social constructions. Even though there are many definitions of culture, the concept of culture has been presented as inclusive of language, religious beliefs, collective attitudes, and habits. The way in which these aspects are holistically perceived is also subjectively influenced. For social constructionists, the meaning is co-constructed by people in social interaction with one another. This meaning is embedded in socio-cultural processes that take place in a specific period or space, and which lead to practices which were once seen as normal to die out. One such example is the wearing of the għonnella by
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Maltese women, a head-dress that was only worn in Malta and Gozo until the 1970s, and which then fell into disuse. Historically, many different cultures have come about since differences between groups of people became more pronounced. Sometimes, they have led to the creation of hybrid cultures that may bear some semblance to other cultures and yet have distinctive characteristics of their own (Bhabha 1994). Cultures, however, are extremely fluid, hard to pin down, and many of the defining characteristics are like a slippery eel: as soon as one tries to define an aspect of the culture, a myriad of exceptions to that aspect are likely to be found. Within a classroom setting, it is important for teachers to not only understand certain cultural nuances, but also see them in the light of students’ volition to adapt in order to feel part of the school. It is possible that some students may feel inhibited since everything seems ‘new,’ whereas others may develop an extra drive to succeed since, being in a different country, they expect things to be more difficult (Lauglo 2000). It is also possible that students who initially felt inhibited develop the self-confidence and resilience in order to succeed in school (Cefai and Spiteri 2017), but often doing so involves the support of teachers, peers, and a whole-school approach of holistic acceptance.

Devine (2011) explains that intercultural education needs to be equated to a philosophy that influences the way schools operate, rather than something which individual teachers may casually insert into their lessons. It is only in this way that students would be enabled to acquire a deeper knowledge of culture and understand how they can use this knowledge to relate in a more meaningful way with their peers, irrespective of the cultural, racial, or ethnic similarities and differences that they may have. Likewise, Devine does not look upon the organisation of intercultural days positively, believing that this could lead to negative stereotyping. Bryan (2009) believes that intercultural days “also have the effect of entrenching the boundaries between nationals and ‘non-national’ or ‘international students’” (306). Rather, Chan (2016) believes that professional growth, critical thinking, reflection and renewal must be integrated into the approaches that schools adopt in order to foster harmony among students. Complementary to Chan’s thinking, Spiteri (2013) suggests that intercultural education involves enabling students to adopt what Bennett
(1986, 1993) calls an ‘ethno-relative outlook.’ Consequently, students need to understand that different cultures can co-exist without losing touch with one’s own or only taking on aspects from international students. Kramsch (1993) further suggests that international students need to be enabled to position themselves in an independent ‘third place’ from where they can recognise and reflect on their home culture and their target culture, as in this way they can obtain critical reflective knowledge about how they can adjust more effectively to their ‘new’ social context. In practice, this may be, for example, designing learning experiences where students can be more exposed to different cultural values in written texts or referring to the experiences of renowned people from other cultural backgrounds in order to make the lesson more engaging.

Research Methodology

The study uses a case-study approach and is focused on an independent Sixth Form in Malta. Seven lecturers were interviewed using an unstructured interview schedule and this small number of participants allowed the authors to have direct interactions with and feedback from the participants (Flyvbjerg 2016). Flyvbjerg explains that “context-dependent knowledge and experience are at the very heart of expert activity. Such knowledge and expertise also lie at the center of the case study as a research and teaching method; or to put it more generally, still: as a method of learning” (5). The purpose of this qualitative research was to explore the perspective of the participants in this study, thus allowing their voices to be heard and as Flyvbjerg says – to thereby ‘learn’ from them. This was in an effort to understand the way in which intercultural diversity is perceived and approached by lecturers at Sixth Form level, and how their personal experiences with race and culture inform their thinking on a meta-reflective level. A qualitative approach was selected because it allowed the researchers to gain an understanding of lecturers’ perspectives of the approaches they adopted when teaching intercultural classes. Both authors interviewed the participants together and inquired about how lecturers took an active role in encouraging cross-cultural communication in their classrooms and how they manifested intercultural sensitivity in their
teaching/lecturing. The participants were a purposeful sample and were selected in virtue of their teaching classes with both home students and international learners. It was assumed that the sample would help the researchers to build data-rich cases that would enable them to come with insightful findings related to their research goals. Each interview was audiotaped with the participant’s permission, and then transcribed by one of the interviewers. The other interviewer checked the transcripts for accuracy to ensure the study’s validity.

A constructivist design was used in this research in order to allow the participants to “examine how their own understandings, skills, values, and present knowledge both frame and constrain their actions” (Creswell 2002: 610). Since the study was focused on how lecturers adapted their lectures in order to be responsive to the needs of students in intercultural classes, all interviews were purposely carried out at the Sixth Form as it was believed that in this way, the participants would find it easier to reflect on the approaches to lecturing that they employed. The constructivist paradigm holds that people develop subjective meanings of their experiences, meanings that are directed toward certain objects or things, and thereby the more significant they are to them, the more likely they are to be seen as meaningful (Creswell 2012, 2013).

Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the school’s administration and the Sixth Form lecturers all volunteered to be interviewed. The participants were sent an email wherein they were invited to participate in the study and were informed about its goals. They were notified that their participation was voluntary and that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time if they so desired, without the need to offer a reason for so doing. No identifying information was recorded during the sessions to ensure that confidentiality was safeguarded. Additionally, all research-related documents were stored on a password-protected computer, which only the researchers had shared access to. The participants were assigned codes in order to ensure their anonymity.

The study was constructed around an assumption that there could be multiple perspectives about the way lecturing to intercultural classes is approached. The researchers
attempted to explore the lecturers’ subjective experiences and attitudes in order to empirically explore their perceptions and lived experiences of their students when lecturing.

Findings

All interviewees were asked what they understood by the term *intercultural diversity*. Similar responses were given, such as catering for "students from diverse countries ... that somehow they bring their traditions, their religions, their language, their language barriers, their problems, the way they've been doing things, their education systems which sometimes are totally different from ours" (Interviewee (INT)1). Other definitions of intercultural diversity were: “understanding the differences, understanding that there are differences in culture, acknowledging them and making allowances for different attitudes, and beliefs, behaviour” (INT4) as well as “tolerating, being open to, and being accessible to different cultures or nationalities” (INT3).

All the lecturers expressed the view that the world within their lecture rooms had changed over the fairly recent past. They said that they saw a shift from a mainly Maltese environment to a very international one, at times with more international learners than Maltese! They did not experience this as intimidating or overwhelming; but instead as one that helped them to cherish the diverse classes they now lectured to. Having a diverse class allowed them to show the learners that more than one perspective may exist; and that both could be acceptable without experiencing the need to create conflict between them. Intercultural diversity, therefore, denotes differences between the different cultures of different nationalities and that one's standpoint in “subjects like Maltese history, which has been almost exclusively written from a Western view-point” should not be the ‘Maltese’ against the ‘others’ or vice versa (INT6). This finding ties in with Sadker and Zittleman’s (2016) perspective within American classrooms which often focus only on a Western worldview, making certain groups such as African Americans, Hispanics, Asian Americans and Native Americans, or events invisible.

Having a diverse classroom also means that lecturers
and teachers need to understand the struggles which the students bring to the classroom, such as language difficulties or understanding aspects through one’s religious or cultural grid. These aspects need to be recognised, understood, appreciated and taken into consideration so that they are catered for in one’s planning and delivery. One also needs to be aware that different educational systems vary in their approach and strategies used and therefore, when teaching international students, lecturers need to familiarise themselves with the differences. Mathematics uses a universal language. However, according to one interviewee, there is a difference in the way some numbers are written in figures as well as the format used “the Italians generally write in boxes, the Chinese write using columns, there are so many differences in the way people do things” (INT2).

One important finding, which most lecturers associated as a pressure that they experience as lecturers, is the vastness and, at times, the open-ended curriculum which they need to ensure is covered over their two-year programme. This creates undue pressure for them to give students as much information as possible, since failure to do so might have an effect on the students’ examination passes.

The curriculum might also act as a barrier if one only teaches it as facts or knowledge that needs to be passed on to the students. Having syllabi with a Maltese cultural grid, as would be the case with subjects like geography or Maltese history, may create an issue for international students since the content may be inaccessible to them and they might not be knowledgeable of the Maltese territory or terrain, leading them to have difficulty in understanding the content and context. Likewise, when textbooks are used, which in Malta are mainly British, or when Catholic undertones are referred to, students might be incapable of reading between the lines or of understanding or visualising what is being learnt since they are distanced from the realities that the authors of these books take for granted. When teaching subjects such as English Literature the “the countryside is English, the weather is English, the wit is English, the irony is English” (INT 5). These aspects are not easily understood, since they might not be a context the students are familiar with, and therefore the
lecturer needs to be aware of this essential criterion. Often the manner in which ideas that some students may see as alien to them are succinctly introduced to the curriculum. Lippy (2016) explains that curriculum materials might reflect the beliefs and practices of mainline Protestant denominations such as Christian holidays thereby assigning less importance to other religious denominations. It is therefore the teacher who needs to be aware of these differences and ensure that other cultures and denominations are taken into consideration.

Saying this, subjects such as literature, geography, and biology are also universal and global since they touch upon topics which are applicable to all cultures. Literature texts have not been written in a vacuum but in a context and although the authors, such as Shakespeare, might not be contemporary, the texts focus upon universal topics such as jealousy, murder, anger and love, and it is likely this that gives his works their appeal. Similarly, the topics taught in geography are versatile and the lecturer, very naturally, touches upon different countries and cultures when focusing on the different aspects taught. The students’ nationalities could also be considered an asset, in subjects such as geography and history, since the different backgrounds and perspectives may be brought into the lecture and discussed.

Assessment, especially in subjects which are nationally bound, was seen as giving rise to intercultural barriers. Different cultures have different viewpoints and therefore, when assessment and examination questions are being prepared, the interviewees observed that they need to be careful how questions are formulated and to avoid asking questions or situations which are culturally sensitive (INT4). It is thereby important for lecturers to be meta-reflective, or as one of the interviewees put it “self-questioning.”

Although lecturers are not able to change the syllabi, one’s teaching methods can be easily adapted to suit the different cultures within one’s classroom. Having students of different nationalities often calls on lecturers to listen more and work at a slower pace in class to aim to elicit optimum student understanding. This, in turn, also means that lecturers need to draw on student voice and student engagement in their
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lectures. So as to draw on the cultural composition of their students in their classes, one of the interviewees explained that “we should be able to use their varied cultural backgrounds to enhance essay sharing, pooling ideas, trying to see each other’s perspectives” (INT6).

All the lecturers interviewed mentioned the importance of offering support to the international learners, both in their induction and to help their integration. They mentioned that several common activities, such as sports fests, that are open to participation from all the students, are important for students to feel welcomed. They also mentioned that the Sixth Form organises icebreaking and bonding activities, even before the scholastic year commences, and throughout the year participation in exchanges and Euroskola trips are encouraged. They also pointed out that students with a poor level of spoken or written English are offered English as a Foreign Language support for as long as they require it. Since some students are in Malta unaccompanied, they are also offered help with basic daily exigencies, as well as the filling in of forms and applications. They said that students appreciate that the Sixth Form also acts as an intermediary for issues such as VISA applications, accommodation difficulties or communication with host families.

Limitations to the Study

Although ample data was collected through the interviews that were carried out, this study did involve a small number of participants who opted to be involved in the study and to be interviewed. The study was also carried out within an institution which forms part of one of the three sectors in Malta. This means that the teachers’ ideas cannot be generalised to the whole of the population within educational institutions such as the College where the study took place, other Sixth Forms, or to any other similar educational settings.

This study is also time-bound, having been carried out within a chosen timeframe, namely towards the end of the scholastic year. It is therefore possible that had the study been carried out at another period within the scholastic year such as the beginning, the lecturers’ perceptions might have been
different. The authors also utilized semi-structured interviews. Had they been structured differently or had focus groups or other methods of interviewing been adopted, less, more, or different data could have been gathered.

**Recommendations**

This case study has been carried out in a local independent Sixth Form and sheds light on how lecturers understand intercultural diversity and how their personal experiences with race and culture inform their thinking on a meta-reflective level. Both authors of this paper are educators with extensive teaching and lecturing experience in Malta and abroad and have developed a keen interest in the way schools operate. The authors are therefore conscious that while lecturers may aspire to adopt student-centred pedagogies, they may feel constrained to use curriculum-centred pedagogies to ensure that their syllabi are covered and consequently to enable their students to pass their exams. They are also conscious of the various challenges that lecturers face in order to adopt student-centred pedagogies.

The interviewees claim that, as experienced lecturers, they are better able to understand the needs of the different cultures and are more knowledgeable of the syllabus and its requirements in virtue of their many years of teaching. They explained that being a lecturer in an intercultural society also makes it essential for one to read up and be au courant with the latest knowledge and developments within one’s field, as well as be more aware of other educational systems so as to include them or adapt accordingly.

It clearly emerges from this study that when planning and delivering one’s lectures, therefore, it is essential that different perspectives are brought into the classroom. Especially with nationally based curricula, it is essential that examples and sources from different countries are used. This is so that the learning is not just Eurocentric or nation-centric but is as diverse and inclusive as possible, making it accessible to all students.

The study shows that culture is constituted of interconnected
values and behaviours. These are picked up and internalised by children and young people during their socialisation which then manifest in the form of specific behaviours and expectations on society (Becirovic and Brdarevic–Celjo 2018), and thereby call on lecturers to be clear in their communications so that students may become more conscious of how to interact with others in appropriate ways. This study has focused upon how students are provided with opportunities to develop intercultural sensitivity with peers. It recommends that they do away with deficit thinking that is associated with intercultural prejudices. Rather, it calls on lecturers to engage them in actively minimising the development of stereotypes and ethnocentrism (Olson 1982: 25) by bringing out into the open and discussing their cultural differences whenever possible. The study has also brought to the fore the importance of lecturers becoming “sensitive to the changing nature of the ethnic and racial makeup of their students and their students’ parents” (McGee Banks 2016: 280). Rather than adopting a Maltese-centric or Euro-centric outlook, it can be recommended that by being on the lookout for how their students feel and look, and by using ideas and resources from different countries, all students of different nationalities are thereby included. By finding the common denominator between cultures, lecturers are better able to bridge the gaps and reach the students within their classrooms.

This study has shown that by creating an internationalised environment, attitudes and values, such as international understanding, tolerance, acceptance, respect, and cooperation are better transmitted. As ascertained by de Wit et al. (2015), “the earlier children are embedded in an intercultural and international environment, in their private life and at school, the more likely they are to continue to be interculturally and internationally stimulated and active” (285). Providing an intercultural and international outlook, therefore, helps all educational institutions, irrespective of the students’ age, to become adept within the global world of the 21st century. By recognising the importance of tapping into the international, educational institutions such as Sixth Forms, “distinguish themselves from the rest ... [since] distinction can be equated to schools that promote the international, thereby having an international mindset” (Seguna 2019: 357).
References


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Chapter 3: Working in International and Multicultural Schools

Migrant Learners' Unit: Scaffolding a Learning Culture Without Silos

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to give an insight into the work of the Migrant Learners’ Unit (MLU) within the Ministry for Education and Employment (MEDE), an initiative with a commitment that goes beyond academic achievement. This paper will explain in detail the rationale of the Unit, while looking at how it operates at organisational and at education provision levels. Furthermore, it will expound on how the MLU works with various stakeholders to build an understanding of various factors which enable the migrant learner to achieve a socially just educational experience. It will give a brief recount of the events that have influenced this area of education in recent years and specifically illustrate how various policies have influenced the setting up and the work done by the MLU.

Keywords:

internationalisation, multiculturalism, diversity, social inclusion, social wellbeing, equity.
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Introduction

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) reported that in 2018 there were an estimated 164 million migrant workers worldwide, including 50 million children on the move. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR 2018) states that ever since the start of the Syrian civil war in 2011, over 11.8 million Syrians have fled the country. Approximately half of them are children. The effect of global events has affected our islands from time immemorial. In recent years, the political restlessness in the Middle East and North African region coincided with the attractive employment opportunities offered by the Maltese labour market and this has resulted in an increase in persons arriving in Malta. Both global and local happenings have consequently brought with them new challenges, including but not limited to evolving employment parameters, community settlement and service requests.

This increase has also left its imprint on state schools with the latter registering an increase in migrant students. This phenomenon has led to the setting up of the Migrant Learners’ Unit (MLU), an initiative of the Ministry for Education and Employment. The work of this unit, which will be discussed further down, aims to implement efficient international and multicultural practices within the school community.

Internationalisation and Multicultural Educational Practices

A quality educational experience caters for the needs of all students and works towards ensuring that all learners reach their full potential. While over the last decade schools in Malta have experienced an increase in learners registering for schooling, educational institutions have also noted how the array of nationalities of these new registrants has changed and is becoming more and more diverse. Nationality is one aspect which can be identified from statistics. The richness of experiences which each learner brings, together with the way the newcomer learner is progressing both on a personal basis and as part of a community in the Maltese school, reveals a much more fluid and multi-levelled actuality. Such a dynamic reality can sometimes feel overwhelming for schools as they
try to understand their school community and its needs.

Nowadays, schools look at the need to address internationalisation and also employ multicultural and intercultural educational practices. Internationalisation requires educational institutions to give a global perspective to schooling, using a cross-curricular methodology and authentic learning experiences. They are striving to incorporate in their school ethos, and in the enactment of the curriculum knowledge, skills and attitudes that focus on the international context that we live in, so that future generations can be proactive global citizens who value the interconnection between the local and the global.

Students are encountering and acquiring international educational experiences in a variety of ways. The emphasis on foreign language learning, participation in exchange visits abroad and projects focusing on global citizenship are common in our schools and backed by local and international policy and funding mechanisms (Nuffic 2019). Technology has facilitated new pedagogic approaches, making it possible to participate in virtual educational experiences with learners in different countries simultaneously.

At the same time, the student population of most educational institutions is evolving in a way that requires these institutions to adopt multicultural educational practices. Education in a multicultural setting may be considered first and foremost as an opportunity for self-understanding, valuing self and others, and as a process of acquiring multiple perspectives. Further to accepting the multicultural setting is the adoption of an intercultural ethos such as creating an everyday cross-curricular space for exchange between different groups.

Hagenmeier and Mashau (2016) delineate multicultural education as “the way in which tolerance and appreciation of diversity, as a positive force, is imparted to learners who hail from different backgrounds” (103-116). Davidman and Davidman (1997) view multicultural education in a broader way, as working towards the goals of educational equity, empowering the learner and his family while focusing on the development of a culturally pluralistic society based on
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Intercultural understanding. This goes way beyond tolerance, as it creates a deep understanding and respect for all cultures, through the mutual exchange of ideas and cultural norms and the development of relationships in which each individual is valued.

In this respect we are speaking about education that is teaching to a diverse learner cohort. It is teaching for a diverse learner cohort which may be different from the existing cohorts of learners already in educational institutions. In this way education is engaging with differences and diversity and at the same time empowering members for diversity and equity. Thus, education is teaching about living together in a multicultural society. Having different ethnicities within schools may be viewed as an opportunity where school activities can become a fusion of understanding, involvement and learning which prepares the learners to approach life with skills, attitudes and knowledge to function in and across cultures and change (Liu 2017). What both internationalisation and multiculturalism have in common is the possibility of acquisition of intercultural competence.

One must note that the field of education in multicultural settings is complex. This field oscillates in such realities as transnationalism, hybrid identities and ever-changing cultures. It brings together various stakeholders who may also be interpreting the area in various ways. In its continual process of self-evaluation for the provision of quality education, the school itself may feel the need to engage in dialogues, which sometimes may be difficult, with different members of the school community, and to find ways of reaching agreement or socially just compromises.

Policy Background to the Setting Up of the Migrant Learners’ Unit

Successful integration of immigrant populations is essential for ensuring social cohesion in immigrant receiving nations. Immigrants bring a wealth of human capital which, if nurtured carefully, can positively contribute to economic well-being and cultural diversity of the host country. Yet, tapping into this potential
remains a major challenge for policy makers. (OECD PISA Report 2003: 12)

Various local policy documents refer to notions of internationalisation and multiculturalism. The National Curriculum Framework (NCF 2012) recognises the evolving mandates of today’s society and the need for education to work in this flux “driven by globalisation, ICT development, competition, shift of traditional values and new paradigms” (p. iii). It places emphasis on inclusivity, on respect, on valuing oneself and one’s own culture while empathising with each other.

The Framework for the Education Strategy for Malta 2014–2020’s four pillars propose paths, through which education supports the achievement of learners “through a value-oriented formation including equity, social justice, diversity, and inclusivity” (3). This is further developed and enacted through the policy document My Journey: Achieving through different paths (MEDE 2016) which sustains the theme, ‘Equitable quality education for all’, with education as an entitlement for all with no one–size–fits–all arrangements.

The Respect for All Framework (2014)

acknowledges that schools are placed within different cultural environments but notes that […] Both culture and climate require particular attention in policy development and even more so in its implementation. The climate which is required within schools for these policies to be fruitful, is one that is physically, emotionally, intellectually safe for all school community members. (Respect for All Framework 2014: 10)

This is echoed in the Policy on Inclusive Education in schools: route to Quality Inclusion (2019) which aims at “[nurturing] a collective culture among all educators, practitioners […] to increase a sense of belonging in all colleges and schools” (13). It notes that the learning environment needs to be flexible and responsive to the learner’s needs. It recognises the four pillars of learning: those of learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together, learning to be (UNESCO 1996).
On the global level, the same themes are present in the United Nations’ (2015) Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) targets, amongst them Goal 4 to ensure “[...] inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all...” which Malta has vouched to respect.

The enactment of the NCF and the consultative process prior to the publishing of the Framework for the Education Strategy for Malta 2014–2024 enabled members of committees to come into constant contact with feedback from schools and draft proposals that fed into the Framework. It was a time when the influx of migrants was more concentrated on waves of arrivals of undocumented persons fleeing from conflict (NSO 2015). Some schools were receiving more newcomers than others. Some were inundated.

Further opportunities for review of the migrant education provision were garnered through the Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX) III (2015) report. Based on data which was gathered previous to the setting up of the MLU, the section on policy indicators and the educational system’s responsiveness to the needs of migrant children, the MIPEX III report states that the NCF policy document provided a good foundation for the enactment of integration and intercultural education in schools with the field of diversity as one of the core principles across the curriculum. However, it found that schools received almost no other targeted support to address the specific needs and opportunities that immigrant pupils bring to the classroom, and that schools were missing out on the multilingualism and multiculturalism in their own classrooms, with no support for social integration, immigrant languages and cultures. Access to education was seen as problematic by the report since there were no formal structures which assess and support newcomer students to access the right level and school. The MIPEX III report noted that teachers received no other systematic support after their pre-service training. The report recognised MEDE’s starting initiative in training parents to become bilingual mediators between migrant families and schools as a first step in the field of parental outreach.

The above-mentioned MEDE policy documents act as the backbone of the MLU’s work and such reports as listed above
and others have provided opportunities for the MLU to look into areas of its work as can be seen in the next section.

The Migrant Learners’ Unit

The Migrant Learners’ Unit (MLU) was set up in 2014. Its mission statement states that:

[…] we seek to promote the inclusion of newly arrived learners into the education system. We value each learner’s well-being through the provision of a holistic educational experience while focusing on the acquisition of linguistic and sociocultural competences. The unit recognises the need to value and involve all the stakeholders concerned for this educational experience to succeed. (MLU 2017)

The statement is further condensed into three words: Value, Include, Succeed! One must note the positioning that the statement takes through its remit in ‘seek[ing] to promote the inclusion’ as a function but of a deeper emphasis on equity through the importance given to valuing each learner’s wellbeing. The Unit’s statement is recognizant of the fact that multiple factors and stakeholders shape the experiences of the learner and the need for the stakeholders to work together for the benefit of the learner. The translation of this statement into action is done in various ways and at different levels which we will illustrate throughout this paper.

The second sentence clearly defines the Unit’s outlook of valuing the learner and his wellbeing, and looks at the provision that the unit is mainly tasked with in the educational field – that of supporting the newly arrived to gain the linguistic competences of the languages of schooling – Maltese and English – as well as to build sociocultural competences which will enable the learner to access, function and succeed in mainstream education and Maltese society at large.

The third sentence looks at the field that the learner and the Unit work within. The emphasis on valuing each contributor and striving to involve all the stakeholders also further supports the holistic multilateral outlook that the unit takes towards
the field. Even at this level, the statement revolves around the learner – or better still, the aim of success of the learner in his educational trajectory in Malta.

In the following section we will discuss how this mission statement is currently being implemented.

1. The Functions of the Unit

The MLU can be said to have two main functions: organisational and educational. These functions operate on the administrative, pedagogical and socio-cultural levels and can be seen to move along with the journey of the newcomer learner from arrival and into schooling. This paper will be looking into some aspects of the work of the MLU in the coming sections.

1.1. Registering for Schooling

The first part of the journey involves the registration of the newcomer for compulsory schooling in Malta. The Migrant Learners' Unit is involved in this process with the registration of Third Country Nationals for compulsory state schooling (age 5 –16). The process includes collaboration with the One Stop Shop front offices at MEDE to register the client’s appointment and set a date for a one-to-one registration meeting. During the actual meeting, the application is filled, necessary documentation is verified and signatures of parents/guardians are done in the presence of the officer in charge. The registration office is in contact with other national entities such as Identity Malta Agency (IMA), the Office of the Commissioner for Refugees, the Agency for the Welfare of Asylum Seekers (AWAS), other Ministries, and the state Colleges, in order for that part of the registration processes to be concluded. Once all documentation is submitted and verified, the registration office informs the College in the area where the family resides that a new application has been submitted and passes on the necessary details to the family. The College will then make contact with the family so that the registration process can be finalised and the learner is informed which school he/she will be attending.
Having a dedicated office for the registration process of newcomer Third Country National parents has proved beneficial in that the family has a personal point of referral who does not only process the application but can coordinate with other service providers to answer queries that the family may have. The uncertainty that a newcomer family feels in approaching an institution, sometimes with the fear of language barriers, may be put to rest through the professional approach of the officers as well as the availability of the Community Liaison Team (CLT) who may be called in to assist in interpretation. The role of the CLT will be discussed in section 6 below.

1.2. Identifying Learners for Induction

Once the family has completed the registration for schooling process and the learner has been assigned a school, a representative of the school’s senior leadership team usually meets the family and the learner for an introductory meeting. The school may note that the learner cannot as yet communicate in both English and Maltese and therefore informs the parent of the possibility for the child to follow an induction programme in order to gain competence in basic communicative Maltese and English which are the two languages of schooling in Malta.

In the case of primary school-age learners, the school informs the MLU that a learner would benefit from induction. It is then the MLU’s remit to identify possible induction provision. In most cases, induction is held in the school where the learner is registered, what is referred to as the mother/home school. In some cases, the programme is held in a nearby school which houses induction classes and which then is referred to as a Hub.

1.3. The Induction Programme

The overarching aim of the Induction Programme is for the learner to receive the academic and social support necessary in order to access mainstream education. Primarily, such support aims at building the learner’s proficiency of the languages of schooling, i.e. Maltese and English. It looks at sustaining the learner’s efficacy to access and benefit from
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Educational settings in Malta. It is a time-limited intervention where learners follow the programme which spans one scholastic year but are admitted to the programme at any time of the year. The programme is held at primary, middle and secondary level. The curriculum and frameworks for the programme are designed by curricular experts within the Directorate for Language and Assessment Programmes in collaboration with the MLU. The programmes are further supported with resources supplied by the MLU and other entities. Teacher training on the programmes is given regularly, usually at the start of each scholastic year.

Improving each learner's achievement is one of the aims of education. However, in such life-changing situations such as migration, and with the compounding risk factors that such a situation brings with it, the support for the wellbeing of the learner becomes paramount. It is thus that the MLU works with schools in their effort to build flexible and responsive learning environments in which the learner can feel safe, valued and respected. This is more evident in the MLU hubs which have children who are ethnically and linguistically diverse, coming from different localities and schools and entering schooling at all times of the year.

Staff of the MLU hold regular meetings with schools to discuss induction provision and progress. The MLU meets parents of the newcomer learners starting induction both in formal school-led meetings, as well as in one-to-one meetings where induction processes and progression is discussed and queries clarified.

These meetings serve not only as informative sessions for parents but also as an occasion to build bridges with the main stakeholders – the school and the family. They are an opportunity where each member can discuss, understand and learn more about experiences, insights, positioning, expectations and targets that both the school and the family have with regard to the educational experience of the child. Such meetings which are held throughout the scholastic year may also involve the MLU Community Liaison Staff and the Social Worker, who themselves come from a migrant background and who can build stronger bridges of understanding between
the school and the family for the benefit of the learner. The MLU links with existing services provided by the Colleges as necessary, especially the psycho-social team of professionals as well as the Student Services Directorate, amongst others.

Such collaboration has a healthy and sustainable effect both at organisation level within the school, as well as in school-community relations. School leaders refer to the MLU during the planning, executing and reporting of actions. The MLU shares its experiences and insights and supports school-led actions. This support is given both at college and school level. The MLU seeks to garner further training opportunities for schools in order to support the building of more inclusive practices.

2. Classroom Level

One can say that multicultural education is a multifaceted field with education for diversity at the heart of each action. At classroom level, the dimensions of curriculum, pedagogy and specific support will be discussed.

2.1. Curriculum

The emphasis on the learner’s wellbeing has been aptly mentioned before. However, the induction processes enacted in class focus academically on the learning of both Maltese and English in a communicative style and methodology. A theme-based approach is enacted, which is related to activities and situations that the learner can use to communicate daily. All curricular areas which are taught in induction support the learning of Maltese and English which are the languages of schooling in Malta. Without mastering such languages, the learner would not be able to make it in the mainstream class nor would he be able to participate fully in social interaction with other peers who do not speak his home language. Thus, he would be at risk of social exclusion at a time when he is building new bonds of acquaintances, friendship and trust in the new setting he has found himself in and which he needs to navigate.

As an educator, the teacher in induction groups finds that
the class is usually made up of learners coming from different nationalities. Some might have had prior schooling experiences while for others this is the first time they are in school and so lack the knowledge of norms, set-ups and procedures. The teacher may realise that learners may still be illiterate or else that their mother tongue tradition was more oriented towards oral traditions of learning. In both instances the learners are actually learning to read and write, sometimes in a different script to their home language, in a foreign language, in a new school here in Malta.

Navigating this milieu necessitates a flexible and responsive approach in teaching and learning. It necessitates flexible frameworks which can be adapted to each learner’s needs, ways of thinking and methods of learning in different contexts. It necessitates first and foremost the understanding of where the learner is, as well as good planning and reflection on the side of the teacher. Educators teaching induction classes often find themselves challenged to reflect on their positioning and conceptualization, both on a personal and curricular level. They often become points of reference within the schools they are working in with regard to migrant learners. The MLU strives to support educators to acquire the necessary skills, competences and attitudes and looks at how both schools and families are viewing, working and benefitting from its services.

3. Social Life in School

Various researchers have noted the positive impact education has on the learner’s social and emotional wellbeing (UNDP 2010; AIHW 2012). Social and emotional wellbeing has been defined by the AIHW as “the way a person thinks and feels about......” (8). Although one needs to state that education does not happen only in school and expectations and aspirations affect uptake, living through such dramatic changes as migration may have an impact on learning as well.

The learner may be trying to make sense of an ‘alien’ social life at school due to the lack of cultural understanding (Kang 2010). He may be using any of his prior experiences to understand his surroundings. The learner’s actions during this phase may at times be seen as ambiguous by the school, if these actions are
not understood. Limited resources or time, language barriers and lack of trust may hinder stakeholders in becoming truly conscious of the aspirations and dreams that the learner and the family have and which would be a pity for educators not to learn about and interact with.

The induction classes present an opportunity where the learner finds stability and safety in such times of change. Educators help to build an environment of respect, trust and space where the children can work on their language skills but also communicate their feelings, ideas, worries and goals. They work on manners and empathy as ways of polishing communication skills. Promoting communication through play, and using different languages amongst others help the children feel understood by their peers and their educators. Learning about different perspectives, agreeing to disagree, and acquiring skills on how to resolve misunderstandings helps to build competences and aptitudes in learners which they will carry throughout their lives.

The induction programme helps the learners to maintain a positive self-image and negotiate school life well. Moreover, the induction process benefits from resources found in colleges which further support the learner should there be the need for further referral.

**Training**

The MLU looks at providing its teacher cohort with multiple ongoing opportunities for reflection, training and professional development. Some of the opportunities focus on teaching languages or academic subjects as in the case of Content and Language Integrated Learning approach (CLIL) training. Others focus on building respectful, safe and caring class communities and yet there are other opportunities where teachers can observe the field, reflect, try out and build resources on different aspects of the curriculum enacted.

The multidimensional aspect of the induction process necessitates that the MLU be in constant contact with classes in the different colleges in order to continually understand, identify needs and activate effective responses to them.
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Such response may involve training for educators. Most of the training that the MLU holds is open not only for school leaders and teachers who are in direct contact with learners in induction, but also to leadership members and educators in mainstream schools. The MLU shares such experiences as it looks at supporting all schools in relation to diversity and inclusion. It is fully aware that the induction is a focused support but it is also a process which enables the migrant learner to transition smoothly into mainstream education, benefit from it and achieve in his educational trajectory in Malta.

Nowadays Maltese state schools are more ethnically rich and it would be a disservice to an individual, class, school and community level not to recognise and work with this potential. Sometimes it is the fear of the ‘unknown’ or lack of understanding which undermines the trust which is needed for interactions to happen.

The Community Liaison Team

The Community Liaison Team (CLT) recruited within the MLU through the EU co-funded LLAPSI+ Project8 works in a multidimensional way. The small team can be said to be “cultural brokers” (Jezewski 1990). Members of the CLT are themselves migrants, speak the languages of the parents they seek to engage with and know the backgrounds, beliefs and norms of newcomers coming from their country of origin well.

The CLT helps the parents/families to access information and opportunities in the education sector. The team helps the unit and the schools in their outreach initiatives and in understanding the families and the community. One may say that their work focuses on building relational trust on different levels:

a. Trust by the Unit and the schools in the parent/family which comes through better understanding;

b. Trust by the family in the Unit/School because of better understanding and knowledge which may result in better access to educational opportunities for the family and so better empowerment of the family to act for the benefit of the child (Ishimaru 2016).

8 The Language Learning and Parental Support for Integration (LLAPSI+) Project is an EU co-funded project under the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund.
The CLT helps the families to understand the norms and notions of roles and responsibilities within the Maltese education system. In engaging with families especially through their home language, they are directly linking to the parent as an adult. Thus, they avoid upsetting family dynamics and roles as in cases when either the child or another member of the family intervenes to translate or mediate (Orellana 2006).

The CLT meets families at registration stage where basic information is given and contacts established. Then the CLT is also invited by schools and colleges for activities such as parents’ evenings, open school days, information sessions led by the school and training courses. The team also works on MLU-led activities which usually emanate from recommendations by newcomer parents, learners or schools.

The Unit also has a Facebook page through which the parents and schools can see the latest activities and events held in the different schools where the induction teachers are present. Through feedback gathered from the page, migrant families have noted that they feel part of what is happening in school. The page gives the opportunity for parents to comment and ask for further information.

A Word about Terminology

During this paper terms such as ‘learner’, ‘families’, and ‘school’ have been used. One must be aware that such terms may present a ‘normalised’ view of individuals and do not unveil the actual complexities within. In what Dyrness (2009) calls the era of good intentions, such terms may also be framing individuals and cohorts in a deficit light and so needing support. Our intention is not this. Although we are aware that we are not neutral, we see the induction process as a way for the learners to gain the required knowledge in order to be able to act. For us, it is an educational opportunity to build understanding of the factors and conditions surrounding the journey the learner will be making in Malta. On the side of the schools, our actions help to bring to the fore understanding for schools to evaluate actions before moving on to “support”. The support given by MLU aims at reducing achievement gaps which may be present due to lack of understanding. It is supporting learners
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at risk of early school leaving since we believe that without a good understanding of the necessary skills and norms, the migrant learner will be disadvantaged. We believe that schools and society will be losing out if migrant learners do not achieve.

Conclusion

Much of the activities termed as multicultural are often thought of as addressing the needs of the migrant community with little or no emphasis on the role of and benefits to the hosting community. Most actions pander to the tune of social integration but in fact may avoid actions which discuss uneasy situations. Building a sense of belonging which comes from looking at how we welcome each other, what efforts are put in to gain understanding of each other, cannot be stressed enough. Without them, we may all be paying lip service to respect and care that is needed in order for each member to feel safe and enable everyone to collaborate and benefit.

Support for diversity in itself looks at individualised approaches and resources as more effective in certain circumstances. Ensuring that we understand the field well and safeguarding the learner not only within the host community but also vis-à-vis his/her family and cultures can be done by ensuring that sound bridging is done between the school and the home. Viewing the teaching and learning of languages and about cultures as important positive aspects especially in today’s globalized world will enable each and every one of us to own the processes. It will enable us to build a dynamic, internationally-minded responsive community in an ever-changing world. On an individual level this can be seen in learners possessing 21st century skills. However, unless the field is seen as relevant by the stakeholders, little effect of true educational and social justice benefit can be harnessed.

In effect, when we are speaking about multicultural education, we are looking at both education that takes into account minorities, as well as education for all. Mutually understanding, inclusive education enables all learners to participate fully and actively. It enables all learners to view themselves positively and develop sound relationships with each other where the ‘my’ becomes the ‘ours’. It should not be afraid to do away with
being ‘politically correct’ if this limits true inclusive actions. The confusion about labelling and single nationality identity can be resolved when one looks at the richness of each individual through multiculturalism that looks for points of interaction, and which values equity rather than equality (McLaren 1994). It is to be seen as a call for social justice through education.

References


Chapter 3: Working in International and Multicultural Schools


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Chapter 3: Working in International and Multicultural Schools

Social and Academic Preferences of Migrant Students in a Secondary School: The View from Within

Ms Antoinette Schembri
Abstract

This paper studies perceptions of migrant students from one particular cohort attending a Maltese state school. The students, whose parents are all migrants, come from different backgrounds and cultures. Informal conversations were held and data gathered was collated with participant observation. The results show that when migrant students are small in number, irrespective of whether they had been born in Malta or abroad, they did not find difficulties to integrate with their peers. Such integration depended also on the work carried out by the teachers and learning support educators whose work is indispensable to make them feel academically integrated. Sports is a good medium to socially integrate these students, irrespective of gender. National policies are important but success finally lies in the individual approach taken by the school.

Keywords:

migrant students, secondary schools, integration, sports
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Introduction

1. Who are the Students from Migrant Backgrounds?

Migration is a phenomenon found within the EU, with some countries having more migrants than others. The Maltese Islands are not an exception. Immigration began soon after Malta joined the EU in 2004 and has continued unabated. Whilst for many years in the twentieth century, Malta was a country which sent out emigrants, the tide has now turned. Malta is now a country attracting immigrants from all over the world. Thus, in Malta, one finds migrant workers who are either EU citizens or non–EU citizens. These move to Malta for employment purposes, to escape hardship, conflict and persecution and also to seek a better life (Farrugia 2007). In the last two decades, Malta has seen an increase of ‘irregular immigrants’, illegal and asylum seekers from sub-Saharan Africa, Syria and other places in the Middle East. In fact, in 2018, there was a large leap in the arrivals of people coming to Maltese shores by boat, following unrest in Libya and in other parts of sub-Saharan Africa. Grech (2019) cites figures compiled by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, which show that migrants arriving in Malta by boat reached 1,455 in 2018. This is a high number when compared to 23 in 2017. However, in his article, Grech explains that not all these people came by boat as there were some who flew into Malta from faraway countries, like Bangladesh. Some of these migrants come on their own. Some come with their children and some have children while in Malta. Others bring over their family after having settled in Malta. For this reason, there is also a wide range of children who fall under the category of migrants. These can be defined as those who have recently arrived in a country, and thus can be considered as first-generation migrants. If they are born while their parents are in Malta, they are normally considered as second-generation migrants. Both types of migrants were taken into consideration in this study. However, this study did not analyse students where only one parent is a migrant. Then, there is the category of returning migrant children and young people. Like their parents, migrant children can be both from within and also from outside the EU. The legal status of such migrants also varies. They can be
citizens, residents, asylum seekers and also refugees (Eurydice Brief 2019: 6).

**Background to the Study**

**1. Education in Malta**

As education in Malta is compulsory, irrespective of which of the above categories children of migrants fall under, their parents are bound by law to send them to school and the government is bound to offer them an education. Malta has three types of schools: state, church and independent. Unless particularly well-off, and thus able to enrol in an independent school, migrant students are enrolled in one of the state colleges found within the main island, Malta, and a college in the smaller island of Gozo. Otherwise, they can opt for a Church school education.

Maltese schools are grouped into ten colleges, with the cohort being from the surrounding catchment areas. The students, both boys and girls, move seamlessly together from kindergarten until the end of their compulsory education in year 11.

The author undertook this study in a government secondary school, which has a population of nearly 500 students. Students come to this secondary school after spending year 7 and year 8 in the middle school, which is situated in a neighbouring village. The five migrant students involved in this study were all Year 9 and were chosen because of the author’s direct contact with this cohort of students. These five students were the total number of migrant students in this year group. Three of these students were newcomers to Malta while two out of these five children had attended middle school, that is, Year 7 and Year 8, with their peers.

**2. The Research Question**

In this study, the author sought to undertake a qualitative analysis to see how these students perceive their education, thus giving them a voice. This is in line with the Eurydice Brief 2019, wherein it is explicitly stated that educators should focus
on developing migrant students’ language skills and promoting their learning in general. The author hopes that this study helps educators to be in a better position to promote the migrants’ personal, social and emotional development. To achieve this, the author started by analysing whether these students feel integrated and supported at school, and what can be done to aid them more. This is in view of the fact that in most European education systems, migrant students are falling behind native-born students (Eurydice Report, 2019). Thus, this paper sought to answer the following research question: How do migrant students perceive education and the school support given to them?

Methodology

Will Gibson (2013) recommends that after one has formulated the research question, it is important to ‘reflect on the various types of data that each available method may produce...’ (60). The author thought deeply about the research design and, in order to answer the research question, she chose a qualitative approach. This is because the author wanted to explore and explain new theoretical insights (Hammond and Wellington 2013) and generate new theoretical models after an in-depth study of the data resulting from how people experience a given research issue.

The author decided to use participant observation and also made use of informal conversations with migrant students. This tallies with what Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) state: that participant observation is vital as it allows the researcher to gather first-hand material. Informal conversations are also salient means of getting information as the subject is not under pressure or stress. These two methods are reliable and valid as attested by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Denzin (1989).

The informal talks were conducted with the students, both alone and in a group of friends. They took place anywhere in the school, sometimes during morning or break supervision in the school grounds, in the corridors between lessons or even during a replacement lesson. The author coded and categorised what the students told her with their words and what she observed through their actions.
Epistemology, Ontology and Positionality

1. Epistemology

The author’s position in the school is one of trust and authority. Normally, these are seen as positions of power. The author wanted to go beyond the question of power and she viewed her position as an opportunity to build a relationship between herself as a researcher and these students. In this, she was being inspired by the way Crotty (1998) defined epistemology. He defined epistemology as ‘how we know what we know’ (8). Schwandt (1997) asserts that the information accumulated should be studied both in terms of knowledge and its justification. In this case, the author applied the epistemology of constructionism. She believes that meaning is derived from one’s engagement with the realities of the world and she could do this by personally experiencing interactions with students attending on both formal and informal occasions.

The author had numerous conversations with these students about their plans for the future and their expectations of the world ‘out there’ after they finished their compulsory education. What did they aspire to be in the future? How did they view themselves in the school environment? How did they feel within the school environment? What did they have to say about their integration in the school? As a person in a position of trust, the author always tried to understand their concerns and had sought to guide them to the best of her knowledge. According to Cropley (2019), all these questions are part of the epistemological facet of qualitative research.

The author knew that, even though she had acquired a good knowledge of the students’ academic background and social situation, she had to hear their stories to be able to personally experience their feelings and emotions. In her position as a participant observer, she was sure that there were new things which had yet to be uncovered, and which she had not elicited directly from the participants themselves, in the quest to get a detailed insight about their life at school and the services that they are getting. Whilst Davidson (2000) questions what the truth is, the author was looking forward to contributing new knowledge to this area of educational research, which has not,
as yet, been well researched in the Maltese sphere.

2. Ontology

Epistemology is heavily entwined with ontology. There are different definitions of what ontology is. Scotland (2012) defines it as ‘being concerned with the assumptions we make in order to believe that something makes sense or is real, or the very nature or essence of the social phenomenon we are investigating.’ Hammond and Wellington (2013) say that ontology concerns claims about the nature of being and existence.

Cropley (2019: 36) speaks of ontology as being the view that each person actively “constructs”, an individual “reality” out of his or her own particular experiences, as each person’s reality is different. In addition, he states that when people interact with others, they shape reality. Thus, reality is ‘socially constructed’. In other words, Cropley sees individuals as “actors” who “construct” the world they live in.

Thus, whilst conducting her research, the author sought to examine her underlying belief as a researcher. The author sought to check her assumptions and verify whether she was doing any generalisations about migrant students. For this reason, she sought to investigate the essence of the social phenomenon of her subjects and how the students could have a better future. This was also for the benefit of the country, as a whole. The author ascertained herself that the number of investigated individuals was enough to derive a general conclusion because in qualitative studies, five cases are the minimum for a correct analysis (Mason 2010; Englander 2012; Robinson 2014).

3. Positionality

The author is aware that because of her position, the students might not have been telling her the truth during the informal chats she was having with them. To counter this, she did not base her research on just one informal discussion. She had been in contact with them since September 2018, and so after one year of working and talking with them, she could be sure
that what they were saying was not made up. This element of truth was further strengthened as students had the tendency to repeat the same facts without changing their original version even when informally asked the questions which were worded differently.

Then, to corroborate the participants’ replies, the author also spoke with the students’ parents. Some of them come to school for Parents’ day and whenever it is necessary. They cooperated often with the school administration. The author has also keenly observed these students while interacting with their peers, and their body language has shown that they are at ease.

Students’ Profiles

These migrant students are not a homogenous group, but have different profiles. Three of these are refugees, the other two are the children of economic migrant workers. They are all aged 14 and when this study took place, they were in year 9. The students are three girls and two boys.

**Student 1:** She comes from Syria. Her parents came to Malta 20 years ago to seek work. She is the fourth of seven children. She defines herself as Maltese, as she was born in Malta. However, she is still Syrian by culture. She started to wear the hijab as soon as she became a woman, which caused her a lot of shame as all the school wanted to know why suddenly she had started wearing the hijab.

She keeps to herself a lot, mostly because her culture does not let her get close to boys. She is extremely well behaved and seeks the company of other such-minded girls. Her father is interested in her schooling. He comes for Parents’ day and also sees that she comes to school on a regular basis. He admitted to me that he wants his daughter to become a doctor or a nurse, to have a better job than him (he is a tile-layer and plasterer). He clearly has high expectations for his daughter.

**Student 2:** She is from Ethiopia. She arrived in Malta 5 years ago. She is the second child from three siblings. Her family are very poor. In fact, this year, she has started to qualify for
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scheme 9; a government scheme which was initiated to help economically disadvantaged children. She wears the hijab, and is a good netball player. However, because of her prowess in netball, she is sometimes hated and mocked, especially with words such as ‘I will take off that veil’, during games at school. She thinks that all the teachers are helpful. She knows that they try very hard to help her fit in. She is very well behaved and is part of a group of girls who are from the same village. She seems to be happy at school. She spent a year at the induction centre in Naxxar to learn Maltese and English. However, she still prefers to speak in English.

Student 3: He is half-Italian, half-Polish and came to Malta last year when his father got a job here and he moved all the family to Malta. He is very well behaved, knows English and after a year in Malta, he has grasped Maltese and even though he does not speak the language, he can understand it quite well. He has a circle of friends.

Student 4: He is a Syrian boy who was born in Malta. He is very well behaved and ambitious. He is in an average class and studies chemistry and biology. His father wants him to be a doctor. He stays in class during the religion lesson and sometimes even participates in it.

Student 5: Her family arrived in Malta in June 2019. In her home country, Bulgaria, she had quite good marks in all the subjects. At first, she found the Maltese system baffling, because the educational system in Bulgaria is not subject to periodic tests and examinations but is based on assignments. Thus, in a number of subjects, there was discrepancy in the subjects’ level. Her standard of education in certain subjects is far below that which is taught in Maltese schools. While the first few weeks were bumpy, she has been accepted in a circle of friends. She is a very polite, respectful and obedient girl.

Findings

1. Views on Teachers and Learning Support Educators

The findings can be mainly divided into two: their views on
teachers and learning support educators and their views on their peers and the school environment in general.

The major findings are that the students feel very safe at school. They are being supported through many services and the majority feel integrated. They all find the environment of the school they attend to be very accepting. In part, this is thanks to their teachers. Although Phoenix (2009) describes that teachers looked down on migrant students as being inadequate and not desired in the classroom, the students I talked to had words of praise for the teachers, whom they described as being very caring. They also had words of praise for the learning support educators, whom one student described as ‘an angel’. He really appreciated her patience. She used to translate for him in the first few weeks, and to explain the lesson all over again to make sure that he understood.

The students said that teachers, in particular, were their main supporters. They were committed to getting them to achieve more academically. To counter the problem of language, throughout the lessons, teachers continually switched from Maltese to English and vice-versa. Teachers also conducted extra lessons during breaks so that the migrants could catch up; a fact which was encountered by Falzon et al. in 2012 in their study in the Maltese educational system.

The support that teachers give to migrant students was also commented upon by Gibson and Hidalgo (2009) who studied young women migrants. They maintained that teachers are important agents. They were described as the agents whose support to the young migrant women was important for the building of relations within the school.

2. Integration Through Sports

On their part, these migrant students showed eagerness to integrate with their peers. The author noticed this herself. One student eagerly played during break time in a sports competition. Upon asking the girl why she was so eager to participate in sports, she told the author that she had joined in the games organised during mid-day break, in which she excelled and through which she became popular. She admitted
that her participation in sports helped her to make new friends. She recognized that her popularity came from the fact that she is a good player and wins games for her house. However, sometimes, especially during decisive games, she is insulted because of the colour of her skin and because she wears the headscarf. On her part she said that she tries not to take any notice.

Sports have been mentioned to be a good means of integrating students (Pisani 2018; Galea et al. 2011; Nguyen 2017; Spiteri 2020) and the above paragraph shows that this is true. In fact, the insults this girl sometimes receives whilst playing are related to her proficiency in sports and therefore are not purely racial or of a religious matrix. The author knows that this latter observation may sound controversial, but it should be stressed that these insults were levelled at her only from the supporters of the rival team, jealous at her high command of the sport.

3. Relationships With Their Peers

In a study done by Galea et al. (2011), migrant girls were asked about their relationships with their peers. In this study, migrant students did not articulate any conflicts. While the migrants in the year under never had any conflicts, some issues like the situation above, where the migrant student was insulted because of her proficiency in sports, do occur. On the whole, the migrant students in this school felt accepted by Maltese students. They all said that Maltese students were welcoming and very friendly. This made them feel accepted in class. In the words of the Italian migrant, ‘the boys are fun’ and they make him laugh. He admitted that he does not know how to speak Maltese fluently and therefore language can be a barrier. But still he manages to communicate in English and sometimes he resorts to his native language. Integration occurred quickly, as soon as he was asked to go out with them in the weekend. The same situation has developed with the Bulgarian female student. She too is being invited to go out with her fellow classmates. It should be stated that these invitations are gender-based, as the boy was invited by other boys living in his village and who attend the same school, while the same can be said for the girl. She was invited by other girls. However,
the author has not managed to gather any information about
the other three migrants who are all Muslims. These were very
reticent and did not like talking about their life after school
hours.

The need to fit in is also manifested by the migrants’ students
desire to dress like their friends. One day, the author saw that
the Bulgarian student came to school with jet-black hair. She
asked the student why she had dyed her hair black. Her
natural hair colour, light brown, was beautiful. However, she
just shrugged, smiled and told the researcher that like this, she
looked more Maltese! As Mirza (2010) puts it, they have learnt
“how to move between worlds.” (135)

While Galea et al. (2011) found in their study that girls were
eager to engage in activities like the rest of their peers and
that they were very polite, the author could feel that in this
study, this was a trait which stood for both girls and boys. The
migrants in this particular year group behave extremely well
and show respect and gratefulness to their superiors, including
the researcher.

The integration of migrant students with an Arabic background,
from countries such as Syria and the Maghreb region is
somewhat different. The fact that Maltese is of Semitic origins
helps a lot in their integration in school. This is an advantage
which is not present with the other migrants and this may
explain why the Bulgarian girl put more emphasis on her looks.
The migrant students from Syria do not need to focus on their
appearance but rely on language to integrate better with the
other students. As Pisani (2018) rightly points out, migrants
originating from Arab countries find it easier to learn the spoken
Maltese language. This gives them an advantage in state
schools where Maltese is the main medium of communication.
This also seems to be a characteristic of Syrian students, in
that they blend in Maltese society immediately (Pisani 2018:
132). The students I talked to showed this trait. While the Syrian
students talked to me and everybody else at school in perfect
Maltese, the students from the other nationalities preferred
to talk in English. This is despite the fact that one of them had
spent a year at the induction centre in Naxxar.
4. Issues Faced by Migrant Students

Despite all of the above, the students expressed also reservations. Such reservations came mainly from students having an Islamic background. The cultural dilemma here is very real, as their way of dress (Nguyen 2017: 36) and culture sometimes hinders them from integrating wholly within the system. In the case of Malta, this is not linked to the school but could be real in homes as their integration outside school is less present. None of the Muslim girls spoke about any extracurricular activity. In fact, the Muslim students do not like to speak about their home environment. The language barrier is very real for those students whose native language is not of a Semitic background. But this element was overcome by an integration that went beyond the school environment.

The students also commented that while the majority of the students and teachers who they came across at school were helpful, there were still a handful of students who made life difficult, who did not help them to adjust, but rather hindered their integration. However, the migrant students whom the author talked to did not let this set them back, but they moved on from this and proceeded to surround themselves with a circle of friends. This shows a lot of resilience, something which Spiteri (2020) also discusses in his paper. Yet, it should be pointed out that even Maltese students can undergo such experiences from other Maltese students. This is more an issue of bullying, which needs a separate analysis.

5. The Role of Migrant Parents

In this situation, the role of the migrant students’ parents is important. The latter should be encouraged to work hand in hand with the school. The findings from Falzon et al. (2012) suggest that the parents of migrant children take an active role in the education of their children. These include attending Parents’ Day and being involved in school activities which are organised during the scholastic year. Yet this is a point where theory and practice fail to go hand in hand. Many of the parents of the migrant students in my school are not involved, mostly because they are busy working. This situation was encountered also by Spiteri (2020: 172) in his studies of
a similar situation. Not all the parents of migrants came for Parents’ day, either. In this study, when the author asked the students why, they replied that their parents could not afford to take a day off because of their hectic work commitments. The author sought to counter this by communicating with their parents by telephone. In most cases she found them very receptive and cooperative.

6. Limitations

The author wishes to state that these are not the only migrant students in the school but she observed all the migrant students in one particular year, that is, year 9. Thus, this study was subject to a selective process which was conditioned only by age and year of study of these migrants but then, there was no more selectivity as all the student migrants in that particular cohort were included in this study.

Another limitation is related to the fact that this study was undertaken in one school and was covering only migrant students from a particular catchment area. Areas can affect the number of migrant students in particular schools.

Conclusion

In this study, teachers are well prepared to carry out their duties with migrant students as the students themselves have stated that teachers knew how to cater to their needs. In 2012, Falzon et al. argued that teachers needed more training on how to deal with migrants. This issue has by now started to be addressed but this does not mean that work in this field should stop. Training and support to staff in schools should continue. While, according to migrant students, teachers and learning support educators are doing a great job, more knowledge about migrants and migration would help to erase any stereotypes that staff and students might have with respect to the different nationalities. It could also help to erase the ‘them’ and ‘us’ mentality, which has been hinted at by students and surfaced in this study during sports.

The truth remains that migrant children are still facing many challenges and will continue to do so. These challenges are
best addressed by having clear national policies in place (Eurydice 2019; Caruana and Francalanza 2013). But what this study brings out is the need for school guidelines. The cases studied show that migrant realities are specific as the students come from diverse backgrounds. Therefore, a one-size-fits-all policy is not recommended. Thus, while a general national framework should be in place, schools should have leeway to set their own guidelines and policies. These would prepare better the school staff for the new environment made up of diverse cultures, some of which are new to Malta and which may be different from one school to another.

On the other hand, these guidelines work when the number of migrants in a year group is small. At least in the cases analysed, the fact that the number of students was small definitely facilitated their integration. When the number is small, gender is not an issue for the integration of the students. For sure, the school environment plays a role and such a success needs also to be analysed with the background and policies of the school.

More studies are needed about migrant students. The author hopes that this study helps to give policy makers an insight into how these students are feeling when they are a small number in a year group and what can be done better so that their needs are better catered for. In this case, these students are enjoying their school experience.

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Chapter 4: Effective International and Multicultural Practices in Schools and Society

Effective **International** and **Multicultural** Practices in Schools and Society

Dr Anita Seguna
Nations worldwide have been challenged, positively and negatively, by globalisation and its effects. The educational sphere has been likewise impacted. Initially, governments turned to higher educational institutions to ensure that future generations were being prepared for the reality within the 21st century. To counteract globalisation trends, the educational sphere was forced to review its aims and functions. Knight (2003) ascertains that through internationalisation, globalisation is addressed, and this is evident at the national, sector, and institution levels through “the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education” (2).

Internationalisation, however, does not affect only higher educational institutions, but as proclaimed by multiple researchers in the field (Maxwell et al. 2018; Yemini 2012; Pevzner et al. 2019; Seguna 2019), through normative and empirical evidence, internationalisation also manifests itself in school and general education. Seguna (2019) ascertains that “Internationalisation within schools, therefore, serves the purpose of preparing the learners to become knowledgeable, internationalised learners within the globalised world.” (57)

One of the effects of globalisation is mobility and migration. Schools have been racially, culturally, ethnically, linguistically, and religiously transformed, making them more diverse than ever before. This has resulted in “a wide and growing ethnic, cultural, social-class, and linguistic gap between many of the nation’s teachers and their students. Teachers are faced with both the challenges and opportunities of dealing with diversity creatively and constructively in their classrooms and schools.” (Banks and McGee Banks 2016: xvii).

Seguna (2019), in her research on Internationalisation in Secondary Schools in Malta, discloses that schools are finding ways of fusing their core beliefs and the 21st century exigencies and responding to the pressures being placed upon them. Notwithstanding this awareness and the efforts individual educational institutions and entities are engaging in, educational authorities and school leaders need to ensure that all stakeholders are better equipped to cope with this
Chapter 4: Effective International and Multicultural Practices in Schools and Society

changing diverse reality.

International research has unearthed a plethora of good practices which educational institutions are embedding within their organisations. Schools need to ensure the inculcation of global awareness, competences and 21st century skills which lead learners to improve their: “character, citizenship, collaboration, communication, creativity, and critical thinking. These competences [need to] encompass compassion, empathy, socio-emotional learning, entrepreneurialism, and related skills required for high functioning in a complex universe.” (Fullan, Quinn and McEachen 2018:16) Schools have introduced environmental education, as well as European and global education citizenship into their programmes of study. Educational concepts such as International Baccalaureate and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), and partaking in international assessments such as PISA, TIMMS and PIRLS are also examples of how educational institutions are internationalising their practices.

Similarly to how international educational institutions have been affected, the Maltese scenario is no different. An analysis of national statistics demonstrates that since Malta’s accession to the EU, the international population has more than doubled, reaching a culmination of 14% in 2018 (Eurostat 2020). According to Eurostat (2020), the international population in Malta is at 67,145. Contrary to popular belief, the international population is mainly made up of EU nationals (57.4% i.e. 38,563) while 42.6% (28,582) constitute non-EU nationals. The National Statistics Office (NSO 2018) also claims that in 2018, 9.7% of the whole student population within all three Maltese school sectors amounted to approximately 9,000 students.

National policies have only started to be written and this leaves educators and educational institutions fending for themselves. However, local research is demonstrating that schools, non-governmental organisations, and individual staff members have been counteracting the prevalent struggles. Local researchers, amongst which are the five authors who have contributed within this section of the journal, have provided a current snapshot of what is taking place within schools. Through their findings they have provided exemplars
of good practices and recommendations for local authorities, educational institutions, and staff members.

Darmanin’s paper *Expanding Borders* seeks to question whether cultural intelligence and different cultures affect leadership styles. She questions whether leaders shape culture or are shaped by it and seeks to understand whether one’s leadership would need to be adapted due to the various cultures within primary schools.

Radu and De Vita, through their paper *Addressing Societal Polarisation in Maltese Schools through Experimental Laboratories*, discuss ARMOUR, a project which has sought the opinions of various stakeholders on societal polarization and violent extremism. They also investigate whether these stakeholders have access to resources to mitigate these aspects.

Wright’s paper *The Facing the Challenge of Preparing Maltese Schools and Students for a Multicultural Society: An Opportunity to Redefine Identity in the Light of “Otherness”*, examines multiculturalism seminars aimed at Year 10 students which offer them an opportunity to discuss, share and reflect on multiculturalism and the experiences of people coming from diverse cultures.

These papers share a common outcome. They demonstrate that migration has changed the schools’ landscape, but different schools and organisations have been forward-looking in their approach. Both Radu and De Vita and Wright disclose the unfounded fear within schools which is often the fruit of both religious and political beliefs and ideologies, peer pressures, negative attitudes and stereotypes stemming from incorrect information, false information from social media and family influences. A lack of teacher training and re-training on topics such as inter- and multiculturalism, radicalization and polarization is also evident.

Findings from these papers have produced four overarching recommendations. Firstly, the importance of the state and educational authorities to focus on encouraging diversity, integration, interculturalism and the empowerment of
stakeholders. Authorities should also expect higher educational institutions to train and re-train the teaching personnel in how to adapt to interculturalism and diversity. Secondly, it is necessary for school leaders to be culturally intelligent, learn how to use this intelligence and utilise empowering and transformational leadership styles to create a positive climate and learning community within schools. Thirdly, the individual efforts of the teaching staff and learning support educators is crucial and needs to be supported to ensure the academic integration and support for local students and international learners. Finally, schools need to provide an enriching environment which gives a voice to all learners, irrespective of race and culture. In addition, learning programmes should develop the learners’ language skills, while the schools’ curricular and extra-curricular programmes should teach the learners critical thinking, anger management, emotional intelligence, and conflict resolution. These skills are essential to cultivate active citizenship. Schools also need to ensure that the learners form positive relationships and socialisation should be enhanced, possibly through sports. Finally, the role of parents to aid the integration process should also be cultivated.

The local context would therefore benefit from developing the teachers’ skills and competences and bringing about an awareness of intercultural benefits for all stakeholders. This response to local and national needs would also help contribute towards the international sphere. As advocated by Seguna (2019), “when schools discover the ‘formula’ which helps them to bring about school improvement and effectiveness, schools readily invest in it” (57). It is therefore hoped that similar research as that provided by researchers for this symposium continues to be taken on and educators will be inspired to continue working towards ensuring diversity and integration.
References


Chapter 4: Effective International and Multicultural Practices in Schools and Society

Addressing Societal Polarisation in Maltese Schools through Experimental Laboratories

Dr Aitana Radu
Ms Giulia De Vita
Abstract

Maltese society is experiencing an increase in its diversity due to a booming economy and the position of the country in the Mediterranean, which are bringing different waves of migration to the island. Difficulties in the integration of these communities with the local community and tensions among them are some of the consequences of this phenomenon. Schools are in particular an important environment in which these tensions manifest themselves, and children from different backgrounds are increasingly polarized. Moreover, Malta, similar to the rest of Europe, is also increasingly more exposed to radical ideologies of various types, which are contributing to social polarisation. Furthermore, young people are often made more vulnerable and at risk of being exposed to these ideologies because of their intense use of social media. As part of the ARMOUR project, we have carried out qualitative research with first-line practitioners working with children and young people, including teachers, social workers, youth workers and police. The findings showed that practitioners are not prepared for this change and often are lacking the skills for properly addressing the ever-increasing polarisation. Teachers in particular called for increased training on how to address societal polarisation and encourage integration and inclusion in schools. Following the approach promoted by RAN EDU (Nordbruch 2016) the ARMOUR project has developed a series of exercises that – when used by first-line practitioners – can empower children and young people, making them less vulnerable to extreme ideologies, through the development and strengthening of critical thinking, as well as basic life skills and social competencies that are essential for active citizenship.

Keywords:

social polarisation, radicalisation, violent extremism, prevention, children, young people, first-line practitioners, education
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Introduction

Over the years, Malta has experienced an increase in the diversity of its population. This is due to a number of different reasons, including a booming economy, and the position of the island in the centre of the Mediterranean, which are bringing different waves of migration to the country. The total share of foreign nationals in Malta has been steadily increasing, from 9% in 2014, to 11% in 2016 and 14% in 2018 (Eurostat 2020). The largest group of migrants are EU nationals (38,563) which represent 57.4% of foreigners in Malta, while non-EU nationals constitute the remaining 42.6% (28,582) (Eurostat 2020).

However, this change in the demographics of the country has also led to difficulties in the integration of the new migrant groups with the Maltese community, something one can observe in many different settings and situations. The integration challenges range from logistical problems (e.g. governmental agencies dealing with migrant groups require more interpreters) to ideological problems, namely the rise of an anti-migration discourse both offline and online. More and more the rhetoric around the boat arrivals of asylum-seekers, especially far-right discourse such as the one promoted by Moviment Patrijotti Maltin and Imperium Europa has them portrayed as an invasion of Malta by foreign individuals with nefarious intentions. This discourse, which was once limited to the outskirts of politics, is slowly but certainly gaining ground, as reflected by the recent political results achieved by Norman Lowell’s party, which gained 3.2% of the votes in the 2019 European Elections, becoming the third party behind the Labour and Nationalist Parties (Times of Malta 2019c).

The rise of far-right discourse, coupled with significant discontentment on the side of the migrants related to the asylum regime and material conditions, has contributed to an increase in inter-community tensions in Malta. Several notable events over the past year have shown the extent of these tensions: in April 2019, a migrant from Cote d’Ivoire was shot on the road leading to the biggest reception centre on the island (Ħal Far Open Centre) in what has been considered the first hate murder in Malta (Times of Malta 2019b). For the whole year 2019, and in the beginning of 2020, there were
riots and protests taking place in open centres and reception centres hosting migrants in Hal Far, Marsa and Safi, against
the over-crowding of these centres and poor living conditions offered to migrants (Times of Malta 2019d; Times of Malta
2020). In parallel, the island has witnessed an increase in radical discourse targeting migrants in a number of popular
online groups in Malta as well as in the comments’ sections of articles discussing the migration problem in leading Maltese
newspapers (Times of Malta 2018; Times of Malta 2019e).

These problems have also been evident in other settings and have affected the whole society. For example, in February 2019,
at Pembroke Secondary School, which has a high percentage of foreign students, tensions between two students – a Libyan
and a Maltese – ended in violence, in an incident which also involved the parents of one of the students concerned (Times
of Malta 2019a). Several similar instances were reported by teachers in schools, who expressed their concerns about this
rising phenomenon and asked for better instruments to deal with these instances (Times of Malta 2019a).

These integration difficulties experienced in the educational sector have refuelled the debate on the need for a long-
term plan for the integration of migrant children, which should include more and better support for teachers, social workers
and other first-line practitioners working with youth (Martinelli 2006; KOPIN 2008).

However, despite efforts from the Maltese government to improve policies for integration and promote social
cohesion, the country is becoming increasingly divided and such strategies are still not in place or have not been fully
implemented. Within the Ministry for European Affairs and Equality, the Directorate for Human Rights and Integration
designed an Integration Strategy 2017-2020 and created a unit focused particularly on integration of migrants (MEDE
2017). Although the strategy is coming to the end, the results especially in the field of mainstream education are not very
clear, and there is an urgent need for action in this area to prevent tensions which could lead to further polarisation of
the different groups. This is especially so since the increased societal polarisation makes Malta become more vulnerable to
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the appeal of radical ideologies.

Though polarization is encountered across society, one social category of particular concern is children and young people, who because of their level of emotional development, the impact of peer pressure and their extensive use of social media are particularly vulnerable to radicalization. On the other hand, schools have long been considered laboratories of democracies, due to the role they play in educating the new generation of citizens. When considering these two facts together, it quickly becomes clear that one key area of intervention should be the school environment and the polarizing factors encountered there. This can be done either by working directly with the individuals affected (in this case children and young people) or through first-line practitioners who work closely with children and young people and can assist them in developing the necessary skills to make them impervious to the attractiveness of extreme ideologies.

The ARMOUR Project ("A Radical Model Of Resilience For Young Minds") follows the second path – that of working with first-line practitioners – and it is based on the belief that schools are vital in supporting children and young people and in creating a positive learning environment. As a Radicalisation Awareness Network’s paper outlined, there are many skills that teachers can foster in children and young people to prevent polarisation and encourage the healthy development of students, including critical thinking, as well as basic life skills and social competencies that are essential for active citizenship (Nordbruch 2016).

One novel way, in which ARMOUR contributes to the reduction of societal polarization are Experimental Laboratories. These laboratories provide a trusted environment where teachers as well as other practitioners (e.g. youth workers, social workers, law enforcement personnel, health workers) learn together exercises and techniques on how to teach children and teens critical thinking, anger management, emotional intelligence, how to help them deal with conflicting identities and resolve conflicts. By using these tools, first-line practitioners are able to foster a more inclusive environment in schools and the wider society and discourage polarisation between different groups.
The first section of this paper provides an overview of the literature surrounding radicalisation and societal polarisation and the theories on skills development necessary for the prevention of violent extremism. In the second section, the findings of the research phase of the project in the Maltese context are outlined, and then linked in the third section to an explanation of the methodology of the Experimental Laboratories and the theory behind their design. The conclusion will finally bring together how the methodology employed in the ARMOUR project can be useful in the Maltese educational context and how it can be incorporated into the activities of first-line practitioners.

**Societal Polarisation, Radicalisation and Violent Extremism**

The concept of societal polarisation as employed in the project was first developed in relation to the distribution of income and income inequalities (Duclos et al. 2004; Esteban and Ray 1994; Wolfson 1994). It can however be applied to many different issues, including ideology, religion and economic status, as it results from the interaction of within-group identity and across-group alienation (Karatrantos 2018). When societal polarisation occurs, group members identify with each other, while they feel socially or ideologically separated from members of other groups. As the level of polarisation increases, tensions and distance across the groups will also increase as they cluster around distant poles (Karatrantos 2018). In the case of Malta, increasing distance between the Maltese community and the foreign population feeds into mistrust between the two groups and results in the increasing tensions that have taken place over the past years.

As societal polarisation leads individuals to distant poles, this will drive them to identify with more radical ideologies and groups, which can be led either by religion or political beliefs. In the ARMOUR project, polarisation is seen as both a mental construct and multidimensional phenomenon generated by the inability of multiple social actors to properly address sensitive issues in the public spaces, like those motivated by...
cultural, economic and political discourse, narratives within the migration context, hate speech and many others. In the case of Malta, children and young people are exposed to negative narratives surrounding the migration crisis often portrayed as an attack on Maltese identity, which might drive them towards extreme political groups such as Imperium Europa. On the other hand, children and teens coming from a non-Maltese background may react to the spread of far-right ideas and the pressure of integration by moving towards a more extreme national and religious identity. Thus, the distance between societal groups increases, pushing individuals towards ideological extremes and possibly to violent actions.

Nevertheless, one must remember that radicalisation is in itself a controversial term and there is a lack of a consensus on definitions (Schmid 2013). The definition given by the European Union is that it is “the phenomenon of people embracing opinions, views and ideas which could lead to acts of terrorism” (Commission of the European Communities 2005). A criticism of this definition is that it fails to acknowledge the nature of radicalisation as a process, the process by which an individual develops extremist ideologies and beliefs (WANA Institute 2016). This failure results in the lack of recognition for the causes and drivers of radicalisation, and therefore for a preventative approach to radicalisation. In addition, being radical or “extreme” does not by itself imply that a certain individual is a security threat to the community, or even that this is necessarily a negative attribute (Borum 2011). Radicalisation can therefore here be defined as the process that leads to developing extremist ideologies and beliefs, and there are different pathways, causes and drivers that lead to radicalisation (Borum 2011).

Consequently, a distinction also needs to be made between radicalisation and violent extremism. As radicalisation is a process, not every individual following this process will reach the point where they engage in violent activity, violent extremism or terrorism. In addition, violent extremism is not always connected to a strong belief in the ideology behind the violent action, but individuals can be drawn to the extremist group and activity for many different reasons (Borum 2011). Therefore, violent extremism is only the end-stage of the
process of radicalisation of an individual (Terre des Hommes 2018). To design a prevention strategy for radicalisation and violent extremism it is therefore important to understand the plurality of causes and drivers that lead individuals onto this path.

A very important part of the prevention of radicalisation is therefore to detect weak or very weak signals which could indicate that an individual could be on the path to becoming radicalized. In order to do this, especially when we consider radicalisation of children and young people, the collaboration of social actors such as schools, local authorities and social workers is fundamental as they have the most contact with these target groups. Many prevention programmes therefore focus on the establishment of partnerships with community representatives, investment in social and neighbourhood projects and mentoring schemes for youth “at risk”. While these strategies are important and can yield important results, often they also run the risk of increasing stigmatization and exclusion of certain groups, and consequentially foster polarisation, pushing young people further on the radicalisation path (Bigo et al. 2014).

To avoid disproportionate and negative consequences through the implementation of these strategies, frameworks that promote a more integrated approach to prevention of radicalisation aimed at building a more resilient youth should be promoted (Terre des Hommes 2018). The drivers and causes that lead children and young people on the path to radicalisation have often been described as ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors: push factors are largely understood as negative social, political economic and cultural drivers of individual decision-making, while pull factors are the positive characteristics or benefits offered by a group in exchange for participation (WANA Institute 2017). According to Nanes and Lau (2018), instead, push factors refer to structural issues within society whilst pull factors are psychological ones that render an individual more susceptible to radicalisation and violent extremism. In general, push factors are those that leave an individual dissatisfied and not trusting the mainstream system, and pull factors are those that make the extremist group seem like the better option.
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According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2018), push factors include the conditions conducive to violent extremism and the structural context from which it emerges, including lack of socio-economic opportunities, marginalization and discrimination, poor governance and violation of human rights, prolonged and unresolved conflicts and radicalisation in prisons. Pull factors are instead the individual motivations and processes that play a role in transforming ideas and grievances into violent extremism: individual backgrounds and motivations, collective grievances and victimization, distortion and misuse of beliefs, political ideologies and ethnic and cultural differences, leadership and social networks (UNODC 2018). These factors should not be considered in isolation and are instead to be considered together with other factors as well as in the local, national and international context.

In particular, the existence of a grievance or perceived injustice by a sub-group of the population is often seen as an initial driver that encourages young people to find an alternative group which will recognize the injustice and give the individual an opportunity to fight back and right wrongs (Ferguson et al. 2008). Young people find in this alternative group a sense of identity, belonging and acceptance which they might not have in the broader society. This is in particular true for young people coming from minority groups, who feel alienated by a prevailing culture, or who may be feared or suspected because of their beliefs, religion, or where they live (Erwin 2016). Individuals within a minority group that feel marginalized and discriminated against, including through little or no political inclusions, limitations on freedom of expression and shrinking civic space, will at times be drawn towards radical ideologies (UNODC 2018).

Radicalisation is therefore in this case also a consequence of more diverse societies and a lack of policies to ensure integration and cohesion among these societies (UNODC 2018). In addition to pushing minorities towards radical ideologies, this situation can also result in a rise of far-right extremism on the part of the host communities, who feel an increasing threat to their way of life from the new communities (Steinmayr 2017). For these reasons, radicalisation towards both far-right or Islamic ideologies was recognized as an
increasing problem in Malta in the course of the ARMOUR research, as reflected across many European countries.

The factors described in the literature reflect the same type of causes and drivers that practitioners in Malta identified, including factors such as mental health, family situations, lack of social support etc. These factors leave young people looking for a better option, which they find in extremist ideologies, often through social media or the peers’ network most close to them. For this reason, prevention strategies should attempt to tackle these issues and equip children and young people with instruments and skills that make them resilient to these ideologies and able to question them and create other opportunities for themselves.

Considering all the above, the ARMOUR project set out to first understand what the level of preparedness to violent extremism is in each of the 7 countries studied as part of the project, and then developed a methodology, through the experimental laboratories and the training programmes for practitioners aimed at assisting first-line practitioners to become better prepared. The next two sections will outline in further detail the findings of the ARMOUR research carried out through interviews and focus groups with first-line practitioners, and the methodology of the Experimental Laboratories, which was developed on the basis of the findings of the research.

Findings From the ARMOUR Interviews and Focus Groups: Malta

In the first phase of the ARMOUR project, qualitative research was carried out in 7 European countries in the form of expert interviews and focus groups, with the goal of understanding the extent to which first-line practitioners in those countries are knowledgeable about societal polarization and violent extremism and have access to the necessary resources to address such problems. What this research has emphasized first and foremost are the marked differences between countries inside the EU in terms of their level of preparedness in the area of radicalization, with countries such as Spain or the Netherlands being leaders in the field, while Romania and Malta are still lagging behind at the end of the pack.

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9 Spain, Italy, Malta, the Netherlands, Romania, Austria and Greece.

10 Resources in this context can mean the funding to organize activities but also policies to guide them.
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In Malta, the qualitative research focused on teachers, social workers, law enforcement personnel, youth workers, psychologists and victim support services, as these were the professional categories identified to have most contact with children and teens. The findings were then incorporated into the design of the Experimental Laboratories.

An important finding coming out of the Malta research was that families and/or legal guardians of children were seen as the most frequent source of such beliefs. In other words, practitioners agreed that radicalisation and extremist ideas among youths living in Malta are often a consequence of beliefs and ideologies, both religious and political, coming from the adults in the family. Other push and pull factors mentioned included peer pressure, the socio-economic situation, the presence of subcultures in society, the lack of a stable upbringing, as well as the desire to belong to a group of people. Mental health as well as marginalization, isolation and the lack of a sense of identity were also perceived as contributing factors to the process of radicalisation.

Secondly, most practitioners agreed that the predominant extremist ideology encountered in Malta is the far-right type, with Islamic radicalization potentially becoming more important in the future. Moreover, participants mentioned the murder of a black immigrant in Malta as an example of violent far-right extremism. The use of social media in the country, especially Facebook, was also indicated as a source of false information that could lead young people towards radical and biased ideas, especially of the far-right type.

In what concerns their knowledge of the subject and the resources they have available, all participants taking part in the research mentioned a lack of training and/or knowledge on the topic of radicalisation. Most have acknowledged lacking the know-how to recognize early signals of radicalization and/or intervening in such cases. This is especially true when working with people of different backgrounds and cultures, as first-line practitioners in Malta are predominantly Maltese and felt they would not be able to reach out and gain trust from youth from different cultures and ideologies and speaking different languages. An important issue raised by many
different practitioners was the lack of interpreters who can aid them in their activities.

Another key finding was the absence of instruments aimed at preventing and countering societal polarization and radicalization. One example provided was the absence of policies aimed at identifying and responding to such cases, similar to the one in place for drug addiction prevention. The practitioners believed that in cases where signs of radicalisation are identified as a concern, a system should be put into place enabling a broad range of stakeholders to follow up with the child or young person in question and provide counselling. The school should be able to provide counselling with the help of educational counsellors, and if necessary it can also involve the parents. Furthermore, social work services and youth work services can refer the child to extra-curricular activities tailored to her/his interests as a means of channelling their energy into positive activities.

However, practitioners also underlined the difficulty posed by the need for parental consent. If one accepts that the adults in the family are more often than not the source of the extreme ideas embraced by children and teens it becomes clear that more often than not they would not be open to assisting the school in these mediating efforts. Therefore, all measures are on a voluntary basis and the only way to enforce them without the consent and collaboration of the parents is through a probation order by a judge, which can only be requested by the police in the case of violent actions.

Another challenge identified by Maltese practitioners is the absence of formalized inter- and intra-agency cooperation in this area. While at a theoretical level different types of practitioners can request assistance from colleagues based in other governmental agencies/public institutions, this is often left at the discretion of the individual practitioner and his/her willingness to go the extra mile. The absence of a clear model of cooperation (e.g. the joint task forces in place in the UK as part of the Channel project) makes it difficult for institutions to ask and receive the support they require from practitioners. For example, schools can also ask for the support of social work services when deemed necessary; however, both
categories emphasized that the collaboration between them is difficult due to lack of resources but also lack of information, bureaucratic processes and efficient follow-ups.

There was therefore agreement among participants that there is a need to improve this collaboration system at national level in such a way as to ensure that any child or teen at risk is monitored and assisted by the relevant practitioners in every aspect of his/her life, to avoid letting him/her fall between the cracks.

One of the main recommendations made by practitioners was the introduction of training and awareness-raising activities on the topic of radicalization and polarization, as it is their belief that there is not sufficient knowledge of the subject and the seriousness of the situation is significantly underestimated. Additionally, improved training would provide practitioners with tools and strategies to use with children and young people to help them become more resilient to radicalisation. Practitioners believe that more education around tolerance and acceptance at a young age would create a more cohesive society and avoid polarisation and consequentially radicalisation. Education should also focus more on developing the children’s and young people’s own identity and abilities, as well as their self-esteem, confidence and ability to cope with adversity.

While schools have been identified as a suitable environment for such positive interventions, practitioners have emphasized that these activities should not only be reduced to schools but instead they should be organized in such settings as would make the target audience most comfortable. Moreover, Maltese practitioners highlighted the need to use a whole-school and whole-community approach to prevent the possibility of stigma and further polarisation by singling out children at risk.

**Experimental Laboratories: The ARMOUR Methodology**

The belief behind the design of the Experimental Laboratories is that by strengthening the individuals’ identity, the exercises
included in the laboratories will build resilience and reject radicalisation and violent extremism. This is a relatively novel idea as previously many of the prevention programmes were aimed at later stages in the process of radicalization when an individual had already embarked on this path. By comparison, ARMOUR works with all children and teens – not only those displaying signs of radicalization, as it believes that early intervention is key to achieving successful positive emotional development. Moreover, ARMOUR seeks to give a voice to the moderate – and it does so by ensuring they have the skills to challenge and deconstruct radical and polarizing ideas which they might encounter from their peers or adult family members.

The concept of resilience is employed in many different fields and it is therefore difficult to find a commonly agreed-on definition. It can generally be defined in two ways: the ability, of a community or of an individual, to return to a state of equilibrium following some form of stress or adversity, but also the ability to transform and evolve in the face of adversity (Davoudi 2012). In the context of policies for the prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism and the ARMOUR project, the type of resilience we are talking about is the second one, a resilience that prevents a process of radicalisation.

Consequently, the interventions suggested (e.g. Experimental Laboratories) promote the development of certain skills and attributes in young people that render them more resilient: in some cases, these focus on training programmes and activities which will develop skills such as critical thinking, whereas in other contexts resilience is described as a consequence of general educational approaches, often through promotion of democratic values and practices (Stephens and Sieckenlück 2020). Additionally, while many programmes focus on resilience at the individual level, some also tackle resilience at the community level as well as the societal level. This approach is reflected in the ARMOUR project, which focuses on different types of laboratories at three different levels (Figure 1): individual capacity building laboratories aimed at developing individual agency; community capacity building laboratories focusing on community empowerment; and state response laboratories focusing on state empowerment.
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Figure 1: Model of the Experimental Laboratories Programme

The laboratories are based on the cognitive-behavioural instructional model and the learning-by-doing model, and propose techniques and strategies that can easily be adapted to teach young people in responding to dysfunctional situations that might trigger a radicalisation path (ARMOUR 2019c). Feedback will be collected during these laboratories and the model will be revised accordingly, and then distributed and promoted more broadly through both offline and online Train the Trainers programme (ToT). The objectives of this approach are to bring about behaviour change and dissuade vulnerable groups from embracing radical ideologies and violent extremism, to increase civic engagement and participate actively in democratic processes, to halt radicalisation processes and to enhance resilience and critical thinking.11

The individual capacity building laboratories focus on the skills that are more commonly targeted in preventative actions and policies focusing on building resilience, including particularly the capacity to think critically, which includes the ability of verifying facts and opinions that young people are presented with (UNESCO 2017). Within the project, critical thinking is

11 ARMOUR Grant Agreement – Action Description p. 95.
described as the ability to pursue “truth” over our own biases, assess our own thinking fairly and abandon mistaken reasoning for new and more valid ways of thinking (ARMOUR 2019d). This skill therefore empowers young people to think independently and make well-informed decisions, gaining confidence and the ability to learn from their mistakes. Critical thinking should be developed alongside anger management, which, considering that anger is one of the most cited push factors towards radicalisation, needs to be addressed to allow children and young people to learn how to manage it and how to handle conflictual situations, solve problems and control impulses independently and in non-conflicting ways (Stout 2002; ARMOUR 2019e). Both of these skills were also mentioned by first-line practitioners in the interviews and focus groups, who pointed out their importance and the little attention they are often given in the Maltese education system.

The importance of leaders acting as teachers and coaches is another key component of this process as highlighted by the third laboratory aimed at developing individual agency, focusing on coaching and parenting. The exercises carried out in this laboratory allow first-line practitioners to experiment with coaching and parenting strategies that allow them to understand triggers, behaviour, decisions and reactions, and are at the same time useful for children and young people to develop mechanisms and strategies encouraging control of one’s own emotions, while working on empathy, teamwork skills and learning to avoid stereotypes and discrimination (ARMOUR 2019f).

The second part of the laboratories aims at putting these skills into practice within the community around the individual, and to work together to build community resilience. To this end, the narrative and cultural awareness laboratory attempts to tackle the social construction of collective and individual identities through narratives, focusing on spotting dysfunctional or toxic narratives and promoting positive narratives and self-expression and self-affirmation (ARMOUR 2019g). Additionally, the conflict resolution and debate and simulation laboratories work together in providing children and young people with tools to express their positive narratives and self-expression and co-operate with peers to resolve problems and conflicts in
a positive manner while developing their communication skills and teamwork (ARMOUR 2019h; ARMOUR 2019i).

Through these laboratories, the project focuses on community agency and on encouraging children and young people to engage in activities with peers which would develop their communication skills. Literature on community resilience emphasizes the importance of neighbourhood networks and social relationships in developing these skills, which can be encouraged both in classrooms and through extra-curricular activities such as team sports, theatre and other (Johns et al. 2014). This is also reflected in the ARMOUR findings from the interviews and focus groups, where all practitioners suggested these types of activities as something that should be encouraged for children and young people at risk of marginalization and isolation, and consequentially polarisation and radicalisation (ARMOUR 2019b).

The last laboratory and objective of the Experimental Laboratories focuses on the state response to radicalisation. It was often highlighted in the interviews and focus group findings that the key to an effective prevention policy for radicalisation is to build an effective prevention system with the collaboration of all the different stakeholders and practitioners (ARMOUR 2019b). For this reason, this laboratory is aimed at a slightly different audience which includes policy makers, and focuses on designing and implementing proportionate measures to early radicalisation in young individuals by discussing with the participants specific scenarios and case studies (ARMOUR 2019l).

The strength of the ARMOUR model of experimental laboratories is that it works on the three different levels together, aiming at building each one of them. As Stephens and Sieckelinck (2020) argue, the ability to think critically and recognize negative narratives which is often associated with resilience, although necessary, is not sufficient as it only addresses part of the narratives and ideas which may create an openness to violence. By developing these skills alongside those that encourage community resilience as well as state response, the ARMOUR project tackles all causes of
radicalisation, including trust in institutions and ability to work alongside peers. These skills are at the basis of the work of the first-line practitioners in any situation, which makes them the perfect stakeholders to address children and young people at risk.

Conclusion

The activities of the ARMOUR project aim to build a model of prevention for radicalization in children and young people which can be applied in many different contexts, including the Maltese one. The Experimental Laboratories provide first-line practitioners working in all institutions, including schools, social work services, youth work settings and others, the strategies and methodologies to teach children and young people skills which would make them resilient to extreme ideologies. In addition, these laboratories also develop skills that encourage communication and exchange across different groups and therefore decrease the distance between them, and therefore polarization in schools and Maltese societies as a whole.

The ARMOUR tools, but also other similar ones, are important practices to encourage multiculturalism and integration of different cultures in schools in particular and more broadly within societies. One of the problems that teachers in particular identified is the lack of resources and time to be able to tackle radicalisation and polarisation while carrying out the school curricula. The advantage of such instruments is that they can be used alongside the normal workload, as they are flexible enough to be incorporated in standard lessons and do not require extensive resources.

The development of these skills, as identified by first-line practitioners, is, however, not enough on their own and it needs to be paired with the development of a prevention system across institutions, which would allow practitioners to identify early signs of radicalization and work together to prevent them from escalating. This system should therefore include awareness-raising activities on the topics of radicalization for practitioners, as well as for young people and parents, adapted to different needs. In addition, more collaboration
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across institutions and possibly a referral for cases at risk should be implemented, while paying attention to avoiding the risk of stigmatization of young people at risk.

The level to which this is necessary across different countries varies, though in the case of Malta our findings seem to indicate that there is very little in place at the moment and therefore immediate efforts in this field are required.

As seen in the case of Malta, if polarisation and radicalisation are not tackled early enough the situation will worsen and escalate the divisions and tensions across different societal groups. What this paper is trying to showcase is the need to put into practice these prevention instruments which are already available at an early stage, even if the circumstances are not perfect and the resources not extensive, by incorporating them into the day-to-day activities and programs already being implemented by first-line practitioners. This, however, requires an acknowledgement from institutions that polarisation and radicalisation are problems in Malta, and a commitment to reform existing policy and build a system which focuses on early prevention. These policies should work on a whole government approach, where all practitioners working with children and young people are trained and made aware of the topic. Schools and teachers should play a key role in the prevention of polarisation and radicalisation as they are closest to the children and young people, but they should not be left on their own and overburdened with this task but assisted by other key stakeholders.

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Expanding Borders – A Study on Cultural Intelligence and Leadership Styles in a Maltese Primary School

Ms Janice Darmanin
Abstract

This short study entitled ‘Expanding Borders’ seeks to find the key to effectively create educational communities in the ever-growing multicultural settings which we, as educational leaders, are facing. It explores the main research question chosen: is Cultural Intelligence affecting the leadership styles in a Maltese primary school? Other questions which link to the main research question emerged: does having a variety of different cultures in a school affect the leadership styles of the School Leader? How does this happen? Do leaders shape culture, or are they shaped by it? How should leadership styles be adapted in the education sector? The research being carried out in this small-scale project is based on theoretical research. It is aimed at giving a picture of how a leader needs to use Cultural Intelligence in a multicultural school setting. Both quantitative and qualitative methods of inquiry have been used in this project. These include online surveys, unstructured questionnaires and interviews. This small-scale project showed that Cultural Intelligence should have a very important role in the leadership styles used in a multicultural setting. It is evident that there is a positive relationship between having Cultural Intelligence, knowing how to use it, and leadership styles which need to be adopted to enhance all this and reap the benefits. This study recommends that empowering and transformative leadership styles should be adopted to create a positive impact on learning and outcomes, and furthermore to sustain a positive and powerful learning community in our schools. This is particularly crucial as worldwide changes persist and different cultures continue to intertwine.

Keywords:
multiculturalism, multicultural school, cultural intelligence, leadership styles, empowerment, transformative leadership, positive learning community
Introduction

People fail to get along with each other because they fear each other. They fear each other because they don’t know each other. They don’t know each other because they have not properly communicated with each other.’ (Martin Luther King 1958: 401)

Educational Leadership is certainly a role which can have a positive impact on learning and outcomes, by creating a positive and powerful learning community. This is particularly crucial when nationwide changes start developing and different cultures start to intertwine. One would need to adapt leadership styles accordingly. If all leaders had to follow Martin Luther King’s quote above and not fear each other but rather find means to properly communicate with each other, we would all feel we are truly part of this positive and powerful learning community. However, this also depends on the personality traits of the Educational Leader. To be an exceptional and effective leader, especially with regards to one’s relationship with those you are leading, one must have a positive attitude, be honest, respectful and have a sense of empathy towards all stakeholders involved. Above all, the leader should be a good communicator. Without a doubt, being an effective communicator is a top attribute of being a strategic leader. These are all internal factors which determine how effective one’s leadership style will be. Effective leadership is also determined by external factors, one of which is Culture. This is something which in our local context is developing rapidly. We are experiencing an increase of various culture shifts in our communities. This means we need more culturally intelligent leaders who will be able to adapt their leadership styles to the cultural changes we are facing.

1. The Research Question

Anthony Solomon and Renier Steyn (2017) argue that leaders need to adopt ‘culturally attractive’ leadership styles according to the cultures within the leadership context. Cultural Intelligence should assist leaders in adopting these leadership styles. In light of this, this short study will try to explore this main research question: is cultural intelligence affecting the
leadership styles in a Maltese primary school? This will involve issues such as: does having a variety of different cultures in a school affect the leadership styles of the School Leader? How does this happen? Do leaders shape culture, or are they shaped by it? How should leadership styles be adapted in the education sector? Does leading with Cultural Intelligence leave a positive effect in a school with students from different cultures? It is quite difficult to provide definitive answers to these questions from this small-scale project; however, the conclusion might provide enlightenment on the subject and suggest a discussion on the present situation in our local context.

Literature Review

‘Leadership today is a multicultural challenge.’ (Livermore 2015). We are currently experiencing a change in the Maltese Educational Student Population. As a result, students from different cultures are enrolling in our schools. This is affecting some schools more than others. Adapting to this change is of crucial importance. One might argue if adapting to cultural change in an educational setting comes naturally to a leader or if it involves acquiring skills to be able to adapt to it. Every leader has a preferred leadership style. However, a leader is required to transform, recreate and maintain, in other words to manage a culture (Şişman 1994; Yıldırım 2001).

1. What is culture?

Göksoy (2017) determines culture as a sum of tangible and intangible values of a society which are passed on from one generation to another. Culture is the ideas, customs and social behaviour of a group of people or a society. Many find interest in getting to know more about different cultures and find it intriguing and beautiful that so many different cultures exist in this world of ours. However, problems and conflicts may surface when these cultures become intertwined or rather when they come together. This may cause a sense of frustration as one learns to live in a community in which there are a variety of cultures. Raymond Williams’ assertion that culture is ‘a whole way of life’ formed the basis of his 1958 work Culture and Society. This is a reality which many communities in Malta are
facing, maybe in some communities more than others. One of the places where this situation will be most present is in the school of a community in which people from different cultures are living. Raymond Williams (1958) recognises cultural worth of all human activity as socially equalising. This is very difficult to reach and it all depends on the leadership styles used and how accepting a community is.

2. What is Cultural Intelligence?

Cultural Intelligence is described as

‘being skilled and flexible about understanding a culture, learning more about it from your on-going interactions with it, and gradually reshaping your thinking to be more sympathetic to the culture and your behaviors to be more skilled and appropriate when interacting with others from the culture.’ (Thomas and Inkson 2003: 14)

For example, not everyone likes changing the restaurant they usually visit or the item on the menu they usually order. Many of us prefer to stick to what we know. Mai Moua (2012) describes Cultural Intelligence as one’s ability to successfully adapt to unfamiliar cultural settings. Therefore, one’s level of Cultural Intelligence is based upon how capable one is to reset or tune oneself to adapt to new situations involving changes in culture.

Mai Moua (2012) states that there are three areas to be emphasised when referring to Cultural Intelligence. These are metacognition and cognition, motivation, and behaviour. Metacognition and cognition involve the ability to think, to learn, and to strategize. Motivation incorporates personality traits which are vital to be able to have Cultural Intelligence. These are one’s self-efficacy, confidence, persistence, and personal values. Behaviour, on the other hand, is one’s ability to adapt one’s behaviour and having a repertoire of skills in this regard. Mai Moua (2012) created the Cultural Intelligence Model. Her visual interpretation of this is quite interesting. She describes them as the ABCs of Cultural Intelligence. This model implies that one needs to go through different stages to have Cultural Intelligence. **Acquire** represents the process of acquiring information and knowledge about the culture/s
involved. This entails acquiring information about how cultures are created, interpreted, and shared. Furthermore, it involves evaluating how cultural interpretations, meaning, and symbols can impact behaviours and attitudes. The term **Build** refers to having an awareness of one’s surroundings through preparation and planning. Therefore, one would need to use the knowledge and information acquired in planning actions. The word **Contemplate** refers to self-reflection or self-evaluation on how one is using motivation to work through, and with, cultural interactions. This entails that one stays alert and remains aware of one’s cultural surroundings. The term **Do** represents adaptability and ability to perform new strategies based on new cultural influences.

One might confuse Cultural Intelligence with other approaches such as Emotional and Social Intelligences. However, research proves that having Emotional and Social Intelligence doesn’t necessarily mean that one has Cultural Intelligence. Thomas and Inkson (2003) wrote that with difference to emotional and social intelligence, cultural intelligence refers to the influence of cultural factors and their impact in intercultural interactions. Let’s consider empathy as an example. It is critical to have empathy to be able to have Cultural Intelligence. However, it is also critical to have cultural awareness to make the connection between the two.

### 3. Leading with Cultural Intelligence

Do leaders shape culture, or are they shaped by it (Bolman and Deal 2008)? Research in general gives evidence that it works both ways. What is sure is that leaders who lead with cultural intelligence are more effective in today’s multicultural society as culture influences leadership styles (Bass and Bass 2008). What inhibits this are internal obstacles such as fear, preconceived ideas and ego, which create an environment which is resistant to change. In turn, this results in a leader hiding behind procedures to fight the change rather than embracing it. As Offermann and Phan (2008) argue, an obstacle leaders face is that they are often oblivious to their own cultural prism through which they perceive others.

As stated by David Livermore (2015), Cultural Intelligence is an
approach which can be learned by almost anyone. However, having certain personality traits ingrained makes a big difference. A leader who is a visionary and a strategic thinker, demonstrates values through actions, and empowers others will certainly be more capable to lead with Cultural Intelligence. Most studies about the relationship between leadership styles and leading with Cultural Intelligence concentrate on the best leadership style being transformational leadership (Ismail, Reza and Mahdi 2012; Keung and Rockinson-Szapkiw 2013; Lee Veasna and Wu 2013). This would be beneficial for both educators and students in a multicultural school.

Research Methodology

Bassey (1999) gives an extensive and detailed definition of educational research, which he later simplified.

*Educational research is critical enquiry aimed at informing educational judgements and decisions in order to improve educational action.* (Bassey 1999: 39)

Specific emphasis should be put on the phrase Bassey uses, which is to ‘improve educational action’. The main aim of educational research should be to make improvements to actions leaders and educators carry out to provide a better educational experience for our students. The research being carried out in this small-scale project is based on theoretical research as it is not intended to induce change. It is linked to theoretical ideas which have been discussed in the literature review. Furthermore, in relation to the purpose of this study, it is aimed at giving a picture of how a leader needs to use cultural intelligence in a multicultural school setting. A blend of quantitative and qualitative methods of inquiry have been used in this project.

*A quantitative piece of research will be able to use analytical and inferential statistics, while a qualitative piece of research will be able to target those groups in institutions or clusters of participants who will be able to be approached to participate in the research.* (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2007: 112)
In fact, I used a mixed method using both quantitative and qualitative methods to benefit different aspects of my research. Quantitative methods of inquiry were used to gather information from teachers related to their observations from their experience in the school where the study was carried out. On the other hand, qualitative methods of inquiry were used. More insightful information was acquired from the Head of School through a questionnaire with open-ended questions, and from parents through interviews.

1. The Surveys, the Questionnaire and the Interviews

The survey which was sent to all educators in the school in question was done online. These included the school's Class Teachers, Learning Support Educators, Kindergarten Educators, the Nurture Room Teacher and the Complementary Teacher. These educators could all give valid insights as they all interact daily with students of different cultures in the school. Furthermore, they all form part of the team led by the Head of School. Therefore, they could all provide the information needed. Questions chosen were elicited from the Literature Review. The survey comprised of two questions to obtain relevant demographic data and four structured questions with multiple-choice answers. The objective was to establish concepts and their measurement. In this study the concept focused on cultural intelligence and related leadership skills. The survey questions represented points around which this research was conducted and therefore provided categories for the organization of observations and ideas (Bulmer 1984). In fact, questions were designed to relate to what the educators observe and ideas they have related to the research questions.

An unstructured questionnaire was given to the Head of School. This questionnaire included two questions to obtain demographic data and four open-ended questions for the Head of School to answer on his own terms (Cohen et al. 2007) and therefore no dichotomous questions were used in this case.

I felt it was crucial to involve parents too in this research project. However, it was impossible to involve all parents since this was
a small-scale project. Therefore, semi-structured interviews were carried out with 3 parents from different cultures: one parent from Malta, one from an Arabic country and one from a European country. This offered a more flexible approach. These parents were chosen as they could all communicate easily without the need of a translator. Mothers were chosen as they participate more in the daily life at school of their children, and hence are able to give more valid answers.

The intention for including interviews in this study was to have a particular medium for enacting or displaying people’s knowledge of cultural forms, to indicate how people make sense of their social world and of each other (Barker and Johnson 1998). The two foreign parents were asked the same questions. The Maltese parent was also asked the same questions; however, some questions were adapted as her perspective was obviously different than that of interviewees who were not born in Malta. The objective was to discuss the parents’ interpretations of the world in which they live, and to express how they regard situations from their own point of view (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2007). This was done for the interviewees to tell their own story, being that they would understand the questions asked in probably varying subjective ways. Interviews were carried out in the month of February. Ethical issues were also considered. The procedure for the interview was explained well. I made sure the interviewees were happy with the location of the interview. Permission was requested to record the interviews for later reference. For the sake of confidentiality, no names were used in this research.

2. Triangulation

The triangulation was ensured by acquiring information from different stakeholders by use of both qualitative and quantitative research methods. This provided a deeper understanding of possible different interpretations and validation on the concept of cultural intelligence in leadership. Therefore, as Gorard and Taylor (2004) demonstrate, the value of combining qualitative and quantitative methods is that it provides a more comprehensive picture of the findings.
3. Positionality

It is of high importance to consider one’s positionality when conducting a research project. The researcher’s view of the world or ‘where the researcher is coming from’ concerns ontological assumptions (the nature of social reality), epistemological assumptions (the nature of knowledge) and assumptions about human nature and agency (Sikes 2004). It can also lead to self-reflection and a learning journey for the researcher. My position in this research study relates perfectly to the literature review, in the sense that it is essential that a leader in an educational setting leads with cultural intelligence. This is ever so relevant to me, especially because I was brought up in Australia and attended a multicultural school myself.

Our school has evolved into a multicultural community. Out of the 170 students in the school, there are 54 students who were either born abroad or have a foreign parent/s. This amounts to 31.8% of the school population. This situation brings along a mixture of cultures all under the same roof, especially because there is a mixture of cultures in every class from Kinder 1 to Year 6. In our school there are approximately 14 prominent cultures from different countries namely: Italy, Nigeria, Eritrea, Ghana, United Kingdom, Romania, Estonia, Syria, Tunisia, Morocco, Vietnam, Philippines, Pakistan and obviously Malta.

I profoundly believe that a leader in this situation needs to have personality traits which are conducive of Cultural Intelligence. This will enhance the creation of a positive learning environment in which everyone feels welcome. Furthermore, the educational institution will become one that celebrates cultural diversity.

4. Piloting

The survey, questionnaire and interviews were piloted to ensure reliability, validity and practicability (Oppenheim 1992). The survey was piloted with a primary school teacher employed at another government primary school. The questionnaire was piloted with another Head of Primary School from a similar
catchment area to our school. The interview was piloted with a parent of both Maltese and foreign background to provide feedback from both Maltese and foreign points of view. After evaluating the process and results during the piloting, only one minor change needed to be made to the interview questions.

Findings and Discussion

1. The Educators’ Point of View

The online survey was sent by email to 24 educators at our school. Twenty-one educators answered the questions and submitted the survey. The questions were chosen to acquire some knowledge about their point of view of the need of Cultural Intelligence in the leadership styles in a school which is becoming multicultural.

More than half of the respondents have been educators at our school for more than four years and are equally distributed from Kinder 1 to Year 6. Having 85% of the respondents answering from a point of view of someone who has seen the school change gradually into a multicultural school is beneficial as it makes the results more substantial. Every class in our school has students from more than one culture, some more than others. When asked about their view of our school being multicultural, 90% of the respondents answered that they strongly agree that due to the many students from different cultures enrolled we can describe our school as a multicultural school. The educator who answered in disagreement approached me after submitting the survey to explain herself. She felt that she had to disagree as her understanding of a multicultural school was that certain differences would be defined between students and she perceives our school as such a united family that it is as if there are no differences between cultures.

When asked if the increase of different cultures has affected positively the leadership style of the Head of School, 67% answered maybe, meaning they are not sure if the Head of School’s leadership style has been affected positively by the
increase of students from different cultures. On the other hand, 14% of the respondents think that it has, whilst 19% think that it has not. This might relate to the fact that it is not that easy to understand certain cultural differences. In fact, this point also emerged from a question which was asked to the Head of School in the questionnaire he answered, which I will refer to later on. Notwithstanding all this, 100% of the respondents believe that leading with Cultural Intelligence is important for a leader to be more effective in a multicultural school. This is a very encouraging result.

The last question was asked to find what the educators think about personality traits a School Leader would need to have to be better at leading a multicultural school. The respondents were given the opportunity to choose more than one personality trait from a list presented to them which included a mixture of traits which are needed to have Cultural Intelligence as found in the literature review, besides a couple of traits which would hinder having Cultural Intelligence. It was interesting to see that the findings show a majority chose personality traits that are conducive to having Cultural Intelligence. Seventeen out of twenty-one respondents think that being an inspirational leader who is a strategic thinker enhances being a better leader in this scenario. Twelve out of twenty-one respondents think that the leader should be one who empowers others, whilst eleven out of twenty-one respondents think that being a visionary and having strong personal values are important for a School leader to be better at leading a multicultural school. It is not clear why one respondent chose the traits ‘fearful’ and ‘egocentric’. The results from these findings show that the educators in our school feel that there should be a significant positive relationship between Cultural Intelligence and transformational leadership. In fact, the positive personality traits included are some of the main descriptors of a transformational leader. Leaders who have a higher level of Cultural Intelligence exhibit a higher level of transformational leadership style, which suggests that individuals with high Cultural Intelligence are able to lead and to manage more effectively in multicultural environments (Keung and Rockinon–Szapkiw 2013).
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2. The Head of School’s Point of View

The Head of School was provided with an unstructured questionnaire. He identified himself as male and that he has been a Head of School at our school for no less than eight years. His understanding of the meaning of culture revolves around the music and the arts, whilst also encompassing language, religion and social habits of people of different nationalities. With regards to constraints, challenges and benefits, he described the main constraints as accepting different cultures in their entirety, especially social habits, whilst benefits include the exposure of Maltese students to different cultures to enhance their social and educational experience, developing a positive and healthy attitude towards each other. When asked if he needed to change his leadership style to adapt to these cultural changes, he said that he made it a point not to be prejudiced or show lack of courtesy with foreign families; however, he admitted it was not always easy as it was sometimes overwhelming. Upon being asked about Cultural Intelligence and Leadership, The Head of School referred to the importance of becoming knowledgeable about other cultures, whilst showing empathy, providing a sense of community at school, fairness and confidence.

Evaluating these answers takes me back to the literature review. Adapting to cultural change might come naturally to a leader; however, leaders should be provided with training for the acquiring of skills needed to be able to adapt to it if this is not the case. If a school leader had to use Moua’s (2012) Cultural Intelligence Model and go through the ABC process: Acquire, Build, Contemplate and Do, then it would be easier for the leader to lead a multicultural school and not need to feel they had to ‘accept’ different cultures as stated by the Head of School in his answer to question four of the questionnaire.

3. The Parents’ Point of View

Three parents were chosen to be interviewed for this small-scale project. Three different mothers were chosen from different cultural backgrounds. The interviewees will be named Mother A, Mother B and Mother C. Mother A is Romanian, Mother B is Tunisian, whilst Mother C is Maltese. I chose these
three cultures to represent the point of view of someone from a European country, an African country and our own country, to compare and contrast between the three.

The answers from the survey and the questionnaire with the Head of School provided a basis for the choice of questions to be used for these interviews. The set of open-ended questions which were asked were the same for Mother A and Mother B. The questions for Mother A and B were asked in Maltese to facilitate understanding and their answers were also given in Maltese. However, I then translated the transcripts to English. The first two questions were of a demographic nature and were the same for all three mothers. They were first asked how they would describe their ethnicity, during which they answered by giving some information about their culture. The descriptions given evidenced how proud they all are of their ethnicity and also how highly and positively they think of their culture. When asked how long their children have attended the school in question, one of the mothers stated that her child has attended for less than a year, whilst the other two parents have had their children attend the school since Kinder 1.

Mother A and B were asked to talk about their concerns or worries, if any, when they were applying for their children to start attending a Maltese School. It is meaningful to know at this point that the son of Mother A has autism and hence why she referred to the fact that she appreciates that her son is not discriminated against at school, after he had been through negative experiences in his previous school. Mother B gave a lot of importance to values and reciprocating respect. On the other hand, Mother C was asked to talk about her concerns upon observing an increase of students from different cultures attending our school. She emphasised that as long as no changes were made to her way of life, all was well. At the same time, she did not want to create judgemental conclusions of what will happen before she experienced the cultural changes. All three mothers felt that there is a strong element of respect between different cultures. This reflects very well on what the school is doing to create an atmosphere of wellbeing for all.

It was also important to inquire if the families of Mother A and B had to make any personal changes to adapt to the
Maltese culture. Both Mother A and Mother B did not feel they needed to change. In fact, Mother A stated that she has been mistaken for being a Maltese. It was interesting to see that at first Mother B thought that she was being treated differently due to disagreements; however, she realised that this is part of being human. On the other hand, Mother C was asked how she thinks people from other cultures should adapt to the Maltese culture. It is her opinion that foreigners should adapt to the Maltese culture even though, according to her, it seems as though some do not feel the need to adapt.

Finally, I felt I needed to ask all three mothers if there was anything they would change in our school for it to adapt better to cultural changes. The same question was asked as I wanted to see what their different points of view would be. An interesting suggestion was given by Mother B regarding the support needed for the school to have a better awareness of other languages besides English for communication reasons. All three mothers stated that they are very satisfied with how the school is adapting to being multicultural. Various activities and events which were organised at school were mentioned. They felt these activities and events enhanced a sense of unity, bringing different cultures together as one.

The parental interviews also showed that parents and their children feel a sense of belonging at school. It is evident that the information given by the parents shows that the school’s ethos and strategies have effectively created a learning environment in which everyone feels they have a special place. These findings all show that managing an organisation is not merely a series of mechanical tasks, but also a set of human interactions (Bell and Harrison 1998; DuFour 2004).

The fact the school used in the project is small and a small number of parents were used to gain insight on this subject might have been a limitation to this study. However, its purpose was that of a small-scale project.

**Recommendations and Conclusion**

It is without doubt that this small-scale project has shown that Cultural Intelligence (referred to below as CQ) should
have a very important role in the leadership styles used in a multicultural setting.

Leadership style is a function of leader CQ; however, the nature and magnitude of the role played by leader CQ varies considerably between leadership styles in general and, particularly, in terms of both the statistical and practical significance thereof. (Solomon and Steyn 2017)

Therefore, there is a positive relationship between having Cultural Intelligence and knowing how to use it, and leadership styles which need to be adopted to enhance all this and reap the benefits. When considering the information gathered from teachers and parents, it is evident that adopting empowering and transformative leadership is crucial to create a community at school in which justice prevails.

For all this to be effective, the transformative leadership should be carried out using both behavioural cultural intelligence and cognitive cultural intelligence. Due to this, many School Leaders might need more training in this regard, especially in how to enhance one’s Cultural Intelligence. Having a Senior Leadership Team in a school consisting of at least some members who are already adept at using their cultural intelligence helps to create a feeling of unity at school. However, some members of the Senior Leadership Team might need more support in dealing with multiculturalism. Therefore, training and professional development for Heads of Schools needs to be effected.

A difference should also be noted between what is experienced inside the school and what is experienced outside of the school environment. In their interviews, the parents showed concern that certain situations in their community create conflict between cultures outside of the school. What is mostly important, in my opinion, is that this does not affect what happens inside the school. The school ethos would be strong enough that it celebrates multiculturalism in every way and no one would feel different.

If one had to go back to the research question and other issues
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which were mentioned in relation to it and the literature review provided, one can conclude that Cultural Intelligence should be a factor of effective leadership styles in Maltese primary schools, in which multiculturalism is growing. Leaders should seek to use their Cultural Intelligence to be more effective in our schools, which are becoming or have become multicultural and are therefore creating the need for change in leadership styles. If a leader has a personal difficulty in accepting various cultures in the school, then this will create a ripple effect, causing even greater problems and conflicts.

The aim of any school leader should surely be to create a positive learning environment for all students. Therefore, leading with Cultural Intelligence would definitely leave a positive effect in a school with students from different cultures.

To lead and manage people effectively requires more than just power and pressure. It requires a range of personal qualities and interpersonal skills. The effective deployment of these qualities and skills in a genuinely supportive and congruent way generates an ethos and culture that fosters learning. It can promote the intrinsic motivation in people at all levels in a school which is the only sure way of securing continuous improvement. (Johnston, 1999: 8)

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Facing the Challenge of Preparing Maltese Schools and Students for a Multicultural Society: An Opportunity to Redefine Identity in the Light of “Otherness”

Mr Edward Wright
Abstract

Collaboration between the Secretariat for Catholic Education (SfCE) and the production house Cam Productions International (CPI) in organizing multiculturalism seminars for Year 10 students in all Maltese schools aims at providing opportunities for discussing, sharing and reflecting upon experiences of multiculturalism, and listening to experiences of people coming from diverse cultures. This paper will report the results of a mixed-methods research that has been carried out over the past three years to assess and evaluate the effectiveness of such an educational project, and understand how its design can be improved. Interviews with students and teachers during and after the seminars, small group discussions during the event, and focus groups organized after, were all transcribed and analysed narratively and thematically. The results point towards the students’ need to learn what multiculturalism really means and about the enriching challenges it offers, how these can be dealt with in ways that nurture self-growth in the light of “otherness”, and fruitful dialogue that enhances holistic identity. These results also highlight the need for students’ voices to be heard with respect to their experiences of multiculturalism, a first step towards the reduction of their prejudices and stereotypes. These voices could lead to increased acceptance of and greater respect for the “other” and the realization that conviviality of diverse cultures is both inevitable and necessary for holistic identity and wellbeing in today’s demographic landscape. The paper’s narrative literature review evaluates different models of multicultural education that adopt inclusive and democratic approaches, and are based on principles of democracy, equality and impartial justice. Such educational projects can increase students’ open-mindedness and open-heartedness towards people from other cultures, facilitating the path towards responsible citizenship as students seek to use their positive energy and virtues for the common good of our multicultural society.

Keywords:

multiculturalism education, personal identity, collective identity, otherness, critical reflection, qualitative research
Introduction

Only last year a very important and much awaited research study by educators like myself, about the health and wellbeing of foreign children in Malta, was published. It was commissioned by the Office of the Commissioner for Children and conducted by the centre for resilience and socio-emotional health within the University of Malta. The study, *A Passage to Malta: The Health and Wellbeing of Foreign Children in Malta*, focused on children under the age of 18 and had a sample of 2,332. It found that a quarter of Maltese students are still hesitant and resistant to multiculturalism, only half of them have non-Maltese friends, the social interactions of Maltese children with foreign children is quite limited overall, and most of the Maltese students prefer to spend their time with their native peers. Such results, which will be further discussed in this paper, indicate the crucial importance and relevance of multicultural education, or education for multiculturalism, in Maltese schools.

The need to address the increasingly multicultural reality of Maltese society has long been felt by many segments of the Maltese population, including politicians, parents of foreign students, and educators in different capacities and with different specializations. This need has been reflected, as will be later discussed at more length, in a number of important documents that have been published over this last decade or so, including educational policy documents and those related to or focused on the national curriculum. While it is true to say that there were some really good and commendable educational initiatives to modify and/or upgrade syllabi of various curricular subjects, and a few projects that tried to address the challenges of multiculturalism, it is also fair to say that much remained to be desired in this respect. This does not only represent my own humble opinion of the current situation of multicultural education, but also that of many of my colleagues: teachers, learning support educators, members of school/senior management teams, as well as politicians, including some whose responsibilities are directly related to the reality of multiculturalism. For example, on the 18th January 2017 the Minister for Social Dialogue, Consumer Affairs and Civil Liberties addressed a conference and stated that at a time in which diversity in Malta is increasing, intercultural dialogue
is the way forward. She stated that interculturalism should become part and parcel of Malta’s national identity, with Malta becoming a more ‘open space’ where acceptance of diversity would lead to less stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination, racism and xenophobia, and greater equality. The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) draft document has been criticized for being too narrow and tending to limit diversity to multiculturalism. At the same time, under the cross-curricular theme ‘Education for Diversity’, the importance of the 2006 UNESCO document was acknowledged, namely respect for

the cultural identity of the learner through the provision of culturally appropriate and responsive quality education for all. It provides every learner with the cultural knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to achieve active and full participation in society which enable them to respect, understand and show solidarity among individuals, ethnic, minority, social, cultural and religious groups and nations. (UNESCO Guidelines on Intercultural Education 2016)

Unfortunately, according to The Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX), Malta scored only 19 out of 100, thus sliding into the “unfavourable category” (MIPEX, 2015). While this same document had quoted Malta's National Curriculum Framework which claims that education must place “diversity as one of the core principles across the curriculum for all pupils to learn about minority groups, different languages and cultures” (section on Education), it also argued that Malta left a lot to be desired in policies on teacher training, especially in multicultural education; supporting schools and their multicultural reality; supporting migrant pupils to integrate especially through policies that address immigrant cultures, language and parental outreach (MIPEX, 2015).

Addressing the Maltese Context and Responding to its Needs

Only last year a very important and much awaited research Back in 1964, the year of Malta’s Independence, Malta’s Migration Microcosm states that Malta served as a stopping place, as well as a stepping stone for migrants throughout
history (1964: 211). Geographically, its strategic position lured people towards it. Brown and Mayo (2016) and Briguglio and Brown (2016) discuss at length several reasons why so many migrants from different parts of the world reach our shores in both legal/regular and illegal/irregular ways.

Moreover, over the last decade Malta’s foreign population more than doubled, making up more than 12% of the entire Maltese population. In 2018, the number of non-EU nationals who were registered in Malta stood at 27,238. Most of these arrived from North and sub-Saharan African countries as well as from the Middle East, Russia, Eastern Europe, and the Philippines (NSO 2018a).

This fast-changing scenario brought multiple opportunities for this small Mediterranean island, especially a significant contribution to its economy. But it also created challenges, including “the welfare of children and young people who in many instances have little say in what is happening in their lives in such circumstances” (Cefai et al. 2019). As at 2018, foreign children comprised 9.7% of the whole student population in all Maltese schools, i.e. around 9,000 students (NSO 2018b). It has been long known through research that children living in a foreign country face more academic, emotional and social challenges, and while some may develop the necessary level of resilience to face them, the wellbeing and mental health of many others are negatively affected. Post-traumatic stress, depression and anxiety seem to be among the most common and prevalent consequences (OECD 2018). Some significant challenges that can lead to such undesired consequences are the lack of access to educational, psychological, social and medical services, difficulties in social inclusion, as well as cultural and linguistic barriers (Cefai et al. 2019).

Faced by such a critical scenario, over the years educational institutions have been active and proactive. The National Minimum Curriculum (NMC) (MoE 1999) had already dedicated one of its main foundational principles (Principle 2) to Respect for Diversity. It also acknowledged and addressed the reality of multiculturalism under other fundamental principles, such as An Inclusive Education (Principle 8) and The Strengthening of Bilingualism in Schools (Principle 10). The NCF (MoE 1999)
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highlights Malta’s growing cultural diversity, ... It acknowledges and respects individual differences of age, gender, sexual orientation, beliefs, personal development, socio-cultural background, geographical location and ethnicity. (MoE 1999: 32)

It affirmed that diversity should be respected in all its forms, that an inclusive environment is to be promoted, and that the right policies should be in place.

The Network of Experts in Social Sciences of Education and training (NESSE) in 2008 focused on effective strategies to integrate migrant children in schools across Europe. It mainly showed that migrant children create a new normality in schools and thus, multicultural education must be addressed at three levels: the societal level (macro level), the school level (meso level), and the individual level (micro level). It started by making crucially important statements about the “urgent need for more knowledge sharing on the nature and effectiveness of cultural and social integration processes” (3), and raised questions on the real effectiveness of educational systems, policies and practices that promote the integration of migrant children.

In 2019, the Ministry for Education and Employment (MEDE) published A Policy on Inclusive Education for schools: Route to Quality Inclusion. It offered a definition of Inclusive Education that is holistic and all-embracing, providing common space for collaboration to all educators and practitioners, families and community members.

Education and Multicultural Education: Definition and Scope

In different times and ages various scholars have framed education as an essential aspect of the common good. In their view one of the main aims of education is not only to serve the individual learner but also the public who benefits from having well-educated citizens, professionals and leaders (Baldwin 1963; Dewey 1916; Giroux 2013). However, when one looks at
the contemporary experiences of a diverse range of people, one can easily observe that education has frequently fallen short of such ideals (Bigelow 2008; Spring 2013; Zinn, 2003). For many people the school will always represent a significant place that produced numerous pleasant memories, intellectual safety for the exploration of identity issues, and a conducive space for holistic growth leading to a sense of wellbeing. On the other hand, unfortunately, for others it represents the pain that transpired from various forms of violence and negligence and/or boredom (Acuna 2014; Adams 1995; Anderson 1988; Gonzalez 1996; Lomawaima and McCarty 2006; Takaki 1989; Watkins 2001; Woodson 1933). Such significant discrepancies are indicative of and reflect those societal injustices that ought to be addressed by education and the curriculum, rather than caused by them.

One of the main aspects and facets of education which is significant for every democratic society, is multicultural education. A number of writers and researchers agree that it encompasses three distinct but interrelated dimensions, namely a country’s ethnocultural demographic diversity, a political philosophy that recognizes and accommodates differences that result from such a diversity, as well as public policy means and measures that are instrumental in achieving objectives rooted in the above political philosophy (Berry 2013; Ng and Bloemraad 2015; Debono 2017). Multicultural education has come to be based on and inspired by Banks’ threefold definition of multicultural education (Banks 2004):

a. as a philosophy that encompasses a set of values and beliefs representing cultural and ethnic influences on identities, experiences and lifestyles. Thus, such a concept embraces the values of educational equality, excellence and cultural pluralism;

b. as a process that approaches this facet of contemporary education as a systematic and continuous component within a more eclectic understanding of education;

c. as a catalyst for educational reform in terms of structure and procedure, that is reflective of the
Thus, multicultural education must transpire from a political commitment that first and foremost seeks to engage and develop "new models of democratic citizenship, grounded in human rights ideals, to replace earlier uncivil and undemocratic relations of hierarchy and exclusion" (Kymlicka 2010: 101). If Maltese society opts to move toward an understanding of itself as characterized by cultural diversity that is integral to its national identity and enriches it, as the above documents have revealed, then it must be fully committed to end every form of racism and oppression. These include those related to gender, disabilities, class, age, and sexual orientation. Only in this way would it be doing its utmost effort to abolish any structural element in society that generates or strengthens socio-economic inequalities (Bennett 2011; Naiditch 2013).

Thus, multicultural education must lead to the idea that differences in the classroom must be embraced and pedagogical practices developed to reflect the affirmation of differences in how students learn, communicate, and relate to each other (Fortuin 2014; Naiditch 2013; Thijs et al. 2014).

The Project: An Opportune Challenge

It was for this reason that the project was initiated, precisely to address a lacuna in our curriculum that teachers had long been complaining about.

1. Project History and Details

In its first year (scholastic year 2015–2016) the project took the form of school–day seminars for Year 10 (Form 4) students. The target audience was limited to only Church schools. The project was intended to be ‘informally piloted’ in its year of inception, and after its analysis and assessment, it was to be decided whether it was to be kept. This project remained a yearly appointment in the calendar of the schools which participated in it. Feedback initially collected was informal. From its second year, it was decided that it would be offered to
Chapter 4: Effective International and Multicultural Practices in Schools and Society

all Maltese schools: State, Church and Private.

Table 1: Seminar programme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9.00 am</td>
<td>Video Clip 1 (FACES + Quotes for Reflection)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.05 am</td>
<td>Introduction by Fr. Louis and Edward (AIMS of seminar)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.20 am</td>
<td>Ice-Breaker (PHOTOETHNICITY)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.30 am</td>
<td>Drama Part 1 (X‘NISTA’ NAGĦMEL JIEN?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.45 am</td>
<td>Small Group Discussions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.30 am</td>
<td>BREAK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.00 am</td>
<td>Video Clip 2 (FACES + Quotes for Reflection)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.05 am</td>
<td>Drama Part 2 (X‘NISTA’ NAGĦMEL JIEN?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.35 am</td>
<td>Student sharing and discussion on Drama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.45 am</td>
<td>PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF A REFUGEE (in the form of an INTERVIEW)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.20 pm</td>
<td>QUESTIONS, REACTIONS AND CONCLUSION</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Designing the Seminar

The seminar activities, resources and pedagogy were decided upon by the organizational team, and the project was launched first to educators, learning support educators (LSEs), senior/school management team members, Education Officers, directors, assistant directors from the Directorate for Lifelong Learning (DLLL) and service managers from the SfCE, as well as the then-President of Malta Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca.

Designing the Short Drama

A dramatic script entitled X‘NISTA’ NAGĦMEL JIEN? (WHAT IS MY ROLE?) was produced specifically for the seminar. It was written and acted out in Maltese, with English subtitles. It was based on everyday life social situations that many 14 and 15-year-old students encounter, and written in an ordinary kind of language that they can relate to. Feedback was sought
from two groups of Year 10 (Form 4) students prior to writing and after finalizing the script it was well received.

**Designing Suitable and Adaptable Pedagogical Activities**

The two short video clips showing the faces of people of different nationalities, races, and ethnicities, manifesting their diverse cultural characteristics, were produced for the photoethnicity ice-breaking activity. These were projected on a slide and students had to match each face with its corresponding nationality.

**Creating a Resource Pack for Educators**

A resource pack was also prepared for the educators who attended the seminar with their students. This included all the resources used in the educational multiculturalism seminar, that is, a compact disc with the short drama, the photoethnicity ice-breaking activity, and the two short audio-visual clips featuring faces of people of different cultures, religions, races and ethnicities, as well as the seminar poster and programme. A list of questions that educators could use to facilitate the small group discussions, and to process the drama and the students’ personal experiences in these spaces were also included.

**3. Participation**

The table below shows the number of schools and students who attended this seminar over the past six years since its inception.

**Table 2: Details for seminar attendance**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scholastic Year</th>
<th>Schools</th>
<th>Church Schools</th>
<th>State Schools</th>
<th>Private Schools</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2015-2016</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016-2017</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017-2018</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018-2019</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>324</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019-2020</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL number of students</strong></td>
<td><strong>1240</strong></td>
<td><strong>1007</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Assessing Success Through a Mixed-Method Research Methodology Embedded in Professional Practice

After the successful running of these multiculturalism seminars for two consecutive scholastic years (2015–2016, 2016–2017), it was decided to collect feedback more systematically and extensively. By publishing the results, the project would become more attractive to schools. The research was to be practice-based. Inspired by the seminal book *The Reflective Practitioner* by Donald A. Schon (1984), who in turn was influenced by Dewey’s book *How We Think* (1933), Schon’s basic notion is that through reflection-in-action “our knowing is in our action, we can gain verifiable insight into our thought processes” (Schon 1984:49).

1. Data Collection Through Mixed Methodology

Mixed methodology was chosen as the data collection method. Before the seminar teachers from the participating schools were asked to gather some of the students’ expectations of the seminar, and to gauge from their class discussion, the students’ understanding of multiculturalism and their attitudes towards various aspects and facets of this ever-stronger Maltese reality. Following the seminar a short questionnaire was distributed to students and teachers to fill in, at home or at school. In-depth interviews were conducted with 8 teachers, 3 LSEs and 15 students over these last three years. Following their experience of the seminar, two of the students interviewed were Maltese nationals with African origins, while another two were foreigners who had been in Malta for no more than three years. In some schools there were follow-ups of the seminar and students were asked to produce creative artefacts that demonstrated what they had learned and reflected upon. Moreover, towards the end of scholastic year 2018–2019, two focus group discussions were held, one for students and the other for educators. The following table summarizes all our sources of data collection:
Table 3: Sources for data collection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Source of feedback</th>
<th>Feedback collected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Teachers’ feedback from students before seminar</td>
<td>135 students from 2 Church and 1 State school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Feedback from short group discussions during seminar</td>
<td>Taken from the notes taken by one of the two facilitating educators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Questionnaires to teachers and students and educators after seminar</td>
<td>255 distributed, 186 collected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>In-depth interviews after seminar</td>
<td>Conveniet and purposive sample</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>8 teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learning support educators</td>
<td>3 Learning support educators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students</td>
<td>15 students (9 girls and 6 boys from schools (3 Church, 1 State and 1 Private)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Observations and informal feedback during seminar</td>
<td>Taken by myself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Charts, storyboards, and other created objects made by and exhibited by students</td>
<td>4 schools: 3 Church and 1 State.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Two focus groups, one with STUDENTS and one with EDUCATORS</td>
<td>Focus group 1 – 8 students (5 boys and 3 girls from 2 Church schools)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Focus group 2 – 5 educators (3 teachers and 2 LSE from the same 2 Church schools)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Thematic and Narrative Analysis for Data Analysis and Interpretation

All the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim, with the consent of all participants. In the case of the students, we requested both their parents’ consent and their own signed assent forms, after sending all these forms with information sheets to their parents through the schools. The organizational group then met several times to read through, analyse and discuss the
findings in the spirit of Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR), and through the use of NVivo. Apart from these transcripts, we also had available all the material mentioned in the table above. Throughout this process the team came up with a number of broad general categories and related themes that emerged from the data, and then reached a consensus on the most prevalent ones that we had to start focusing on. Each one of these (outlined and discussed below) was further sub-divided into themes that came across clearly through words, phrases and/or expressions that were used frequently and/or interpreted by the participants in similar ways, to imply the same or similar meaning/s. This thematic analysis was combined with a narrative analysis of the participants’ life experiences that also followed Paul Ricoeur’s stages of interpretation, namely: distancing, appropriation, explanation and interpretation (Ricoeur 1981). These increasingly deeper levels of interpretation and understanding occurred over four two-hour sessions that the team held at St. Joseph’s Home.

Results and Discussion

This section will report the main results of this study and discuss their significance and relevance to achieve its aims.

1. Unfounded Fear of the Young Generation: The Main Causes of Cultural Negative Attitudes and Stereotypes

Many of the students’ comments before they actually attended the multiculturalism seminar clearly expressed their fear of foreigners, especially Arabs (“Arab”) and Africans (“Afrikani”), especially the dark-skinned (“is-suwed”) and those who come to our island by boat (“dawk li jiġu bid-dghajsa”). When asked for the reasons for such fear, many comments linked foreigners, especially the above-specified categories, to terror, fundamentalism, deviant activities, crime, and jobs that otherwise could be held by Maltese people (“jieħdu/jisirqu xogħol il-Maltin”). Many comments even associated these foreigners with the imposition of Islam in every territory they land on (“ixerrdu l-Iżlam kulfejn imorru”), and a strong effort to take over the country (“jieħdulna over lil pajjiżna”). Some comments even revealed that when students were asked how
they could feel so sure of such ideas, they asserted that these were “undeniable facts” (“dawn fatti”), and for a few of them they should not even be discussed but simply acted upon (“kif tista’ tmerihom?”) by the respective authorities. These negative attitudes, false perceptions and misconceptions, as well as negative attitudes and stereotypes were also very evident from the students’ comments during the seminar, and from what some students said during the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with reference to their previous (before seminar) or current (after seminar) attitudes and beliefs.

2. The Causes of Fear: Lack of Correct Information, Fake News in the Media and Family Influences

From all the above-mentioned sources of data, it comes out very clearly that for the great majority of students the main sources of information about foreigners and immigration, legal and illegal, are family members, the various media (especially the news bulletins on the local stations, and the social media, especially Facebook), peers they encounter in different social contexts, and school (especially PSCD and Social/Environmental Studies). Some students even referred to one or more family members as racist, or at least manifesting some xenophobic beliefs and attitudes. Many students even admitted during the seminar and/or in-depth interviews and/or focus group discussions that they never or rarely check their sources when they read news on the media, and they tend to take as true what they listen to at home and/or when they are with their closest and most trusted friends.
Chapter 4: Effective International and Multicultural Practices in Schools and Society

3. Need of Students to Engage in Intercultural and Multicultural Dialogue in Educational Contexts

When students were asked about their previous opportunities for intercultural and multicultural encounters and dialogue, formal and informal, many of them said that they had very few such opportunities, or none at all. Moreover, the few opportunities that they actually mentioned occurred through encounters with classmates at school, through informal encounters and functional relationships in various social contexts, both in Malta and abroad, and especially through the media. Interesting to observe, only those who had opportunities for meaningful personal encounters expressed why they feel lucky and/or transformed in their attitude and/or persuaded to think and act otherwise.

Meta sirt naf lil Charlene jiena bdejt inħares differenti ... lejn dawn in-nies I mean ... suwed u persuni ta’ razza differenti...qabel vera kienu jbeżżghuni ... (very emotional) ... imma mbaghad bdejt iktar nithassarhom ... (Student 3 – In-depth Interviews, repeated from seminar)

Meta titkellem magħhom ... u speċi ta (thinking) ... issir tafhom iktar...tinduna li huma vera orrajt u tal-ġenn... u tista’ anki titghallem minnhom...jien hekk ġrali (Student 6 – Focus group, repeated from seminar)

4. Need for Cross- and Extra-Curricular Initiatives in Multicultural Education

It was very significant and equally important to observe that many students as well as educators (teachers and LSEs) acknowledged that much remains to be desired in
multicultural education, despite all genuine efforts made in recent years to address multicultural issues through various curricular subjects. Many students of those interviewed and in the focus groups expressed their satisfaction with the fact that this seminar gave them an opportunity to listen to the voices of real people who had suffered so much racism, xenophobic comments and attitudes “hurled towards them”, as well as lack of respect and entitlement to their basic rights. However, they were equally disappointed at the fact that they had never experienced multicultural education before in this way, despite the repeated “homilies” they are obliged to listen to every day on the values of solidarity, altruism, empathy, acceptance, brotherly love, fruitful dialogue, compassion, and many more. All of them agreed that the interview with Sunday or Happy, Nigerian refugees who had arrived in Malta after a very long painful journey, only to meet more pain in the various forms that racism takes, was the most effective part of the seminar. The large majority of them also said they really liked the drama, and more importantly that it managed to provoke their critical reflection. Some even said that the ice-breaking exercise and the drama could not have been better activities to stimulate a good discussion in the small groups.

5. Need for Multicultural Education
Addressed at Parents and Families

In answering the questions ‘Do you ever fact-check what you listen to in your home environment?’, and ‘Have you ever disagreed with your parent/s and/or other family members about issues related to multiculturalism?’, these were a few responses provided by three different students:

Dak li niddiskutu d–dar huwa l–opinjoni taghna ... mhux kulhadd ghandu dritt ikollu opinjoni fuq dawn l–affarijiet? (Student during seminar)

Jiena nahseb li missieri ghandu ræjyn fuq hafa affarijiet ... missieri jahdem ix–xatt u jilhaqa’ ma’ hafa minnhom u allura jaf x’ikun qed ighid (Student during seminar)

U tghid mhux ser nitkellem hekk id–dar? Kieku jtajjarni missieri! (Student 2 – In–depth interview, Student 7 – Focus group)
This clearly shows that students don’t critically reflect, or fact check what is being discussed at home, highlighting the importance to engage parents and families in the discussion on multiculturalism as the data clearly shows that certain opinions, preconceptions and misconceptions held by the students prior to the seminars may have been strongly influenced also by their families. Teachers and learning support educators were especially emphatic on the need for parents to be educated in their understanding of and perspective towards multiculturalism. One comment by a teacher with more than 30 years in the profession sums up nicely what educators feel and believe:

>Aħjar nibdew mill-ġenituri...ghax hafna velenu li ghandhom (referring to students) minnhom jiġi ... (Teacher 2 – In-depth interview, Teacher 1 – Focus group)

>U inti jekk id-dar ħlief mibgħeda u razzżimu ma jisimghux, x’tistenna? (LSE 1 – In-depth interview, LSE 2 – Focus group)

### 6. Need for Multicultural Education

**Addressed to Teachers and Educators**

Most of the teachers and LSEs acknowledged there have been positive attempts over these last few years to make amendments and modifications in the curriculum to provide space and opportunities for multicultural education, but much remains to be desired. They described these efforts as ‘sporadic’ and ‘too little’ and ‘not always so effective’. They also acknowledged that a greater lacuna in the educational system is the lack of knowledge and pedagogical training that educators have in multicultural education, and they expressed their concern that such a lack of professional preparation and formation may sometimes lead to more harm than good when addressing issues related to multiculturalism.

>Jiena kieku nkun nixtieq naghmel iktar ...imma mhux faċi...u kultant tikkonfondi x’taqbad tghid u taghmel ... (Teacher 7 – In-depth Interview)
7. Need for Leaders to Commit More to Action and Implement Policies

All the teachers and learning support educators who were interviewed expressed the view that more (‘much more’ for some) could be done on the part of leaders to implement policies and act in ways that promote more positive and open attitudes towards people of other cultures and races. While documents and policy papers are important, there must be more commitment to action, which could only be manifested in clear plans and projects that enflesh and animate the ideas and ideals in the documents. The educators were referring to official political and educational documents, white papers and position papers. Some educators even vented their frustration at the fact that so much money is spent in launching these documents and project a positive image of the country, and then so little is invested in supporting educational projects and initiatives in multicultural education. Some of those interviewed were frustrated that even to attend this seminar proved to be so difficult due reasons that they described as “easy excuses” that could be easily sorted out. One teacher even said that it had become a “nightmare” to make arrangements for such important extra-curricular activities that complement the syllabi content, and even address this content in student-friendly language and student-centred pedagogies. Furthermore, some expressed great disappointment at the fact that we still have educational administrators and school leaders who do not see any value:

*L-ewwel hafna bla bla bla u omeliji fuq valuri ... u mbaghad biex taghmel xi haża trid titkarrbilhom ... l-importanti hu biss li l-iskola tidher sabiha u li taghmel xi hağa ... (Teacher 5 – In-depth interview, Teacher 3 – Focus group)*

Two LSEs also stated clearly that they expect the authorities to be more sensitive to issues related to language and religion when it comes to foreign students. They need to make sure that the appropriate structures are in place, and the necessary measures are taken so that LSEs and teachers could use code switching effectively, be more sensitive to religious differences, apply more effective and inclusive classroom pedagogies,
know how to provide opportunities to foreigners to voice their stories in a safe environment, and lead by example in demonstrating empathy and offering compassion to such voices.

Ahjar jaraw (referring to people in authority, in politics and education) kif jistgħu l-għalliema u l-LSEs jitgħallmu jikkomunikaw b’lingwi differenti u jirrispettaw u jitkellmu fuq ir-reliġjonijiet differenti, l-iktar l-Islam... (LSE 4 – In-depth interview, LSE 2 – Focus group)

Hemm bżonn ikunu ċerti li l-istejjer ta’ studenti bħal dawn li jbatu ħafna... joħorġu... imma l-iktar li l-għalliema kapaci joholu l-klima ... u jkunu komdi huma ... (LSE 2 – In-depth interview, LSE 3 – Focus group)

Recommendations

1. Pressure on Political and Educational Authorities to ‘Walk the Talk’

A recent local study (Debono 2017) has shown that the shifts in Maltese demographics due to increasing multiculturalism have brought about a significant level of contestation of identity markers, especially religion and language. Foreign students attending Maltese schools are asking questions related to culture and identity, thus provoking serious reflection on citizenship. Thus, the stronger multicultural reality in schools is pointing towards the increasing need for Maltese authorities, in both politics and education, to deal urgently with issues related to national identity markers, especially those that centre around rights, duties, and equality. This reality also needs to be framed in the broader geo-historical context of increasing global migration and multiculturalism that inevitably redefine the notion of citizenship. This has come to be understood as based on rights and duties that transpire from a sense of belonging to a particular territory to one that stretches beyond territorial boundaries. In fact, a number of scholars argue that the time is ripe to develop universal rights and duties as well as a shared civic vision for the peaceful conviviality of people coming from different cultures. Such logic ensues from the fact that more people are having legal
rights of residence in different countries, including Malta, but then their political rights and access to welfare services are limited (Merry 2012; Revi 2014; Turner 2016). The growing number of such ‘partial citizens’, even referred to as ‘denizens’ (Turner 2016), brought about by increasing globalization and international migration, calls urgently for a new way of defining citizenship. Consequently, this has multiple implications on how to cultivate citizenship in schools in relation to all the values that constitute true democracy. It is in fact the opinion of a number of educators that political and education authorities need to show more determination, creativity and commitment in the implementation of the values set out in official documents. In the words of one of the teachers interviewed, they need to “walk the talk.”

2. The Professional Formation of Educators in Multiculturalism

Teachers’ behaviours and perceptions are crucially important in multicultural education provided by schools. Many scholars, such as Banks (1998), Blum (2014) and Marry (2012) emphasize the significantly critical role that teachers play to foster an inclusive environment in the school, through which the different identities of pupils are respected. Such scholars even see this role as one of the major challenges that teachers will face in the twenty-first century.

Most educators in this small-scale study expressed their feelings of helplessness and lack of confidence when faced with situations in which students felt excluded from the education process and for which the teachers were not prepared. Moreover, they believe that this situation could only get worse as multiculturalism increases. The teachers’ comments and my own long experience as an educator show that educators do instinctively develop coping methods to be as inclusive as possible. However, such methods are not adequate, and at times even ineffective. On the other hand, this study revealed the educators’ will and determination to learn more about cultural diversity and multicultural education, provided they are given the opportunities. This was very encouraging. However, they do not automatically translate into inclusive behaviour. In the same way that mere contact between students of
different national and ethnic backgrounds does not translate automatically into meaningful contact, teacher contact with pupil difference, by itself, does not automatically translate into an inclusive teaching and learning experience. Moreover, professional formation needs to aim more at providing all educators with opportunities for exposure to cultural diversity, inclusive education and competence in multilingualism. Through these, educators must have opportunities to explore and work on their own stereotypes, biases, prejudices, fears and anxieties. Following such a crucial stage, it must be prioritized that educators develop competences to facilitate linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms, and support students who have experienced trauma and manifest emotional and behaviour difficulties (Cefai et al. 2019).

Educators also need access to a variety of multimedia resources, that are tailormade to the needs of Maltese society, to feel more empowered to address topics and issues related to multiculturalism. They even acknowledge the need for professional training in this regard. In fact, all of those interviewed showed a strong sense of gratitude for the resource pack that was provided with all the resources used in the seminar. As one teacher explicitly stated,

\textit{tassew grazzi ta’ dan il-pack ... ghax ftit ghandna rizorsi tajbin hekk ... li huma bil-Malti u bl-Ingliż ... u tailormade ghas-sitwazzjoni taghna. (Teacher 8 – In-depth interview, Teacher 3 – Focus group)}

3. Addressing Real Needs Through the Educational Curriculum

It came out very clearly from the in-depth interviews and the focus groups that there are several aspects of the educational curriculum that need to be addressed in relation to multiculturalism. Among these, the aspects that seem to be most urgent and perceived as crucially important, are related to language (a language policy), religion (especially multicultural religious education), flexibility of syllabi of various subjects to adapt to the Maltese multicultural reality, and the promotion of more openness to multicultural/intercultural encounter, both within the confines of the school as well as
outside its physical space. The last of these aspects will be specifically explained in the next sub-section.

With regard to language and religion, the foreign students interviewed were very clear in emphasizing the importance of both these cultural aspects to their sense and level of integration in the school and wider community:

*When my friends speak to me in English, even though they don’t feel so comfortable, I really feel their respect, and that they want be to be their friend...it makes me really happy, feeling wanted... (Foreign Student 1)*

The 2008 NESSE Report had already acknowledged the importance of language in the process of integrating migrant children, especially in its relation to the educational process. It had explicitly asserted that

*... education as a core element of integration happens largely through the medium of language. Language is not only a precondition for participating successfully in core societal institutions of the receiving society, but also for developing private relations with members of the native population” (NESSE 2008: 75)*

One of the two foreign students interviewed had a Christian mother and a Muslim father. With respect to religion she sincerely shared her belief that:

*Religion should never be a barrier ... I feel lucky enough to appreciate both Christianity and Islam as my mum is a Christian and my dad a Muslim ... I go to both Catholic churches and to the mosque... I only wish that more Maltese students learn about all religions so they appreciate them more ... and feel more respect ... (Foreign Student 2)*

In *A Passage to Malta: The Health and Wellbeing of Foreign Children in Malta*, it is strongly recommended that “schools with a high number of foreign students, particularly asylum seeking ones would benefit from additional resources to address language issues ...” (Cefai et al. 2019: 19) and that
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“multi-lingualism for all’ as a resource for all students in the classroom” (ibid. 22) should be introduced. This would require that “all teachers will have an adequate knowledge of language and language learning and support within a school culture which embraces multilingualism and values the multi-lingual resources of foreign children” (ibid. 22).

4. More Cross-cultural and Extra-Curricular Initiatives for Pupils and Educators

It has been very evident in this ‘research through practice’ project that both educators (teachers and LSEs) and students feel the need to participate in more educational activities that promote multicultural dialogue and intercultural personal encounters. All students interviewed individually and in the focus groups, as well as teachers and LSEs, had words of praise for the multiculturalism seminar. When asked specifically what they most liked about it, they mentioned:

- the opportunity to get out of school and mix with students from other schools in a different environment that is well adapted to the educational activity;

- the fact that they could mix with foreign students and listen to their voices and stories, especially those marked by suffering and anxieties;

- the fact that the seminar was conducted in English when there were foreign students, and the drama had English subtitles. This, they said, showed concrete respect, sensitivity, and a genuine effort and commitment for inclusion;

- the safe space they experienced in which they could voice themselves irrespective of what their prior opinions and ideas and prejudices were. As one student expressed it, “we could just be ourselves for some time, without fear of judgement.”

All such requests are on the same wavelength as the recommendations made in A Passage to Malta: The Health and Wellbeing of Foreign Children in Malta:
More school related initiatives and projects organised together by Maltese and foreign students, projects with other schools and with schools in other countries, particularly those countries perceived negatively, as well as peer mentoring and befriending schemes, would be useful in this regard. (Cefai et al. 2019: 23)

5. Multicultural Education for Parents

The 2008 NESSE report had clearly indicated the effect of the interplay between educational policies and the pupils’ family background. It also states clearly that this fact must always have a direct and strong bearing on both teacher training and the initiatives taken by school and educational leaders and authorities. Vassallo (2018) argues that the more initiatives taken for the multicultural formation and education of parents of native students, and the more involvement of all parents, especially foreign ones, in school activities, the faster and smoother the process of multicultural integration becomes. This research ascertains the importance of having school educators who are very sensitive and attuned to the potential offered by diverse family cultures which can be nurtured through initiatives and projects that create effective home-school partnerships and recognize the multitude of advantages that such an endeavour generates in schools. Schools are ideal spaces for the encounter of families from diverse cultures. This puts great responsibility on schools to foster a positive, warm and welcoming environment to all families. This must always include the consideration of the multiple cultures, languages, socio-economic backgrounds, beliefs, race and religious practices of all the parents (Van Wyk and Lemmer 2009; Vassallo 2018). Cefai et al. (2019) call schools and local communities to come up with activities that encourage Maltese parents and families to value diversity and appreciate its benefits, including activities for and by Maltese and foreign parents in schools and intercultural community hubs, where Maltese and foreign families, children and young people can come together and spend quality time together. (Cefai et al. 2019: 23)
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6. Taking the Media by the Horns and Promoting Media Literacy Education

Very interestingly, while reflecting on why they liked the drama and believed it was effective to stimulate thinking and motivate discussion, some students specifically mentioned the facts that they could relate to the plot and the language used, and also that all the characters were adolescents like them. In fact, two of these students suggested that multicultural education can be really effective if combined with initiatives in media education that includes media production, for young people like them.

Student: Jiena l-media vera nhobbha ... u kieku jkolli čans li jien u shabi niktbu script u naghmlu film fuq razzizmu ... il-ostra kieku...nifqghu l-iskreen

Interviewer: Għalfejn?

Student: Għax ghandna hafna esperjenzi ta’ razzizmu ... nitaqghu ma’ hafna suwed u barranin ... uhud minnhom hbieb taghna ... u naraw hafna jghajjruhom u jabbużawhom...

Interviewer: Le ... imma ma niddejjaqx niffilmja u nirreċta ... u anki shabi ... anki dawn il-barranin li nafu ... (Student 7 – In-depth interview)

Through Media Literacy Education (MLE) as a curricular subject, and also as an empowering tool that can be employed by other subjects in the school curriculum, underrepresented populations can be empowered to voice their stories, perspectives and beliefs. Through MLE they have the possibility of expressing their critiques of dominant media messages and simultaneously produce multimedia texts through which they challenge stereotypical representations of themselves as they are disseminated by the various mass and social media that mark their lives significantly. Intrinsic in such an analysis is the recognition of, and a will to resist, the power differential between marginalized communities and mainstream media (Legrande and Vargas 2001; Naiditch 2013). Media tools for educational purposes have powerful potential to promote and
enhance diversity, as well as its many facets and meanings. In addition, given the context of diversity that characterizes schools across the country, one would think that digital media would be used almost as an organic response to our current societal needs (Page 2008).

MLE is an optional subject in schools and should become compulsory in line with the urgency that the media-saturated world we live in calls for, as well as the culture we inhabit. Through synergizing content and process, through inquiry and creativity, MLE can really help young people become more literate on issues of diversity, especially in interpreting and responding to the messages through which the media represent and portray different aspects of social diversity. The urgency for media literacy is in today’s world felt even more due to the vast generation of information that students are immersed in, fake news and conflicting messages they are bombarded with, and the new forms of media that are constantly being developed and inhibit (Naiditch 2013; Race 2015).

Conclusion

The primary aim of this small-scale research study was to serve as a valuable source of feedback for the multiculturalism seminars for Year 10 students in all Maltese schools, that have been ongoing since the scholastic year 2015–2016. Moreover, the threefold scope of this paper was to give visibility to this project, to do our little but crucially important share to address the needs of an increasing multicultural society through education that promotes comfortable encounter and dialogue with ‘otherness’, and finally but not the least, to increase the enthusiasm for more initiatives in multicultural education that are constantly inspired by, embedded in, and leading to further critical reflection. However, it must be made emphatically clear that such a project, like other similar ones that we genuinely hope will be created in the near future, is only meant to be a catalyst for structural, pedagogical and procedural changes in education that continuously reflect larger changes in society and address them adequately: formally, non-formally and informally. All research in this regard shows that truly effective multicultural education should never be understood as a
method or program, but as a progressive course of ideas that lead to actions.

It is our firm belief that the more practice-based research projects there are in multiculturalism and media education, that are shared in the true spirit of a truly democratic society, the more we would all together be contributing for the formation of a society based on justice, equity, inclusion and active citizenship.

References


Cefai, C., Keresztes, N., Galea, N. and Spiteri, R. (2019) A Passage to Malta: The Health and Wellbeing of Foreign Children in Malta, research study has been conducted by the Centre for Resilience and Socio-Emotional Health at the University of Malta in collaboration with the Commissioner for Children who commissioned the report.


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Author Information


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Janice Darmanin born in 1978 in Sydney, Australia, had her primary education in an Australian multicultural Church school. She continued her education in Malta and graduated from the University of Malta with a Bachelor Degree in Maltese and Early and Middle Years. Her career as a primary school teacher involves 11 years of teaching Personal and Social Development in around 12 different schools. In 2012 she was appointed Assistant Head of a Primary School which faces various challenges due to socio-economic reasons, apart from it becoming a multicultural school. She is currently reading for her Master Degree in Applied Educational Leadership with the Institute of Education.
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**Fr Mark Ellul** is the Headmaster of the Archbishop’s Seminary. Observing the development of students and how they form a specific values hierarchy to effectively integrate within society and being the headteacher of one of the Catholic schools in Malta led the author to link his philosophical and theological background with his educational training. His field of research is character and values education and he is reading for a Ph.D. in Educational Leadership at University College, London.

**Jane Farrugia Buhagiar** taught for more than sixteen years in various schools. She worked as a teacher trainer and participated in the Summer Institute at the National Writing Project (NWP) site at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. She was part of the consultative working group on migrant learners in schools in 2013 and was involved in the setting up of the provision of language induction processes for newcomer learners. Since 2011, Jane has been involved in the coordination and management of five EU co-funded projects which focused on the training of teachers, the provision of language teaching and parental support for the integration of newcomer learners. Jane is currently an Education Officer within the Migrant Learners’ Unit.
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Christine Fenech is the Senior Manager Research and Development at the Institute for Education, which aims at supporting teachers, parents and students to address challenges they face through evidence-based guidelines. Previously she worked as Manager Research and Policy at the National Commission for Further and Higher Education. She holds a Magister Artium in History of Art, Political Science and Philosophy from the Free University of Berlin and a Master’s degree in Comparative Euro-Mediterranean Education Studies from the University of Malta.

Dr Viviana Premazzi holds a Ph.D. in Sociology of Migration, an M.A. in Intercultural and Interreligious Conflicts Management and is an Accredited Lecturer in Intercultural Management by Hofstede Insights. She has worked as a consultant and trainer for corporations and not-for-profit organizations in Europe, North America, Africa and the Middle East. She is the founder of Global Mindset Development GMD Malta, a Senior Lecturer in Cultural Intelligence at the University of Malta and a trainer for the Institute for Education. She has provided expert advice in education, security, HR, marketing and management to international organisations, government agencies, national and international companies, NGOs, charities and social enterprises. She has been a researcher and lecturer for universities and research institutes in Europe and North America. She strongly believes in the power of Edutainment (Entertainment Education) and of learning by doing. Her aim is always bridging research with practice and fieldwork.

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Lara Sammut is a professionally trained teacher specialising in the teaching of foreign languages. She is passionate about continuous professional development and the teaching of foreign languages. She has participated in various fora involving migration and the coordination of EU funded social cohesion projects. She covers the duties of Education Officer at the Migrant Learners’ Unit within the Ministry for Education and Employment, in Malta.

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Christiana Sciberras teaches Chinese (Mandarin) to Year 7 students at St. Margaret College (Cospicua) and to adult learners at the Directorate for Lifelong Learning. She has also taught study units in Chinese culture at the University of Malta. Christiana is a Ph.D. candidate in the area of Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language at the University of Southampton (UK). Her main research interests are Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language, teacher identity, development of teaching resources, multilingual education, and modern Chinese language and cultural studies.
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**Dr Anita Seguna** currently works both as Manager Student Affairs and as Lecturer with the Institute for Education. She has worked in the educational field since 1993 performing various roles: Teacher, Head of School, Head of Curriculum Design and Professional Learning, Mentor, Tutor and Lecturer. She is also a part-time lecturer at the Friedrich-Alexander University of Erlangen-Nürnberg and the University of Malta. She believes in the importance of andragogy and a hands-on approach in the professional development of teachers. She is also the author of several books in Maltese for children and teenagers. Anita Seguna holds a Ph.D. from Friedrich-Alexander University of Erlangen-Nürnberg. In her Ph.D. thesis, she investigated internationalisation in secondary schools in Malta. She ascertains that internationalisation is a process that integrates a global perspective into the schools’ development.

**Dr Damian Spiteri** has been active in the education field for the past 25 years and has worked as a school social worker, teacher, guidance teacher, and lecturer. He is a senior lecturer in Health and Social Care at MCAST and has also lectured in Social Work at the University of Malta, University of Strathclyde and the University of York. He has a keen interest in the area of multicultural education and has presented widely on the topic in various university settings in Europe, America and Asia. He is also the author of a book on multicultural education that was published by Palgrave Macmillan and is now working on his second book on Migrant Education that will be published later this year.

**Brian Vassallo** B. Psy (Gen), Dip Inc Ed, M.Sc. (UK) taught the first year of primary education at Mariam Albatool School for fourteen consecutive years. In 2014 he was assigned the role of Assistant Head of School, a position which he still occupies. He is a graduate in Psychology and in Inclusive Education from the University of Malta and a Master’s graduate in Educational Leadership from the University of Leicester (UK). He is also a visiting lecturer at the University of Malta where he contributes within the Master’s in Access to Education, the Master’s in Human Rights and Democratization of Governance, and the Diploma in Inclusive Education. He is the author of numerous research papers published locally and in renowned international journals. His research interests
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### List of Abbreviations

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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>AIHW</td>
<td>Australian Institute of Health and Welfare</td>
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<td>AWAS</td>
<td>Agency for the Welfare of Asylum Seekers (AWAS)</td>
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<td>CLIL</td>
<td>Content and Language Integrated Learning approach</td>
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<td>CLT</td>
<td>Community Liaison Team</td>
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<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<td>ICT</td>
<td>Information and Communication Technology</td>
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<td>ILO</td>
<td>International Labour Organisation</td>
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<td>IMA</td>
<td>Identity Malta Agency</td>
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<td>INT</td>
<td>Interviewee</td>
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<td>LLAPSI+</td>
<td>The Language Learning and Parental Support for Integration Project</td>
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<td>MEDE</td>
<td>Ministry for Education and Employment</td>
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<td>MIPEX</td>
<td>Migrant Integration Policy Index</td>
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<td>MLU</td>
<td>Migrant Learners' Unit</td>
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<td>NCF</td>
<td>National Curriculum Framework</td>
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<td>NSO</td>
<td>National Statistics Office</td>
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<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
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<td>PISA</td>
<td>Programme for International Student Assessment</td>
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<tr>
<td>SDG</td>
<td>Sustainable Development Goal/s</td>
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<td>TCN</td>
<td>Third Country National/s</td>
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<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
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<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization</td>
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<td>UNHCR</td>
<td>United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees</td>
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List of Abbreviations
This edition of the Malta Journal of Education contains the research presented at the first Annual Symposium of the Institute for Education on the subject of Internationalisation and Multiculturalism in Maltese Education and Society in response to the recent influx of international students in Maltese schools.