Inside Secondary Schools
A Maltese Reader

edited by

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Contents

Foreward

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In introducing this collection of readings meant to help guide trainee teachers in their reflections on secondary schools in Malta, I would like to draw on my own professional knowledge and experience to provide further stimulus for thought and debate. Critical thought and debate is of the essence in all things educational, for in my view, one of the first and most important lesson to whoever takes up a career in teaching is that in education, there is no perfectly right solution and possibly no absolutely wrong proposal. It is important to keep this in mind, as we attempt to consider Malta's secondary school in the light of the development of the educational system over the years.

The present structural and cultural makeup of the Maltese secondary education sector cannot be fully understood if the analysis overlooks the historical context which moulded its development. Maltese secondary education did not develop in a systematic and coherent manner. During particular epochs, boundless enthusiasm was evinced towards particular policies and models, only to be followed by strategies leading to a different orientation.

Indeed, the development of Maltese secondary education is characterised by having been for too long a bone of contention in Malta's adversarial political controversies, and, during the last quarter century, by being subjected to a panache for quick fixes by implementers of policy.

It might be surprising to some to learn what a high profile Maltese Education has had in Maltese political history. Maltese political activity has its genesis in 1880 with the foundation of the Reform Party and the Partito Antiriformista. The major issue between the two opposing factions was the choice of the language of instruction to be used in Maltese schools. For sixty years (of the intervening one hundred and nineteen years), the controversy raged on – Should the language of instruction in Maltese schools be English or Italian? Was there a place for the teaching of Maltese and through Maltese in the curriculum?

During the other fifty nine years of this epoch, one can discern two distinct phases. During the fifties and sixties, endeavour concentrated on the widening of educational opportunities – which development was uncontroversial. In 1956, the number of places available at the Lyceum (the only state secondary school for boys) and the Grammar Schools (the three state secondary schools available for girls) was doubled.

This measure was followed by the opening of a Secondary Technical School for Boys and for Girls, respectively, in custom-built new school plants. The precedent was set of tracking secondary school intake in separate streams. Entry into both streams was through a specific selective entry examination – a set of examination sessions for each stream. In 1970 universal secondary education was introduced by the setting up of

Area Secondary Schools to cater for those eleven year olds who had not managed to obtain a place at the Lyceum, Grammar Schools and Secondary Technical Schools.

Secondary school intake was now tracked into three streams. Hardly had the system had time to settle down, when policy orientation changed and changed and changed yet again. The development of Maltese Secondary Education was not only buffeted by a revolving door approach to policy making but also found itself in the frontline of national polemics of a different nature from the pre-war controversy over the language question: Should the state school sector be organized on a comprehensive model? Was the overnight implementation of the model counterproductive? Did the abolition of examinations within the system create more problems than it tried to solve? Was the setting up of trade schools with vocational tracking at an early age a wise course? How did the unification of the tripartite system into one comprehensive system fit in with the concurrent establishment of a trade school stream (both developments dating to 1972)? In 1981, was the reintroduction of a selective Junior Lyceum stream in the state sector and the comeback of summative examinations (with a vengeance) right or wrong? Was the sudden predilection for narrow band schools: Junior Lyceums, Area Secondaries, Trade Schools, Junior Craft Centres (now defunct). Opportunity Centres, Church schools and Independent schools, right or wrong? What should the status of Church schools be?

A lot of energy was spent in resolving these issues and the present day structure and culture of Maltese secondary education is the result of these long drawn out political polemics, with the concomitant oversimplifications and lack of objectivity. The debates were carried out on a black-white perspective. Groupthink set its own dictates on the participants: 'If you are on our side, you fully subscribe to our point of view – which point of view is perfectly right. On the other hand, if you belong to the other side, you fully subscribe to the other point of view – which point of view is absolutely wrong.'

During the last five years or so, a new dawn seems to be breaking. A bipartisan approach to developments in education is starting to evolve. The centre is aware of the traumas that past switches in education policy taken in an unprepared manner, without adequate consultation and consensus building, that were induced at the time. The centre is also aware that the lingering influence of these traumas still preys on the public at large. Thus it is careful on what change strategy should be adopted and on the manner in which such strategy should unfold. Collective amnesia and a failure to learn from past history would do educational development no good.

Furthermore, there has been maturation in the way long term strategic planning is taking place. In 1996, a novel concept was adopted. It was accepted that a couple of years to think through fundamental changes of a cultural nature was needed, followed by a further year of evaluating the reactions to the draft proposals. This three year design phase gave scope to concept clarification and consensus building prior to implementing the changes that will unite stakeholders rather than divide them.

Change management is still in its infancy, but hopefully it has come to stay. The new approach has been around for too short a time span to ensure that the new beginning does not hold false promise. Our aspiration is that this change paradigm will become the norm – change that is convergent, pragmatic (i.e. not ideological), bite sized and

well planned. Unfortunately, the predilection for quick fixes is a very hardy survivor in our culture. Time will tell whether the new beginning will nourish or will succumb to the impatience of the inexperienced and the inexpert.

A caricature metaphor for the present secondary system would tend towards an assembly line factory of subject teachers trying to pump a set syllabus into a class of pupils… concentrating highly on examination coaching to the detriment of educational mastery. To complicate matters, the system has tried to redress this perception by introducing an avalanche of activities and initiatives to an extent that a new grievance is emerging. Classroom teachers are justifiably starting to complain that disruptions are so frequent, that programmed learning and student-teacher relationship building is becoming very difficult in the limited time available.

In my opinion, making an inroad in changing this state of affairs is a tall order that will require concentrated effort for the best part of a decade (provided we are wise enough not to conduct diversionary and divisive litigation which saps our energy).

I hope to see the evolution of a Secondary school curriculum that will introduce the concept of imparting competencies and values and not focus solely on the acquisition of knowledge. And, even in the limited field of acquiring knowledge, I hope to see pedagogy shifting its emphasis from examination coaching to real mastery of content. These objectives should he reached through an organic school programme that allows scope for individual school/class preferences, whilst not tolerating lackadaisical random unfocussed toing and froing.

The curriculum will emerge as the core feature on which the education provision of a school will be judged. It may be a surprise to some of our readers that this self evident truth is not as yet the norm. - The secondary school curriculum should expect the pupil to more and more participate and take charge of her/his learning.

- The secondary school curriculum should provide enough time for schools and pupils to process and cover content in an educationally meaningful way, meet the objectives of the learning programmes and satisfy the individual needs of pupils.

- The secondary school curriculum should pay special attention to the age characteristics of 11-16 year old children, through curricular variation to the age group being taught. One should keep in mind. that even within this age bracket there are at least, two distinct phases: 11-13 year olds, and 13-16 year olds.

- Whilst keeping in mind that the teaching-learning approaches and acquisition of knowledge from the cultural domains necessarily have to take consideration of the common features of children in the same age group, the developmental rate of biological and psychological maturation differs from individual 10 individual. Secondary school programmes will be fully aware of that self evident statement.

The Maltese secondary school will be empowered and will be given support to develop three fundamental features within its educational provision:

1. Whilst building on a common foundation, schools will evolve differentiated learning and teaching opportunities. Such opportunities help pupils fully evolve their individual personality, commensurate with their abilities, age characteristics, development and experiences in school and out of school.

2. The school will seek to impart the acquisition of knowledge in various fields as a means for students to develop their intellectual faculties and their ability to act, learn and communicate independently. In-depth processing of this knowledge will contribute to the development of erudition and a well-balanced world concept, helping young people find their way in the local environment and in the world at large.

3. The school will seek to promote the development of personality through education. This can be realised if education programmes, methods and teaching-learning processes ensure a colourful school life. Scope would be given for pupils to develop their self-awareness, creativity and ability to collaborate and co-operate with others.

Is the proposed agenda a fundamental shift in everyday reality that will produce a genuine quality secondary education provision? Or is the proposed agenda a cosmetic exercise that will fail to make meaningful changes?

On a different plane, will the initiatives be stalled through resistance to change? Through holding on to an ingrained mindset? Will the concerted effort that is necessary to make any sort of difference be diverted into debating even more radical issues and changes?

The answers to these questions will unfold over the coming years. Alternative futures for Maltese education are beckoning and we shall be collaboratively moulding one of those alternatives. I will hazard one guess: Developments will have made enough headaway to ensure that the teachers of tomorrow will be more at home with the proposed scenario than the teachers of today. It was for that reason that I was more than glad to accept the Faculty's invitation to write this brief Foreword to the present collection of readings, aimed at guiding students of education as they start their field placements in schools. Your individual commitment, competence and flexibility will be crucial factors in determining whether the proposed agenda is realised, or otherwise.

Charles Mizzi, M.Sc.
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MALTESE EDUCATION SYSTEM

MARIO TESTA

Welcome the challenge and the future is yours.

Education in Malta has always been on everybody's agenda as a result of the importance to provide a holistic approach to education. Scholars have argued, time and time again, for reforms to take place at one stage or another and for standards to be achieved while putting the learner at the centre. This would ensure that the country is equipped with the required manpower and the expertise needed in the different fields. The call has always been for an educational system which seeks to nurture schools into learning communities where the emphasis is not only on teaching and learning for exams but for the optimum development of the individual. In line with a holistic view of education, such a system would equip students with the necessary skills to be able to move on from one field of study to another if desired.

Following the 1999 National Minimum Curriculum and the myriad of interpretations to it by those in the field – teachers in particular – a new educational system which provides for every learner to succeed began to take root in the minds of policy makers. An educational system which embraces flexibility, focuses in real terms on child-centred approaches and above all empowers educators to have all the necessary skills and knowledge to provide each individual – using the right pedagogies- with the kind of education which helps in the real development of the students' potential. Discussions and ideas continued to flow and the bold and important decision to network state primary and secondary schools into Colleges came to fruition in 2008.As Bentley rightly put it: "Transformation will only occur by shaping and stimulating disciplined processes of innovation within the school system, and building an infrastructure capable of transferring ideas, knowledge and new practices laterally across it… The organisational form which can give depth and scale to this process of transformation is the network" (Bentley, 2005:3)

Ten Colleges were created pushing forward a system with the sole aim to further decentralisation, networking, sharing of good practice and the raising of standards. A system intended to move away from the isolation of schools and a competitive frame of mind to a joint effort to perceive education as pertaining to all and not only to the most able: "Networks are purposeful social entities characterised by a commitment to quality, rigour, and a focus on standards and student learning. They are also an effective means of supporting innovation in times of change. In education, networks promote the dissemination development of teachers, support capacity building in schools, mediate between centralised and decentralised structures, and assist in the process of re-structuring and re-culturing educational organisations and systems". (Hopkins, 2005:5)

Networking takes place on a number of different levels and among various educators. The aim is always to share ideas and learn from each other. Teachers from different

schools within the College meet to build up projects together, visit each others' schools, exchange expertise and involve students in joint activities to enhance learning and further develop the College feel. Various institutions give support and express interest to work with the schools. The latter on their part seek such networking since it is always enriching for the schools to experience the expertise that these can offer. This is also in line with the philosophy of lifelong learning and holistic education which is very much advocated in all schools. "In the field of education, we now understand that organisational isolation inhibits learning" Ministry of Education (2005a:37)

The document For All Children to Succeed – A New Network Organisation for Quality Education in Malta, published in June 2005 is worth looking into, perhaps not in isolation so that a wide view of the richness of thought behind any reform will be more understood and appreciated. One may also take a look at some of the various documents and policies published throughout the years such as – to mention a few - 'Strategic Plan – National Curriculum on its Way' (March 2001), 'Guidelines for Special Examination Arrangements for Candidates with particular Requirements, (Sept 2002), 'Creating Inclusive Schools' (September 2002), 'Knowing Our School' (May 2004), 'Inclusive and Special Education Review' (June 2005), 'For All Children To Succeed – A Network Organisation for Quality Education in Malta' (June 2005), 'Career Guidance Policy for Schools' (October 2007), 'Transition from Primary to Secondary Schools in Malta – A Review' (September 2008) and National Policy and Strategy for the Attainment of Core Competences in Primary Education' (January 2009), and others which one can have access on the government website. These policies and documents which were made available to all state schools as well as Church and Independent schools have all contributed in providing quality education and serve as a guiding tool towards the raising of standards in all schools.

Each College embraces a number of primary and secondary schools in a particular geographical area. The primary schools are feeder schools to the secondary schools. Colleges have adopted a name for themselves, schools began to acquire greater autonomy, develop their own ethos and establish themselves as quality schools where research and professional development are key elements to the raising of standards: "An effective professional learning community has the capacity to promote and sustain the learning of all professionals in the school community with the collective purpose of enhancing pupil learning". (Bolam et al., 2005)

One can openly say that this is a reform looked at as a socially friendly reform emphasising the need to provide every opportunity to all children, irrespective of their educational attainment, to partake to the full in all learning opportunities. A reform which embraces quality education for all, respects diversity and an inclusive education, doing away with streaming and introduces mixed ability classes at all levels.

For the first time Heads of School do no longer work in isolation. A Council of Heads which meets once a month has been established. This Council is chaired by the College Principal of the respective College. The fundamental function of this Council is the empowerment of Heads of School through the opportunity to share ideas and good practice; understand the different structures that work in primary and secondary schools; facilitate the transition of students from primary to secondary; discuss

strategies for the improvement of educational standards at the schools and for the holistic educational development of the student as well as come up with strategies to improve the professional development of staff. Heads of School together with their respective assistant heads of school are the ones to ensure that: "Successful school improvement... depends on an understanding of the problem of change at the level of practice and the development of corresponding strategies for bringing about beneficial reforms*."* Fullan, M (1992:27)

A huge investment has been undertaken to prepare the teachers for change. Therefore training and support became key issues for a successful reform in education to take root. Training has become an embedded feature in the life of the teacher at school and all effort has been made to sustain it. Teachers have responded very positively to this and are asking for more. Indirectly, this has made the teacher to want to learn more and be more equipped and professional in his career. The focus throughout this training is to equip the teacher to be able to help students acquire the necessary skills to learn in an enjoyable way while developing into self-directed learners who do not necessarily need to rely on adults to continue their learning process. This will undoubtedly encourage students to keep on learning and studying.

Of course this necessitates a commitment from the teachers. The latter must work in a structure and adhere to practices that motivate the students. Yet they are encouraged to be proactive and innovative in the different strategies they need to adopt for differentiated teaching to take place resulting in portraying schools as "emancipatory, democaratic and empowering social organisations" Cefai C, Cooper P & Camilleri L (2008).Teachers are expected to ensure that they are not focused on teaching the syllabus but teaching the student and thus encourage self-directed learning from the school. The whole class approach has now to give way to more active engagement by the student according to his/her needs.

To further consolidate the idea of the College system and eliminate any sense of undesired competition among the students, the system did away with the Junior Lyceum examination and replaced it with the benchmarking examination. This brought about a radical change in the way students are assessed, eliminated tensions and competitions and gave a much clearer profile of the students' academic level. Thus an important paradigm shift came to light. A way forward towards a system which no longer expected of the child to fit an educational system but on the contrary, the system must fit the child. The purpose of examinations is now to highlight the achievement of each learner and not to stream or select pupils. The introduction of oral-aural assessment in English and Maltese and all assessments will be recorded as levels of achievements.

With immediate effect and coupled with this reform we have witnessed the launching of the National Policy and Strategy for the Attainment of Core Competences in the Primary Education aimed to: "ensure that by the end of the primary cycle of compulsory educational experience in Malta, all learners will have mastered the required Core Competences in fulfilment of their potential. To this end, develop a National Policy and Strategy for the acquisition of these Core Competences by the end of Year 3 and for the provision of intervention when required, to enable all learners to access the full curriculum and become lifelong learners". (2009:11)

Achievement leads to enjoyment, self-fulfilment and the need to know more. It is the aim of educational leaders to have an educational system which eliminates absenteeism from school so that, as much as possible, dropouts – if any - will be few and far between. The drive to upgrade schools both from a physical aspect as well as on an academic level has long been going on but with the setting up of Colleges this has been accentuated and we are seeing tangible results. Coupled with this is the careful choice of professional personnel for leadership positions since this plays a major role in the proper management of the schools.

Research claims that pre-schooling education is of utmost importance and besides the great investment being made at kindergarten level it is worth noting that in certain schools <u>Child Centres</u> for children under the age of three have been opened where mothers can leave their children in the hands of well trained personnel. These are play centres where these little ones can start socialising and experiencing the world of fantasy and fun in an educational environment.

Support Services

Each school within every College has the support of various Assistant Directors, Service Managers and Educational Officers who work closely with the schools. Other support services include that of the College Administrator, College Precincts Officer, College Support Officer, Psycho-social Services Team which includes the Counsellor, College Prefect of Discipline, Social Workers, Trainee Career Advisors and Trainee Counsellors who work hand in hand with other professionals such as the guidance teachers, SEBD specialists, psychotherapists and other professionals according to the necessity of individual cases. Added to these one also comes across medical staff as well as customer care services which also offer counselling where needed. Colleges have also seen the birth of Learning Support Zones, Learning Support Centres and Nurture Groups which aim to give the best possible help to students who have undesirable behaviour. It is worth noting that Special Schools have been transformed into resource centres to serve as a:

- provision for training and courses for teachers and other professionals;
- development and dissemination of materials and methods;
- support for mainstream schools and parents;
- short-time or part-time help for individual students;
- support in entering the labour market.

Spiteri L et al (2005:28)

Various other support structures are in place to help out in teaching and learning, professional development and the assurance that all educators are on board to provide the best education to the students. For example regular weekly meetings are in place among the Heads of School and the Assistant Heads in the School to monitor continuously what is happening at school level in a bid to raise standards, improve on policies and give ideas and support at College level. The senior management team is expected to be a point of reference to the teachers and act as mentor where needs be. A system is in place for the Senior Management Team to visit classes to support and advise as necessary for academic achievement. Teachers are encouraged to work as a

team and various meetings are held in this regard: "…developing and maintaining channels of communication…assists the principal [in] working with interest groups… It is the responsibility of the principal to create opportunities for educational dialogue". Bennett, J. (1999: 199)

It has become an integral part of the teachers' professional development to meet for one and a half hours each week in a team to discuss and plan strategic ways as to how teaching and learning can be more effective. Besides, such sessions are also used to develop one's knowledge as a teacher through the input of internal or external professional personnel. Then there is the once a term half day sessions for Staff Development Sessions and the once a term two hour Professional Development sessions. Besides, during the year the staff can meet for a day to work and develop the School Development Plan for the coming year. As Partin clearly states: "The ability to arrive at group decisions has become a vital skill for today's teachers, as increasingly schools incorporate site-based management, collaborative teams, and shared decision making" Partin R. L. (1999:160)

It is also worth noting that in a bid to give all the support necessary to teaching staff, all newly qualified teachers undertake an Induction process that comprises mentoring, and the use of the Performance Management and Professional Development Process (PMPDP) that replaces the old confirmation procedure. They are also being assigned a mentor in their initial stages in their career as a teacher.

Teaching aids have become the order of the day and they are continually being introduced in schools. The system has to ensure that standards at school depend on "improvement that can be supported by available or achievable resources" Hargreaves, A & Fink, D., (2003:438) Every teacher has also been provided with a laptop to be used as a tool in the classroom. The introduction of computers in classes and the use of interactive whiteboards in every class at Kindergarten, primary and secondary level has certainly given a boost to innovative ways of teaching and learning and the active involvement of all students throughout their scholastic years. Various courses are being organised from time to time to keep teachers abreast with new teaching strategies and assist them to always be creative and make the classroom a hub of learning through creative and innovative ways which captivate the students' interests on an individual and collective level.

Project work through team work is not new in our schools and in fact all schools seem to make good use of the expertise that exists at school level. Various meetings and conferences are organised for teachers throughout the year in order to keep everyone up to date and in touch with today's realities. Twelve hour In-service courses take place during the year where teachers from various colleges meet together to learn from each other and share their good practice.

Important aspects of legal basis and rationale, legal status of staff and heads

The _Education Act (Cap 327)_ **Act No. XIII of 2006** further set the scene for the devolution of authority through the system of networks. The Head of School is regarded as the Head of the institution embracing legal rights. Heads of School have

authority given by law to be vision implementers, of course with the full cooperation of the management team and staff. They are expected to engage in open discussions and take the necessary actions as deemed fit by all. Added to this Heads of School have the faculty to handle school and public funds in accordance with standard procedures and financial regulations while at the same time have full autonomy as to how such funds may be spent. The school under the direction of the Head of School can also enter into contracts with outer agencies as well as hire the school premises to third parties wishing to make use of the school especially during afternoon or evening time. Schools are adopting an open door policy in line with lifelong learning. The Senior Management Team also has the right to set up boards to recruit certain personnel especially when it comes to part-time clerks or part-time minor staff. The School Council which is made up of teachers and parents also has legal rights and thus authority to handle funds and organise activities as the Council deems fit to the benefit of the school.

Student Councils and Parent Participation

The establishment of the Student Councils have given a voice to the students and ownership of their learning. The schools have become a hub of activities of learning also thanks to the ideas that emanate from Student Council meetings. As quoted in *Knowing Our School:* "The dialogue between pupils and a teacher should be thoughtful, reflective, focused to evoke and explore understanding, and conducted so that all pupils have an opportunity to think and to express their ideas" Ministry of Education (2004:58)

Students are being actively involved in major projects at schools from the inception of projects to the actual implementation of the project. Schools have witnessed many a good idea being forwarded by the students themselves in order to better themselves or the environment they live in. At school level the: "challenge is to create the conditions that give students an opportunity to know the expectations, to practice them, and to modify their actions based on feedback from a variety of sources"   Bezzina, C (2001:53)

Parents have also become very much part and parcel of schools. The School Council which is formed of parents and teachers alike many a time sound the school with needs from the wider public and local community. Various healthy discussions are carried out among the interested parties and understandings and expectations are taken on board. Besides the School Council practically all schools in Malta have some kind of active parent group which helps out in the different activities that take place at school level. What is more, others are called upon by the schools to offer their expertise where necessary. There are instances where parents give talks to fellow parents or even to school staff. It is left to the management of the school as to what level parents are to be involved in the schooling of their children. But all in all school-home links are very good. The proposed Nation Curriculum Framework has dedicated thought and commitment to further involve the parents in schools.

Tapping external institutions has also proved to be another beneficial source to the school. Schools work closely with, for example, the Local Council and NGOs. The banking sector usually gives much needed support to the schools not only financially

but also through the donation of educational material. Various other agencies work with the schools at all levels and according to the exigencies of the particular schools.

Leadership at school level

School leaders and staff are autonomous yet accountable to their superiors. They are very responsive and attentive to directions given by the Ministry of Education or by the Directorates yet at the same time they know that they are given the empowerment to be proactive and respond to the constant and different demands that the national and local community makes on the school in a bid to further education: "Their style of management and the school ethos they build contribute inestimably to the development of positive attitudes and values". Ministry of Education (2007:175)

Different schools adopt different methods of distributed leadership. Heads of School together with their senior management teams and the staff are expected to keep up to date with current educational issues as well as come up with ideas and initiatives that motivate and widen the students' vistas. Practically all schools have teachers involved in one team or another. At times teachers group themselves through common topics of interest and then come up with projects which they develop with their students. At primary level teachers group themselves by year group while at secondary level teachers team up by subject. The subject coordinator has a special role in seeing that team work is in fact adopted and working properly. When it comes to school evaluation of teaching strategies and policies adopted, the teachers work in different teams and tackle different issues. The Senior Management Team is always involved in some way or another with the different teams set up at school level and they serve as reference points if not endorsement of the various projects that crop up. The School's Development Plan plays a major role in helping the Head of School give direction as to what is expected of the school from the outer community. Documents have been at hand re School Development Planning which presents a structure for teachers to come together and plan the school's way forward: "Traditional definitions focused on the administrative processes and functions… effective [head teachers], for example, are responsible for planning, organising, leading, and controlling… Gradually, lists of tasks and roles have given way to lists of competencies and proficiencies". Sergiovanni, T. J. (2006: 24)

The Heads of School and the Assistant Heads of School often form part of a team either within the school or across their particular College schools. Focus groups are also set up to deal with issues or activities to raise the standards and project the right ethos of their school: "The key to collaboration within a learning organisation is to promote norms of both collaboration and continuous improvement while respecting the individuality of pupils and teachers". Stoll, L. & Fink, D. (2003: 151)

Teaching and learning is considered as the core of knowledge that takes place at school. Empowerment and ownership through distributed leadership is basic to all educational success. Each school within a College is free to organise its own educational programmes in the light of the grand educational standards in the country. Heads of School are to see and make sure that teachers understand their role and the importance of their input in whatever takes place at school level. Teachers are asked to take a very proactive role in what goes on at school and to share good practice and ideas with the rest of the staff: "… innovation is the implementation of new ideas.

Two important types of innovations are product innovation (new things) and process innovation (new ways of doing things). Innovation is the key to survival, growth, and performance". Lussier, R.N. (2003: 210)

Schools also make it a point to adopt and introduce school policies and procedures after careful consideration and as wide a consultation as possible with staff, students and parents alike. Once the policies are adopted by all, then the values which are held dear by the school will be on the road to success because they would have been owned by all.

School evaluation, classroom evaluation and self-evaluation can be witnessed in certain schools. External audits are also taking place, a measure which has proved to be an asset to the College schools' educational standards: "Successful school improvement is linked to systematically planned and executed monitoring and evaluation of process and final outcomes. The monitoring of the change process is as important as measurement of outcomes" Stoll & Fink, (2003:53)

Unfortunately there are still small pockets of teachers who have not as yet seen the great benefits of such evaluations and thus the practice is still being slowly accepted. Such teachers fear constructive criticism because they think that exposing weaknesses show that they are not professional. On the contrary those who welcomed objective criticism always felt that they had become better teachers and better administrators.

The Outside Community

The schools have various contacts with the local community and organisations especially the Local Council and various NGOs. Many of the expectations of the wider community find themselves entrenched in the School Development Plan and will form part of the year's plan of action. There exists a healthy relationship with the local community, in that the latter is very supportive of the school and the various educational and cultural activities that the school organises. On the other hand schools do their best to maintain this relationship since both are complementary to each other. Schools are more often than not used by the local community especially in the evenings when there is no school, yet many schools offer their premises even in the mornings as long as there are no disruptions to schooling. Sponsorships are also on board to schools from the local community especially with regards to literacy projects. Schools are also entering into partnerships with the local community to create working relationships which will ultimately help their students acquire skills which are difficult to develop at school especially when it comes to industrial fields. Supermarkets for instance are ready to offer hands on experiences to students while voluntary organisations are ready to give free talks to students and parents alike. Students at secondary level are also experiencing a work placement for a week to expose their eventual involvement in the world of work.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have seen how the establishment of the Colleges have presented a paradigm shift from the way one used to perceive education and educational standards. It can fairly be said that the system is providing a solid basis to the

proposed aims of the new National Curriculum Framework which embraces lifelong learning, active citizenship and employability as the basis for a solid education system which above all addresses the needs of the students.

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STUDENT SUPPORT

Introduction

The Student Services Department within the Directorate for Educational Services offers a variety of support and educational services for students. Student Services are aimed at assisting all learners in achieving optimal educational, social, emotional, personal, interpersonal, and career development.

Mission Statement

The mission of the Student Services Department is to assist learners in managing life situations more effectively and acquiring the necessary key competences, so as to attain their curricular performance goals, while developing holistically as a person.

Background

In the course of the negotiations leading to the Agreement between the Government and the Malta Union of Teachers on the education reform process signed on the 17 July, 2007, the Government and the Union agreed that for the better performance of the students' learning outcomes and the Teachers' duties, students may need to be supported by a range of students' support services in and outside class, including the support of the students' parents. The Government and the Union have discussed in detail a range of student services. Whilst the Government gave full consideration to the Union's points of view and suggestions, the Government and the Union agreed that such support will be of great benefit to the student and will also sustain the teacher's role. The Education Authorities intend to provide such services throughout the calendar year and the Union agreed to fully support and collaborate in the development and implementation of such services according to the job descriptions provided by the Education Authorities for the professionals working in these services. For this purpose the Education Authorities will be engaging qualified personnel as may be necessary to man the required positions in a range of psychosocial services on a College basis including Psychologists, Counsellors, Career Advisors, Social Workers, Prefects of Discipline, Youth Workers as well as personnel and services in the inclusive and special education and the medical and psychiatric sectors. Guidelines detailing the nature of the student services the Education Authorities intend to put in place are found in this document. This document outlines the new framework of student services the Education Authorities intend to gradually put in place in order to offer and improve student services in schools.

1. Counsellor

The position of Counsellor shall be filled through an open call for applications open to persons in possession of: a) a first degree in education, social work, youth work, psychology or other related field, and a post-graduate Diploma or a Masters Degree or a higher academic qualification in counselling, or comparable qualification, issued by an

institution of higher education recognised by the Education Authorities ; and b) at least two calendar years supervised practice in counselling in a setup working with children and adolescents. Selected applicants shall undergo an induction process in the College and school environment and system organised by the DES. A Counsellor shall be a full-time officer without private practice and may be conditioned to a maximum of six day working week of an average weekly working time of forty hours averaged over a calendar year on a time-table as established by the Director General DES. A Counsellor shall be accountable to the College Counsellor, with the duty to operate on a College basis at both primary and secondary school level supporting students, school staff, and parents at both levels thus ensuring better continuity in the educational development of students and better professional practice. Counsellors will operate in a multi-disciplinary team framework. Counsellors may be assigned special areas of duties as required by the Director General DES.[1]

2. Trainee Counsellors

The position of Trainee Counsellor shall be filled through an open call for applications open to persons in possession of a first degree in education, social work, youth work, psychology or other related field, or comparable qualification, issued by an institution of higher education recognised by the Education Authorities. A Trainee Counsellor shall be engaged on contract in a traineeship scheme on a fulltime basis and may be conditioned to a maximum of six day working week of an average weekly working time of forty hours averaged over a calendar year on a timetable as established by the Director General DES. Trainee Counsellors shall be expected to follow those induction and training courses as the Education Authorities may deem necessary for Trainee Counsellors to become eligible to apply for the post of Counsellor. Refusal to follow such professional training courses when provided by the Education Authorities shall imply the termination of the traineeship.

3. College Counsellor

Each College shall have the position of a College Counsellor who shall operate on a fulltime basis without private practice and may be conditioned to a maximum of six day working week of an average weekly working time of forty hours averaged over a calendar year on a time-table as established by the Director General DES. The position of a College Counsellor shall be filled through an open call for applications open to persons qualified to be Counsellors and who have at least four years experience as Counsellor in a licensed school.

4. School Counsellor

School Counsellors in post shall retain their present career progression, conditions and benefits attached to the post, and may apply to fill the new positions of Counsellors and College Counsellors as established under this Agreement. Should School Counsellors in post apply and are selected to fill any of these positions, they shall be subject to the conditions of work of the new position but shall otherwise retain the right to apply to fill vacancies in higher grades or positions for which they are eligible as a result of their career progression in the teaching career stream as well as the right to revert to their substantive post.

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[1] E.g. Anti-bullying service, Anti-substance abuse services, Child safety service, Unit Ghozza Customer care services, Learning centre, Resource centres for students with special needs

5. Education Psychologist

The DES shall engage qualified personnel in the position of Education Psychologist to work in the College multi-disciplinary team. Education Psychologists shall operate on a full-time basis without private practice and may be conditioned to a maximum of six day working week of an average weekly working time of forty hours averaged over a calendar year on a time-table as established by the Director General DES. The Director General DES may also opt for the procurement of psychological services for Colleges.

6. Trainee Education Psychologist

The position of Trainee Education Psychologist shall be filled through an open call for applications open to persons in possession of a first degree in psychology, issued by an institution of higher education recognised by the Education Authorities. A Trainee Education Psychologist shall be engaged in a traineeship scheme on a fulltime basis and may be conditioned to a maximum of six day working week of an average weekly working time of forty hours averaged over a calendar year on a timetable as established by the Director General DES. Trainee Education Psychologists shall be expected to follow those induction and training courses as the Education Authorities may deem necessary for Trainee Education Psychologists to become eligible to apply for the post of Education Psychologist. Refusal to follow such professional training courses when provided by the Education Authorities shall imply the termination of the traineeship.

7. Psychiatric, psychological and psychotherapeutic services

The Directorate for Educational Services may procure the services of psychiatrists, psychologists and psychotherapists to cater for particular needs of individual students who would benefit from such services. A contract for services will be formulated according to the exigencies of the student's/students' needs.

8. Career Advisor

The position of Career Advisor shall be a College based position with the duty to operate at both primary and secondary school level in a College to support students, school staff and parents at both levels thus ensuring better continuity in the educational development of students and better professional practice. Career Advisors will operate in a multidisciplinary team framework. The position of Career Advisor shall be filled through a call for applications open to persons in possession of first degree in education, social work, youth work, psychology or other related fields and a Diploma in career guidance, or comparable qualifications, issued by an institution of higher education recognised by the Education Authorities Career Advisors shall be on a full-time basis and may be conditioned to a maximum of six day working week of an average weekly working time of forty hours averaged over a calendar year on a time-table as established by the Director General DES.

9. Trainee Career Advisor

The position of Trainee Career Advisor shall be filled through an open call for applications open to persons in possession of a first degree in education, social work, youth work, psychology or other related field, or comparable qualification, issued by an institution of higher education recognised by the Education Authorities. A Trainee Career Advisor shall be engaged on contract in a traineeship scheme on a fulltime basis and may be conditioned to a maximum of six day working week of an average weekly working time of forty hours averaged over a calendar year on a timetable as established by the Director General DES. Trainee Career Advisors shall be expected to follow those induction and training courses as the Education Authorities may deem necessary for Trainees Career Advisors to become eligible to apply for the post of Career Advisor. A Trainee Career Advisor shall have the traineeship terminated on refusal to follow the required professional training courses when provided by the Education Authorities.

10. College Career Advisor

Each College shall have the position of a College Career Advisor who shall operate on a full-time basis and may be conditioned to a maximum of six day working week of an average weekly working time of forty hours averaged over a calendar year on a timetable as established by the Director General DES. The position of a College Career Advisor shall be filled through a call for applications open to Career Advisors with at least four years experience in the post, or a teacher in possession of a Diploma in career guidance with at least four years experience in career guidance and counselling in a licensed school. In the absence of applicants with these requisites guidance teachers shall be eligible to apply for the post.

11. College Prefect of Discipline

The College Prefect of Discipline (CPD) shall be responsible for the coordination of activities, policies and procedures related to the promotion and encouragement of good behaviour and discipline in the schools of the College. The CPD is a resource person offering professional advice support to the whole school community. The position of a CPD shall be filled on a performance contract basis following a call for applications open to teachers with eight years teaching experience in a licensed school and to persons with relevant qualifications at degree level issued by an institution of higher education recognised by the Education Authorities. CPD may be conditioned to a 8 maximum of six day working week of an average weekly working time of forty hours averaged over a calendar year on a time-table as established by the Director General DES. Selected CPDs may be required to undergo the necessary induction and training programme sponsored by the DES.

12. Social Worker

The DES shall engage qualified personnel in the position of Social Workers to work in the College multi-disciplinary team. The working hours of Social Workers may be conditioned to a maximum of six day working week of an average weekly working time of forty hours averaged over a calendar year on a time-table as established by the Director General DES.

13. Youth Worker

The DES shall engage qualified personnel in the position of Youth Workers to work in the College multi-disciplinary team. The working hours of Youth Workers may be conditioned to a maximum of six day working week of an average weekly working time of forty hours averaged over a calendar year on a time-table as established by the Director General DES.

14. College Librarian

The DES shall engage qualified personnel in the position of College Librarian. The selected applicant will be expected to provide librarian services in the schools of the College. The selected applicant may be conditioned to a maximum of six day working week of an average weekly working time of forty hours averaged over a calendar year on a time-table as established by the Director General DES.

15. Health and Safety Officers

The DES shall engage qualified personnel in the position of Health and Safety Officers. The selected applicant will be expected to provide occupational health and safety services in educational institutions falling under the responsibility of the DQSE or the DES. The applicant may be conditioned to a maximum of six day working week of an average weekly working time of forty hours averaged over a calendar year on a time-table as established by the Director General DES.

16. After School Programme Coordinator

The DES shall engage suitable personnel in the position of After School Programme Coordinator with the aim of maximizing the use of school facilities and premises that can be used outside normal school hours as community learning centres that offer a range of lifelong learning programmes including those of complementary and supplementary educational support, sports, and cultural activities of arts, music and drama. The selected applicant/s may be conditioned to a maximum of six day working week of an average weekly working time of forty hours averaged over a calendar year on a timetable as established by the Director General DES.

17. Resource Worker in Inclusive and Special Education

The Education Authorities may engage on a contract basis Resource Workers to be deployed on duties in schools, Resource Centres and at the national level to contribute to the implementation of the individual educational programme of students with special needs. Resource Workers shall be engaged through a call for applications open to persons in possession of the appropriate training and qualifications related to the education and special needs of students as established by the Education Authorities. Such training and qualifications may be acquired through courses organised or sponsored by the Education Authorities or by an institution of higher education duly recognised by the Education Authorities at Certificate, Diploma or Degree level. Resource Workers shall perform tasks and assignments as established by the Education Authorities in the call for applications and may be conditioned to a maximum of six day working week of an

average weekly working time of forty hours averaged over a calendar year. The time-table shall be established by the Director General, DES. Teachers in post who apply and are selected to fill the position of Resource Worker shall retain the right to apply for promotional posts provided for by their career progression in the teaching grades and years of service in this position shall be reckonable as equivalent to years of service and experience in the teaching grade.

18. Learning Support Zones and Learning Support Centres Personnel

Apart from teaching grades, who are governed by the Agreement signed on the 17th July, 2007 between the Government and the Malta Union of Teachers, the Directorate for Educational Services may procure or engage relevant and competent professionals to serve the learning support zones and learning support centres for students with challenging behaviour. Such personnel may include administrative or professional 10 persons who can offer services in addition to those already attached to these LSZs and LSCs. Such personnel shall perform tasks and assignments as established by the Education Authorities in the call for applications and may be conditioned to a maximum of six day working week of an average weekly working time of forty hours averaged over a calendar year. The time-table shall be established by the Director General, DES.

19. Professional Support Services for Education Personnel

Staff performing duties related to the education of children in schools, Resource Centres, Colleges or at the national level shall be entitled to professional support services, namely, counselling and legal services, free of charge, if and when required in cases that arise strictly in connection with the performance of their duties. Counselling and legal services shall be availed of on application by the individual concerned and following the approval by the relative superior or College Principal given in consultation with the Head of School. Such professional services shall be provided in accordance with the policy stipulated by the DES. These services shall maintain the highest level of confidentiality according to the relevant professional ethics. The DES may procure professional services or engage professionals on a full time basis. Such professionals shall perform tasks and assignments as established by the Education Authorities in the call for applications and may be conditioned to a maximum of six day working week of an average weekly working time of forty hours averaged over a calendar year. The time-table shall be established by the Director General, DES.

20. Medical Staff

The DES may procure or engage additional medical staff (including doctors, nurses, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, speech therapists, etc). If such professionals are engaged, they shall perform tasks and assignments as established by the Education Authorities in the call for applications and may be conditioned to a maximum of six day working week of an average weekly working time of forty hours averaged over a calendar year. The time-table shall be established by the Director General, DES. Selected applicants will be expected to serve schools, Colleges, Resource Centres, centres and other institutions as indicated by the DES.

BECOMING A TEACHER

ANTOINETTE CAMILLERI GRIMA
and
MARIE JOSEPHINE MALLIA

Introduction

This chapter focuses on some elements that shape the nature of the teaching force: firstly, the choice in favour of teaching and the beliefs of student teachers as influenced by their previous educational experiences as pupils, and as individuals who have sporadic experiences of teaching; secondly, the factors of gender and social class, significant markers in the profession; and thirdly, the process of professional development which needs to be more widely acknowledged in the Maltese context.

A desire to teach

'Minn meta kont żgħira kont għal *teacher* …kont dejjem nilgħab tat-*teacher* bil-pupi …dejjem kelli dil-ħajra li nsir *teacher*, kont nikkoreġi l-pitazzi tiegħi…kont ngħallem lit-tfal tal-ġirien, kienu jiġu għandi biex ngħinhom fil-*homework*…dejjem ħassejtha l-linja tat-*teaching*, minn dejjem kelli dik il-ġibda…minn mindu kont żgħira kont inħobb ngħallem.'

'Since I was young I always aspired to become a teacher… I always played teacher with my dolls… I always wished to become a teacher, I used to correct my own copybooks… I used to teach neighbours' children, they used to come to me for help with their homework… I always felt inclined towards teaching… I always loved teaching, since early childhood.'

Upon joining a teacher education course prospective teachers bring along with them more than their personality traits and their desire to teach. Important aspects that come to the fore at this point are aspirant teachers' 'implicit institutional biographies – the cumulative experience of their school life, which in turn, informs their knowledge of the – students' worlds and of the school curriculum' (Britzman, 1986, p.43).

This implies that aspiring teachers initiate their professional teacher programmes with set ideas about teaching, learning and schooling; ideas which very often fit into the larger institutional order in which they are born. Unlike other careers like law, engineering and pharmacy, teaching is not an unfamiliar territory to those joining in. On entering the course a student teacher would have already been exposed to different modes of teaching as a pupil. This exposure may be taken as an apprenticeship into the skills of learning how to teach. Such experience, in fact, contributes to well-worn and common sense images of teachers' work and serve as a frame of reference for their self-images as future teachers.

It is, therefore, important to note that student teachers' identities that have been formed through the apprenticeship of observation are very much conceived from a pupil's perspective (Sucrue, 1997). Thus while it is important to treasure memories of good teachers, it is vital to remember that even positive models of teaching would in due time need to be reconsidered. This is because no model of teaching is absolute; diversity of social settings and the evolution of educational theory continue to challenge even the most exemplary of teachers.

Some research has been carried out locally in the last decade regarding the choice of teaching as a career. For instance Brincat & Kelly (1997) who administered a questionnaire to a representative sample of five hundred and sixty practicing teachers and three hundred and fifty B.Ed. (Hons.) and P.G.C.E. students found that the most common reasons for choosing teaching as a profession were: the desire to work with young people (30%), the love of passing on knowledge (28%), and the fact that it was the best job available at the time (12%). Furthermore they discovered that 82% of teachers have no regrets about their career path and 62% would choose the same profession again. Lia & Mifsud (2000) administered a questionnaire to over a hundred teachers who graduated between 1996 and 1998. Eighty per cent of the respondents said that they had joined the B.Ed. (Hons.) course as they had 'an ambition to teach.' Another 8% and 7% admitted that their choice was due to family influence and peer pressure respectively.

Giorgio (2001), who administered a questionnaire to two hundred education students from two year groups (1999-2003 and 1997-2201), found that generally Maltese student teachers give little importance to intrinsic motivating factors and put more emphasis on extrinsic rewards. In his study the most influential factor in the choice of course was the fact that academic entry requirements are low in comparison to other degree courses. Furthermore, in line with Lia & Mifsud's (2000) findings, his respondents confessed that parents and relatives had influenced their choice.

While attempting to construct a profile of B.Ed. (Hons.) students, Mallia (1998) found that the majority of student teachers trace their choice of career back to their childhood (see quotation from interview above). Furthermore, the impact of their previous teachers also triggered many an aspiration to take on teaching as a career.

'Fis-sekondarja kien hemm għalliem wieħed li ħajjarni bil-mod li kien jimxi magħna. Kien jimxi magħna tajjeb. Iktar qisu ħabib milli għalliem. Hu kien li ħajjarni.'	'When I was at secondary school there was one teacher who was an inspiration when I came to choose my career. He was good to us kids. He was more of a friend than a teacher. Thanks to him I felt attracted [to the teaching career].'

The above quote – typical of many student teachers' responses – highlights the effect of previous 'ideal' teachers on the student teachers' construction of their models of what constitutes a good teacher. Previous experiences as pupils and as teachers, therefore, merit some further attention in our discussion.

Happy memories of school

In her research, Mallia (1998) was interested in a number of questions related to the present focus – among these were the following: Who is the typical Maltese student teacher? What are the preconceived ideas that aspirant teachers enter the course with? How does the identity location of aspirant teachers affect their beliefs about teaching and learning? Which aspects of these beliefs need to be challenged and re-defined? Semi-structured interviews were adopted as the main instrument for collecting data, and a sample of student teachers reading for a B.Ed. (Hons.) degree were interviewed during the 1997/1998 academic year. Preliminary results emerging from the interviews indicate that the majority of student teachers were educated in state schools, and specifically in Junior Lyceums. This trend was corroborated with analysis of data emerging out of the global first year student teacher population that indicated that 65% of the student teachers frequented state secondary schools – namely Junior Lyceums – while only 30% of the students frequented secondary private and church schools. Data regarding the remaining 5% of the students was unavailable. This trend continues with respect to post-secondary education, with 62% of the student teachers having attended state post-secondary schools. The emerging pattern of student teachers' school background suffices to throw light on how educational background influences the formation of beliefs with respect to schooling.

With almost the whole population of student teachers attending selective schools like Junior Lyceums, private and church schools, it is not surprising that student teachers in the initial year of the course feel positively about the prevailing educational system. Because student teachers have made it to university, and therefore have managed to pass successfully through the system, the majority of them, especially first year student teachers, express the belief that the educational system is a fair mechanism. The following quote captures the effect of personal experience on the shaping of such attitudes:

'L-iskola dejjem ħabbejtha. Bħala studenta dejjem kont nagħmel dak li tgħidli t-*teacher*. L-iskola qatt ma ħarist lejha b'mod negattiv.'	'I always loved school. As a student I always used to abide by what the teacher used to instruct me to do. I never perceived school from a negative view point.'

This is a typical comment which points to how a personal successful experience of schooling tends to fulfil the assumption that intelligence and effort bring about success irrespective of social background. In turn it drastically limits the potential of student teachers to find fault with the educational system and consequently to make a critical evaluation of it.

By comparison, first hand experience of partial failure in schooling, though very sparse among student teachers, was found to serve as an illumination of how schooling can selectively discriminate against those who cannot make it. The account of an ex-trade school student reading for a B.Ed. (Hons.), who in his own words

'struggled his way to university', is testimony to humiliation, symbolic violence, and systematic cooling down of aspirations. Problematisation of schooling in his case was not limited to personal experience but was extended to a critique of a wider social and educational nature, whereby it was forcefully argued that it is not simply intelligence and effort that counts for a person to be able to make it successfully in the sphere of education. He further argued that academic success very much depends upon whether one's aspirations are maintained high by educators and by the system, and finally upon the type of educational institution the person is lucky to frequent.

If student teachers are expected to challenge rather than fit smoothly into the system, it becomes crucial to expose aspiring teachers to a critical imagination of it, to give value to diverse experiences of schooling and in the process put into question personal experience. Opportunities for comparative observations with pupils of wide-ranging attainment levels could indeed act as a window upon the differential treatment that learners with diverse aptitudes receive. This could potentially stimulate comparative analysis and critical reflection alongside an awareness that the experience of schooling is not exactly similar and fair for all and sundry.

Some encouraging experience of teaching

Similar to Sucrue's (1997) findings, accounts of isolated and sporadic quasi-teaching episodes are common among Maltese student teachers, and in the majority of cases have contributed significantly to the student teachers' career choice. Almost invariably these experiences consist of one-to-one situations where help by the learner had been solicited – hence the willingness of the learner to learn was assured. Moreover, such teaching episodes lack the complexity of classroom teaching that places heavy demands on pedagogical and organizational skills as well as on expert knowledge of subject matter. What is problematic in these accounts motivating entry into teaching is their simplistic view of teaching and learning which fails to consider that in reality teaching is neither a one-to-one situation nor sporadic, and does not necessarily imply the willingness of the learner. Failure to view the constraints of real-life teaching produces a false sense of security that is normally put to the test once students are placed in schools for their practicum or as fully-fledged teachers.

At this point it is crucial to critically evaluate the assumptions underlying the discourse of student teachers related to the reasons they bring up for their choice of teaching as a career. As the findings of Brincat & Kelly (1997), of Lia & Mifsud (2000) as well as the preceding quotes indicate, student teachers place emphasis on the fact that they 'always' aspired to become teachers. This emphasis is problematic as it could be symptomatic of the assumption that a person is born a teacher, and therefore that the teaching profession necessitates certain qualities which are assumed to be inborn *('kwalitajiet li jridu jkunu fik')*. This mentality of 'being born' into the profession is widely diffused (Sucrue, 1997). Britzman (1991) is highly critical of this mentality and argues that such an emphasis on natural qualities underestimates reflection on the process of learning how to become a teacher. Data emerging from interviews confirm this assertion (Mallia, 1998). In fact, 'natural' or 'temperamental' qualities such as being patient, caring, and dedicated frequently featured on the list of attributes that student teachers consider necessary for a good teacher. By comparison, fewer students mentioned the importance of knowing how to transmit knowledge, while none of them even hinted at the importance of reflection in the process of

teaching and learning. Unless such hidden notions are tackled the teacher education course might continue to be considered more as a form of certification entitling the holder to teach rather than a process of learning how to teach.

Whilst acknowledging that breaks from experience are crucial in teacher education in aspects where the 'familiarity pitfall' implies acquiescence and paralysis (Feimen-Nemser & Buchmann, 1985), at the same time ignoring experiential knowledge is not only dangerous but also wasteful. Buchmann (1989) rightly suggests that not all that is learned through experience is valueless, and a replacement for experiential learning is not necessarily available given the limited time and resources in teacher education. The implications are quite clear: initial beliefs of aspirant teachers with a first hand experience of classroom teaching prior to entering the course are not to be brushed aside as if non-existent; some are worth consolidating, whilst others need to be challenged and redefined.

The powerful effect of previous teachers on prospective teachers also highlights the importance of awareness about such preconceptions by teacher educators, being themselves potential role models. Prior notions can be discussed with student teachers such that certain aspects are nurtured while others are challenged. Dismissing the existence of such models could unintentionally nurture qualities that fall beyond the vision of the true educator, as in issues of control and the over-emphasis on effective teaching in lieu of the process of democratic learning, topics found to be high on the agenda of the student teachers interviewed by Mallia (1998).

Mallia (1998) looked in depth at other, possibly more hidden variables that play a significant role in one's decision to become a teacher in Malta: gender and social class.

Gender: is teaching a feminine profession?

Teaching is sometimes referred to as a 'feminine' profession because of the large ratio of female teachers in respect to males (Apple, 1987). Teacher education is similarly characterized by a consistent large female ratio of student teachers in comparison to males. Indeed data concerning the distribution of gender among the population of prospective teachers reveals that teaching is, for the years to come, to remain a 'feminised' profession. This pattern of a predominantly female population undergoing pre-service teacher education is consistent with trends observed in other countries, amongst which are England (Grant & Eiden, 1999) and the United States of America (Apple, 1987).

Table 1 below shows the distribution of male and female student teachers per year group, alongside the corresponding percentages presented to facilitate comparison.

Table 1: Male and female students following the B.Ed. (Hons.) course

Yr. Group	Males	Females	Total	% Males	% Females
1997-2001	89	180	269	33.1	66.9
1996-2000	94	136	230	40.9	59.1
1995-1999	76	153	229	33.2	66.8
1994-1998	44	113	157	28.0	72.0
Total	**303**	**582**	**885**	**33.7**	**66.4**

As this table shows, the student teacher population under review is predominantly female. There have been no steady changes in the distribution of males to females in the population of B.Ed. (Hons.) undergraduates in the period under review. In fact the ratio of males to females – which currently stands at one is to two – tallies perfectly with the findings of Buttigieg (1991). 'Feminisation' of the teacher education candidates further stands out when the ratio of male to female student teachers is compared to the ratio of the global population of male to female university students, which at the time of the study stood close to one is to one.

The predominance of females in the student teacher population is in many ways influenced by the traditional gender roles attributing caring professions to females. This assumed 'natural' link between the female identity and nurturing characteristics is even more pronounced with respect to primary teaching, as Mallia's (1998) quantitative and qualitative data have confirmed.

Student teachers interviewed were found to be very much aware of the high proportion of females within the course, yet most student teachers seemed to take the situation in a matter of fact way, and generally refrained from questioning the *status quo*. The following comments are typical, and illustrate this point:

Student: '*Eighty per cent* tal-kors tfajliet.'
Interviewer: 'Għaliex taħsbu li t-*teaching* jiġbed daqshekk tfajliet?'
Student: 'Minn dejjem hekk, minn sena għall-oħra aktar ikun hemm tfajliet. Naħseb jien il-ġuvintur aktar miġbudin fuq il-*computers*, *communications*, *engineering*. It-tfajliet qishom jibżgħu.'

Student: 'Eighty per cent of the course members are females.'
Interviewer: 'Why do you think teaching attracts so many females?'
St - 'It has always been that way, year in year out, there are always more females. I believe that males are more inclined towards computers, communications and engineering. It is as if females are scared.'

These overt hegemonic messages in terms of gender highlight the stereotyped image of the female as the care-giver, and the image of males as the technically-minded species. By comparison, only one student teacher questioned the link between feminine identity and teaching, and related it to the perceived low status of teaching.

| 'Dawk il-professjonijiet li messewhom in-nisa, fosthom it-*teaching* kollha għandhom *status* baxx.' | 'All those professions involving women, including teaching, are attributed a low status.' |

The above assertion is crucial as it analyses the feminisation of the teaching profession in terms of its socio-historical roots rather than simply linking the predominance of women in the profession to natural feminine attributes.

For some student teachers, traditional gender stereotypes are still an underlying reason for opting for the B.Ed. (Hons.) course. In fact, compatibility of teachers' working conditions with parenting responsibilities (given the lack of widespread flexible conditions of work offered to parents in full-time employment in Malta) is perhaps one of the main reasons why many females tend to opt for teaching. Another important issue is the engrained belief that females are more caring and therefore qualify more readily than their male counterparts to fulfil the role of the teacher. The following extract from an interview with a female student teacher strongly supports this view, and is typical of comments recorded during the fieldwork:

| 'Naħseb li l-aħjar kors għal tfajla B.Ed, għax tiġi tiżżewweġ ħa jkollok aktar ħin liberu anke mar-raġel, tkun tista' tiġi tagħmel il-faċendi u sajjarlu qabel jiġi, biex isib kollox lest.' | 'I think that the B.Ed course is best suited for a woman – if she marries she would have more free time to spend with her spouse. She would be able to do the housework and cook his dinner, so that when he arrives home, he'll find everything ready.' |

Coupled with the above perception – widespread among aspirant female teachers in the initial year of the course – is the idea that teacher education can in fact function as a form of preparation for the future role of the care-giver within the family. Initial beliefs of student teachers about the profession are symptomatic of a mentality that assumes that teaching requires natural qualities, which many a time are associated with parenting. Book, Byers and Freedman (1983) also made similar claims resulting from research findings among aspirant teachers in the United States of America. These findings confirm the need for aspects of the course dealing with gender issues to challenge taken for granted notions such as the assumed natural link between teaching and femininity (see Sucrue, 1997; Von Wright, 1997). This is especially the case in respect of teaching early and middle years, where the association between femininity and the early years of schooling seems to be more ingrained.

Social class and upward mobility

Local research into the social origins of university students suggests that university students of higher class origins tend to opt for higher status professions. This implies

that the social extraction of prospective teachers following a course in teaching leading to a relatively newly established profession is by comparison generally lower (Schembri, 1990, p.126). Analysis of the parental occupational background of student teachers interviewed by Mallia (1998) show that, as in Schembri's data (1990), the majority of student teachers came from parents occupying lower occupational categories. Mallia's (1998) data unravelled a cluster of parents occupying manual jobs such as welders, masons, dry docks workers, port and public workers, carpenters, port workers and trades persons. Statistical data in respect of first year student teachers (data regarding other year groups was unavailable) also indicated that at the time of the study, 37% of the first year student teachers hailed from families where either one or both parents only had a primary level of education. By comparison only 10% of the student teachers originated from families where either one or both parents had undergone tertiary education, and the rest (53%) hailed from families with either one or both parents had up to secondary schooling. Moreover none of the sample population came from parents occupying traditionally high status professions such as doctors, lawyers, lecturers and architects. This finding is very similar to that about the origins of American student teachers that were found to be quite modest when compared to the origins of student lawyers and doctors (National Education Association, 1999). Claims that the majority of student teachers originate from parents with lower educational attainments than themselves is highly significant as it corroborates arguments made by some student teachers who perceive the course as a route for moving up the social ladder.

Interviewer: 'Għaliex dħalt B.Ed?'
Student: 'Ridt nilħaq xi ħaġa.'
Student: 'Għamilt erba' snin naħdem ta' mastudaxxa. Kien hemm ħafna ma jemmnunix. Jgħiduli idejk ma jidhrux, kont nagħmlek bnieden ta' skola. Hemm din l-i*stereotype* li bniedem tas-snajja, bniedem selvaġġ…Iktar milli għall-paga, dħalt għall-i*status*, għar-rispett.'

Interviewer: 'Why did you choose B.Ed?'
Student: 'I wanted to become somebody.'
Student: 'I spent four years working as a carpenter. There were many people who wouldn't believe me. They would tell me your hands do not show, I used to believe that you were a learned man. There is this stereotype that a craftsperson is a wild person… I joined this course more for status and respect than for the wage packet.'

The above quotes are typical of a diffused mentality that teaching offers a route for upward social mobility. In this context it is crucial that student teachers realize that teaching does not offer the same pay packet, status and professional autonomy afforded by the more established professions. Though teaching is officially recognized as a profession, it is still hampered by the bureaucratic top-down decision-making styles that are normally attributed to lower categories of workers. In many ways the teacher is still asked to perform what is demanded from a higher authority both in terms of the selection and delivery of knowledge.

However, while the general community's view of teachers might be a very definite one, i.e. that of instructors with specific duties to fulfil (see Borg & Mizzi, 1997), in the literature on teacher professionalism there is an increasing emphasis on the developmental nature of the activity. Berliner (1994, p.107) for instance emphasizes that in teaching, as in other areas of expertise and professionalism, 'despite their apparent diversity… experts… seem to posses similar sets of skills and attitudes and to use common modes of perceiving and processing information'. It is to this that we now turn our attention.

Professional development

Becoming a teacher is not a four-year plan of study; learning to teach and becoming effective at this very complex task is a lifelong activity. Teachers' professional behaviour continues to develop during their career. Terminating the teacher education programme and qualifying does not mean the end of the training process and the achievement of competence. Professional development refers to the way the teachers' evolution takes place during a career (Ducharme & Ducharme 1999; Kelchtermans 1993).

Various models of practicing teachers' development have been put forward over the years such as Fuller's (1970) developmental model, Huberman's (1989) phases and Oja's (1989) stages. Fuller's (1970) three phases comprise (1) an Early phase characterised by teacher's concerns about self; (2) a Middle phase where the competent teacher's main concerns are related to subject matter, class control, and relationships with pupils; and (3) a Late phase, or a stage of professionalism where teachers are concerned with learning and their own contribution to pupil change. Huberman's (1989) three broad phases are (1) Launching a career, initial commitment with easy or painful beginnings; (2) a period of Stabilization with final commitment, consolidation, emancipation, and integration into the peer group; and (3) again New challenges, new concerns, experimentation, responsibility and consternation. Oja's (1989) six stages of development (self-protective, conformist, self-aware, conscientious, individualistic, autonomous) are linked to age and other factors in an adult teacher's life such as getting married, leaving one's parents, settling down, mid-life transition and re-stabilization.

Berliner (1994) discusses the issue of professional development in terms of a journey that takes one from novice to expert teacher:

Stage 1: Novice – student teachers and first year teachers are at a stage for learning and gaining experience;
Stage 2: Advanced Beginner – second- and third-year teachers are at a time when context begins to guide their behaviour rather than going by an established rule under all conditions;
Stage 3: Competent – at about the fifth-year of teaching, having gained more experience, teachers start to make more conscious choices, are better able to set priorities, and to choose sensible means for reaching ends;
Stage 4: Proficient – at this stage intuition and know-how become prominent and the teacher is able to predict events, such as which student is going to need more help, more precisely;

Stage 5: Expert – the last stage of development when teachers perform effortlessly, and are also likely to show more emotionality about the successes and failures of their work.

Furthermore, taking a school-wide perspective in Malta, Astarita (1999) mentions among other issues that newly graduated teachers in their first placing at school feel the need for a deeper understanding of the internal organisation of schools and of the curriculum; to become familiar with systems of assessment and reporting; to learn about school policies; and the need to establish social relationships within the school, especially to embark on co-operating systems with other teachers, and also with school administrators and parents.

Table 2 below summarises the findings of Wragg & Wood (1994) about how novice and expert teachers react to the experience of a first lesson with a new class. One can notice differences both in terms of attitudes and behaviour.

Table 2: Characteristics of novice and experienced teachers

Novice teachers …	**Experienced teachers …**
Feel anxious about their relative lack of knowledge about children generally and the classes they will take in particular.	Like to find out for themselves what the pupils are like rather than listen to others' opinions about them.
Are self-conscious about themselves being looked at.	Are able to describe events in retrospect with considerable precision and certainty.
Give a great deal of thought to lesson content and little to managerial aspects.	Consider the first lesson with a class as a management ritual, and feel the need to establish some predominant image.
Often identify with pupils and recall times when they behaved in a similar way.	Are quite clear about which rules are important and how to secure compliance.
Think of relationships developing mainly within the classroom.	Are more aware of contact with pupils outside the classroom.

Teaching experience makes a difference not only for established teachers, but also in the case of student teachers who had been employed as casual teachers prior to their studies. Mallia (1998) found a marked difference in attitude between mature student-teachers with teaching experience and their colleagues. The following quote is typical and hints at what distinguishes this category of students from the rest.

'Li kont casual it's considered as an asset għax niftakar meta ġejna hawn, ħafna minn sħabi li ma kellhomx teaching experience, qabel, the first thing they were seeing was theory, whereas I and a few others like me, we could see the theory applied to practice, pero' sometimes the theory which does not work.'

'The fact that I was previously a casual teacher is considered as an asset. I remember when we first came over here (at university), most of my peers who had no teaching experience, the first thing that they were seeing was theory, whereas I and a few others like me, we could see the theory applied in practice, but sometimes even the theory does not work.'

While considering previous teaching experience as a positive aspect these student teachers claimed that because of their previous immersion in teaching they could see the continuities and discontinuities between what is taught at university and its application in the classroom situation. This realisation normally comes either during the students' practicum or during the induction phase (Wragg &Wood, 1994), and so mature student teachers seem to have an advantage in this sense.

Buchmann (1989) and Johnston (1992) urge teacher educators to look for experiences that lend themselves as foundations for bridges of new understandings. Confirming the validity of this argument are interview responses with mature students with prior teaching experience that generally revealed a more critical outlook towards the educational system in general (Mallia, 1998). As their outlook is very much in contrast to that of the rest of the student teachers, especially those in the initial years of the course, such experiences could be fruitfully utilised as a shared resource in initial teacher education programmes.

The reality faced by Maltese beginning teachers in their path of professional development has been documented recently (Bezzina, 2001; Bezzina & Camilleri, 2001). Astarita (1999, p.75) for instance found that in Malta 'newly qualified teachers are expected to function in the same way and with the same degree of competence and expertise as teachers who have many years of experience' and this makes them feel they need to work harder and harder, and then 'due to the amount of pressure they cannot really enjoy their job' (p.58). Similarly, Cini, Galea & Xerri (2001) in their study of problems faced by beginning teachers in Malta conclude that the need for an induction phase must be recognised. This should consist of a support system to help beginning teachers bridge the gap between the problems arising during their initial teaching experience in their classroom reality and their theoretical knowledge base acquired during their studies.

The professional holds knowledge, not only of how – the capacity for skilled performance – but of what and why. The teacher is not only a master of procedure but also of content and rationale, and capable of explaining why something is done. The teacher is capable of reflection leading to self-knowledge (Shulman, 1994). Furthermore, teaching is the process of 'becoming'. It is a process of growing up in terms of teaching skills, classroom management techniques and organizational skills. The growth process involved in becoming a teacher continues to be relevant throughout one's career. This is especially true as classroom life is becoming

increasingly challenging and demanding and where the teacher has to perform additional roles like that of organizer, communicator, decision-maker, motivator, manager, innovator, counsellor, ethicist, and judge (McIntyre & O'Hair, 1996).

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to identify the location of student teachers in view of their decision to join the teaching profession. Issues of gender and social prestige permeate throughout revealing that the student teacher population is a product of a rigidly stereotyped society and a meritocratic educational system. Notwithstanding this, one must highlight the transformative potential of critiques of prevailing hegemonies, which were consistently – if somewhat sporadically – articulated. It is ultimately the role of teacher education programmes not simply to reflect the structural features and processes inherent in society and the educational system, but to act as agents engaged in potentially modifying social relations, practices and norms. Self-reflection and reflection on practice is probably the primary step in this direction. The presentation of aspirant teachers' typical beliefs and social origins as a reflective exercise upon 'lay theories' of teaching and their shaping influences on teaching identities can therefore lead to revisiting personal beliefs and decisions related to teaching.

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SCHOOL CULTURES

JOSEPH FENECH

Introduction

All of us have had experience of the process of schooling because we have all spent the best years of our childhood and adolescence in educational institutions. That experience, undoubtedly, has left memories and images of specific places, characters and situations many of which, perhaps with a little effort, can be easily recalled and talked about.

Personally, I can vividly recall a number of these:

1. My first days in the infant classroom when we chanted in chorus the rhyme of the matchbox and the matchsticks as an introduction to number work during the
2. Arithmetic lesson;

3. The row formation and the Head of School's whistle to draw our attention to the start of the morning assembly and the prayers that we were made to say;

4. The misbehaving classmate who was called to the front and made to kneel down facing the wall as a punishment;

5. The small gang in the secondary school meeting in an out-of-the-way comer of the school for an early morning smoke before assembly; and

6. The child who used to get all his Language and Number work wrong and sent the round of classes with the copybook full of red crosses pinned to his back.

All of these can be seen as manifestations of an institutional culture which cumulatively constitute the complex pattern of life in a school. The assumption, of course, is that it is important for teachers to get to know about and understand this culture. And, this is for a number of reasons. First of all, a knowledge of the school's culture helps them gain insights into and develop an understanding of the context of practice. Secondly, it will become easier for them to socialize themselves into the culture of the school and thereby their integration within the school will be facilitated. Thirdly, it will enhance their identity and, as a consequence, help them acquire more confidence, as professional practitioners. Fourthly, their professional competencies will be developed more effectively. And finally, through a reflective exercise, they will be able to understand the process of educational change at the institutional level.

Meanings of School Culture

Although one may or may not agree with Prosser's (1999) claim that there is no general agreement on what culture should be taken to mean, in order to establish more focus and avoid the problem of looseness and vagueness, the anthropological definition of culture.is being adopted in this chapter. In this sense, as Reid (1986, p.58) succinctly points out, school cultures refer to those 'characteristic patterns of behaviour, beliefs and values and physical environments which are to some degree different from those of other institutions in society'. The study of school culture from an anthropological perspective, therefore, entails the observation of:

- Institutional norms, values and beliefs;
- Ceremonies and rituals;
- Rules and regulations;
- School atmosphere and climate; and
- The social behaviour of staff and students.

Some cultural analysts point out that this is not enough because one must go beyond these to 'the deeper level of basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared by members of an organization, that operate unconsciously, and that define in a basic taken-for-granted fashion an organization's view of itself and its environment' (Schein, 1985, p.6). Schein's stipulation draws attention to the complexity and importance of the concept of culture within an organization and the meticulousness that is required to study it appropriately.

A discussion of what school culture should be taken to mean raises a number of questions. For instance, is culture a single, integrated entity within a school or are there other co-existing cultures? Is there cultural uniformity within the system of schools or does a school develop its own characteristic culture? Is the cultural reality of the school static or dynamic? Let us explore some possible answers to these three questions.

One or many?

There are conflicting views about whether there is only one culture in a school – the *holistic* view – or whether there is an assemblage of various sub-cultures – the pluralistic view. The holistic perspective is often held by organisational sociologists who developed the concept of organisational culture when they investigated, frequently through survey methods (Halpin & Croft, 1963; Stem,1963), what they preferred to call 'the school climate'. The underlying assumption is that the culture serves as 'the social glue' (Seill, 1985) which keeps the organization together. In the late 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, the idea was reinforced through the work of the school effectiveness/improvement movement (Reynolds, 1997; Reynolds, Hopkins & Stall, 1993; Mortimore, 1988; Rutter, 1979) that explained the performance of a school in terms of the culture that prevailed within it. Such a view is not without its critics and Meek's categorical statement is shared by many educationalists. 'The problem with some studies of organizational culture,' Meek (1988, p.453) points out, 'is that they appear to presume that there exists in a real and tangible sense a collective organizational culture that can be created, measured and manipulated in order to enhance organizational effectiveness'.

Parallel to this position, and sometimes in contrast with it, much interesting research which indirectly challenged the holistic concept of school culture, was being generated. This was largely conducted by ethnographic researchers whose studies showed that somany divergent cultures co-existed in a school acting on and interacting with each other. Examples abound but only a few can be mentioned here. Smith & Keith (1971) studied the culture of innovation at Kensington Elementary School in Washington; Wolcott (1973) produced a portrait of headship; Hargreaves et.al. (1975) narrated the culture of school deviance; Willis (1977) observed the culture generated by anti-school values; Nias *et al.*(1989) observed the culture of teacher collegiality in five primary schools in England and Acker (1990) focused on teacher culture in a British primary school.

My view is that, in such a situation, it is not a question of accepting one perspective and dismissing the other, but of acknowledging that, within and sometimes because of, the mainstream or dominant culture in a school, there emerge a number of sub-cultures, which may either reinforce or be in conflict with it. Both will be discussed later in the chapter.

Uniform or diverse?

Perhaps the assumption is that, an educational system like ours, characterised by centralized decision-making, will generate cultural uniformity right across the schools. This is mistaken for a number of reasons. First of all, each school develops its own identity and character, partly as the consequence of the legacy of its past (Stoll, 1999). Secondly, the school culture takes shape as a result of the idiosyncratic management styles of its leaders (Fenech, 1992, 1994). Thirdly, other factors like the quality of student intake and the professional biographies of the teachers channel the culture of the school in particular directions (Hargreaves, 1986). Lastly, because the culture of the school is always in a symbiotic relationship with that of the particular community in which it is embedded (Smith, *et al.*, 1987).

Of course, this does not mean that there isn't what Prosser (1999) calls a 'generic' school culture. This derives from the fact that there are mechanisms like the National Minimum Curriculum, textbooks and examinations which in important ways determine what is taught in schools. There may be also a shared philosophy of teaching which shapes the norms and values across schools. A case in point is the philosophy of child-centredness so impressively captured in Plowden's (CACE, 1967) account of primary schools in England in the mid-1960s and which has generated a culture of care (Nias, 1999). Schoolwork is also regulated by educational legislation, prescribing, for example, age of entry, and Education Division circulars establishing particular procedures to be followed. Therefore, while each school is culturally different from all the other schools due to its uniqueness (Hargreaves, 1999), there are also many similar features, especially in what has been called earlier the mainstream culture of schools.

Static or dynamic?

The cultural continuity of schools has been the focus of many studies especially by researchers who have been interested in the problem of change (Fullan, 1991; Sarason, 1982). The assumption always is that schools are by their very nature conservative

institutions trying to stick to the status quo. And, in many ways, considering the difficulty with which change is taken up, there is much truth in this assumption. 'That is the way we have always done things around here' is the attitude of many teachers as well as many school administrators.

However, although there is much stability in the culture of schools, there is also, as Rossman *et al.*(1988) point out, a lot of change as well. This is evident in ethnographic accounts of school culture. For instance, in a fascinating ethnographic study of Kensington Elementary School in Washington, Smith *et al.*, (1987, p.168) develop a detailed narrative account of how, over a fifteen year period, a primary school changed 'from the culture of intellectual excitement to the culture of poverty'. Acker (1990), in the work referred to earlier, discovered much that was changing within a context of stability.

The point that can be made on this issue is that the stable features of a school's culture do not necessarily lead to inertia and absence of innovation but can serve as context for change and development. Paradoxically, therefore, the process of school change always occurs within and through a degree of institutional stability.

Mainstream culture

Functions

Reid (1986) identifies a number of functions which the mainstream culture of schools fulfils. First of all, there is the instrumental function whereby a school's culture serves as a means of reaching the objectives the school sets itself, that is the promotion of the students' learning and achievement. Secondly, the culture has a regulative function in that it defines the activities of teaching and learning and specifies how they should be carried out. It needs hardly reminding that the school's curriculum is a selection from the culture of society (Lawton, 1986) and itself generates its own culture. The third function is directive in the sense that the culture serves as an interpretive framework of life and goals articulated by those who work there.

Typologies of school culture

A number of researchers developed different typologies for the analysis of school culture (Hargreaves, D., 1999; Stall, 1999; Hargreaves, 1994; Handy & Aitken, 1986). The typology which serves the purposes of this chapter and is relevant to the situation in our schools, is Handy & Aitken's (1986). The authors argue that organizations develop their own culture which can be classified as follows:

- The club culture
- The role culture
- The task culture
- The person culture

They claim that these explanatory models of culture within organizations are also observable in educational institutions but admit that these may not exist in pure form as a mix of these categories may be observed in any one school. Only two of the four component elements, namely, 'role culture' and 'task culture' will be discussed here as tools for the analysis of the culture in Maltese schools.

Role Culture

A role culture is more likely to be found in those schools which, like ours, form part of a bureaucratised system of education administered centrally and is based on a number of assumptions. Organisationally, the school presents itself as a set of coordinated roles or job-boxes. Teachers are role-occupants with job-descriptions defining what they have to do. Change is effected through a re-arrangement of roles according to new priorities. There is a constant emphasis on procedures and acting according to rules. Teachers' work becomes routinised and the outcomes predictable. The characteristic features of such a school are presented schematically in Table 1.

Table 1: Characteristics of a school marked by a role-culture

1. Bureaucratic administration

2. Role ascription

3. Hierarchical control over teacher's work

4. Teacher isolation

5. Influence deriving from position one occupies

6. Stability as a characteristic of the cultural environment

Of course, it can be argued that, from a management perspective, there are advantages inhering in such a cultural environment. First of all, formalized procedures make it more administratively convenient to run a school. Secondly, the routinization of operations creates a sense of security amongst staff. Thirdly, the attachment of a set of behaviour expectations to each role (be that of Head of School, Assistant Head of School, teacher, ancillary staff) guarantees predictability of interactions of staff within the school. However, whether all this will lead to a better quality in educational provision is very much debatable.

Task Culture

Conversely, schools in less centralized educational systems, with more possibilities, therefore, for local decision-making, are more likely to develop a task culture. In this case, the assumptions are that, as an organizational set-up, the school brings together a group of dedicated professionals, whatever their rank within the organization who, with the help of resources, will apply their knowledge and skills to a project, task or problem. There is a sharing of skills and responsibilities which promote collegial relationships. Emphasis is on plans and their actualisation rather than procedures and

rule-following, reviews of progress rather than past performance. It is a questioning culture which does not rely on routines but promotes creative responses to the tasks to be done or the problems to be tackled. The characteristics of a school with a task culture are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Characteristics of a school marked by a task culture

1. Professional administration

2. Role achievement

3. Teacher discretion

4. Teacher collegiality

5. Influence deriving from the expertise one has

6. Change as a characteristic of the cultural environment

This kind of school culture allows for the exercise of personal initiatives, promoting, therefore, the professional development of staff, provides opportunities for more creative approaches to professional practice and makes the school a more lively institution. It becomes, in a word, 'a learning school'. Educational change will not create insecurity amongst staff but a challenge and an opportunity for creative activity.

Sub-cultures

As has already been pointed out, besides the mainstream culture there exist in every school a number of sub-cultures either generated within it or imported into it. In this chapter only teacher and student cultures will be briefly considered.

Teacher cultures

For many decades now, the occupational culture of teachers has been the subject of a number of studies from different perspectives and using different interpretative paradigms. These perspectives included the historical (Altenbaugh, 1992; Warren, 1989; Lawn & Grace, 1987), the sociological (Smith, *et al*. 1987; Ozga & Lawn, 1981; Hargreaves.D., 1980; Johnson, 1979; Lacey, 1970; Jackson, 1968; Smith & Keith, 1968), or a combination of both (Fenech, 1992; Sultana, 1991; Darmanin, 1989; Hargreaves, 1986; Lortie, 1975). The intention here is not to review these studies but to highlight some important aspects of the culture of teachers to help us make sense of their work context and develop a better understanding of their professional practice.

In this context, it is considered important to look at teacher culture as an expression by the teaching community of the tensions and contradictions within the school culture, the professional culture of teaching and the culture of the wider society (Cohn & Kottkamp, 1993). It is in response to their socialization into this culture that teachers develop particular strategies which ultimately become important features of

the occupational culture of teaching (Pollard, 1985; Woods, 1980; Hargreaves, 1978).

The occupational culture of teachers is the result of the impact of a number of factors which include: (i) their social class background; (ii) their education and professional training; (iii) the nature and status of their employment; and (iv) their educational perspectives.

(i) *The social class background.* Although in the sociological literature the class provenance of teachers is very often indicated as the middle class (Reid, 1986), it is clearly not always the case. Since the introduction of mass schooling in the middle of the nineteenth century, Malta's teachers, especially in the elementary schools, came mainly from the working class. In this case the cultural gap between the teachers and their students was not as wide as it is often assumed to be. Eventually, of course, on entry into teaching, Maltese teachers began to internalise those attitudes, norms and values which were characteristic of the middle class. In this way they were able gradually to assimilate the culture of the school, with its middle class characteristics, and shed their working class culture. Within the schools, the upshot has been the frequent clashes between student and teacher cultures.

(ii) *Education and professional training.* The amount and type of education teachers have had, as well as their professional training, also exert a determining influence on their professional culture (Hargreaves, 1986). For many-years, it has been the characteristic feature of many educational systems, including ours, for primary school teachers, on the one hand, to have a secondary level of education followed by a course at one of the training colleges. On the other hand, traditionally, secondary school teachers came straight from tertiary education without any professional training at all because it was assumed that to be able to teach in secondary schools all the teacher needed to have was knowledge of subject matter. How to teach was assumed to be learned on the job.

(iii) *The nature and status of their employment.* The mechanisms of selection in our educational system serve to bestow differential status on the different categories of teachers. For instance, the status of teachers in the lower streams is perceived to be inferior to that of teachers in the higher streams. There is also a higher status attached to teaching in the grammar rather than in an area secondary school. In an area school there is often less emphasis on subject expertise, more student-centred pedagogies, less detached relations with students and a looser interpretation of rules and regulations. Furthermore, teaching academically oriented students is considered to carry, in our educational culture, more prestige than teaching vocationally oriented ones (Burgess, 1983; Ball, 1981; Lacey 1970). The curriculum subjects they teach also place teachers in a status hierarchy with respect to their other colleagues (Ball & Lacey, 1980). English and Mathematics, for instance, occupy a higher position of prestige in the secondary school curriculum than Home Economics or Physical Education. It must be pointed out this context, however, that the teachers' status in a school depends also to a large degree on their classroom management skills, their leadership qualities, the dedication and assiduousness in their approach to their work and the student outcomes.

(iv) *The teachers' educational perspectives.* The influence of the teachers' educational perspectives on their professional practice has been amply documented in Hargreaves' ethnographic study of two middle schools in Britain (Hargreaves, 1986). Adopting

Woods' (1983, p.7) definition that perspectives are 'frameworks through which people make sense of the world', Hargreaves (1986) demonstrates how the teachers in his study defined and responded to the situations in schools and classrooms in terms of the perspectives they held. For example, Mrs Littlejohn, a teacher with a secondary perspective, was very sensitive to the noise level inside her classroom as this sent messages to her colleagues about her professional competence:

> I'm very nervous of letting the classes make a lot of noise so that other people think I'm having discipline difficulties. And that stems from my first school, actually, because at first I didn't mind when children made a noise until people started coming in to see if I was alright. And that worried me, so that in the end I got a bit of complex about it. (Hargreaves, 1986, p.159)

In a professional culture marked by teacher classroom isolation like ours this framework for the evaluation of practice is shared by many teachers, both in primary and secondary schools.

All these factors are brought to bear on the teachers' institutional relationships through which they develop a sense of common purpose, a shared understanding of pedagogical strategies, and a common approach to problems of educational practice (Lacey, 1977), in other words, an occupational culture of teaching.

Student Cultures

Like teacher cultures, student cultures have come under scrutiny in a number of sociological studies (Burgess, 1983; Ball, 1981; Willis, 1977; Hargreaves *et al.*, 1975; Lacey, 1970; Hargreaves, 1967). In broad terms, on the basis of studies like these three categories of student cultures can be identified. These can be called (i) a pro-school culture; (ii) a parallel culture; and (iii) an alternative culture to that of the school. Many students, perhaps the majority, manage to assimilate successfully both the school's formal culture and the adolescent culture of their peers (Ball, 1981). Others find the culture of the school alien to them and, consequently, develop an alternative culture, sometimes directly opposed to it (Willis, 1977). The sociological literature, therefore, places students along a cultural continuum with conformity at one end and deviancy at the other. What one has to remember, however, is that student cultures do not emerge in a vacuum but in relation to and in interaction with all the cultures in both the school and the surrounding community.

(i) *The pro-school culture*. The family milieu of many students equips them with those attitudes, norms and values which make their transition to the environment of the school a continuous one (Bernstein, 1975). In this way, it becomes rather easy for them to conform to the norms, beliefs and values held in high regard by the school they attend. The students with a pro-school culture are more likely to be found in the top streams and in selective grammar schools. They are the ones who share the teacher's definition of the situation inside classrooms, show motivation in their schoolwork, do not present any behaviour problems and achieve highly at the end.

(ii) *The parallel culture.* Besides the home and the school, however, students live and interact in other environments. This brings them into intimate contact with the

adolescent culture of their peers. In their account of youth culture based on a study of a working class secondary modern school and a middle class grammar school, Murdock & Phelps (1972) distinguish between the street culture of working class youths and the pop media culture of their middle class counterparts. The first is characterized by mucking about in streets, spending time in bars and showing much group solidarity. The characteristics of the second are imitating role models, demanding immediate gratification and giving vent to emotional and physical needs. Whether we agree with this fine distinction or not, the fact that adolescents internalise other norms, beliefs and values besides those which characterize the formal school culture, cannot be gainsaid. Many students are able to handle this culture together with the formal culture of the school, moving out of one and into the other with relative ease. In this way, they are able to navigate successfully both in the milieu of the school and in that of their peers.

(iii) *Alternative cultures*. It is perhaps inevitable that schooling worldwide, with its particular organizational tructures and curriculum processes, generates a culture which evokes resistance from hose who become alienated and disaffected. It is as a reaction to their sense of elplessness and failure that students construct a culture in opposition to the formal culture of the school. The schooling experience of these students subject of a pioneering study by Willis (1977) who argued that the anti-school culture of these 'lads' emerged from a need to deal with a situation into which they were unable to fit and from which they could not escape. It is because of this that they developed strategies to be able to cope with the boredom and alienation which schooling inflicted on them and, at the same time, enable them to bridge the gap between the world of school and the world of work.

It is a culture which clashes at many points with the mainstream culture of the school and lands the students in trouble with the teaching staff and administration all the time. This clash of cultures was present in Maltese secondary schools in the early 1970s when grammar schools were changed to comprehensives. The underachievers, coming from the dismantled area secondary schools, immersed themselves in an anti-school culture which manifested itself in rule-breaking, acts of bullying, ganging up against fellow students, defying adult authority and damaging school property.

Over the past few years, local studies of disaffected students were conducted by B Ed (Hons) and PGCE students in the Faculty of Education, using ethnographic methodologies (Ghigo, 1999; Milovanovic, 1999; Cassar, 1997; Azzopardi, 1992; Fenech, 1992; Mifsud, 1992). By and large, they confirm the findings of studies published elsewhere. In their accounts the students admitted that they were attending school in order 'to meet friends and have fun' and refused to obey the school rules because these were considered too restrictive. They engaged in deviant acts like playing truant and absconding and drinking alcohol and smoking on the school premises. Thus, through acts like these, and the process of labelling by teachers, without their knowing it, the students were constructing a deviant career with all the consequences that this entailed.

Chircop's (1994) ethnographic account of resistance strategies adopted by a group of fifteen female students in a Trade School is illustrative enough. This excerpt from a conversation with two of the students captures a small slice of their life at school:

Cyntia: We either didn't write or we used to chat, depending on the mood.

Veronica: For I think that this school is useless. They don't learn.
                Everybody goes for a laugh. When I used to attend I didn't even know
                the Time-Table. No copybooks, that is .....

It is evident from Chircop's account that the students engaged in this kind of behaviour only during certain lessons and with certain teachers. They were adopting what can be called 'selective resistance'. For instance, on one occasion Chircop (1994, p.395) describes how the anti-school group changed their attitude completely during the Personal Care lesson:

> Here students who had, during other lessons, been defined as deviant
> and unruly, co-operated with their teacher, paid attention, and invested
> a lot of energy into what they were asked to do.

This raises the question as to whether the anti-school culture of many students engulfs their whole school career or whether there are areas of school life, as appears to be the case, where they comply with institutional demands like paying attention, behaving well, and doing one's work, in other words, fulfilling the student role.

Manifestations of culture

An understanding of the culture of a school can be developed by examining the ways in which it manifests itself. As Prosser & Warburton (1999, p.82) argue, culture has a visual dimension and can be adequately captured through the methods of visual sociology which "enables us to identify visual categories, patterns and meanings and is an important aid in understanding what constitutes an institution's culture" because "culture is displayed in ceremonies, rituals, artefacts, non-verbal communication and constructed environments. In school these take the form of assemblies, speech days, trophies and classroom layout, for example". Table 3 presents a list of the visual manifestations of culture in our schools, some of which are discussed in turn.

Table 3: Visual Manifestations of School Culture

1. Constructed environments

2. Ceremonies

3. Rituals

4. Artefacts

5. Significant objects

6. Dress codes

7. Corridor and classroom displays

Constructed environments

One of the determinants of school culture is the constructed environment in which teaching and learning take place (Reid, 1986). The architectural features of the school tell us a lot about the organizational procedures of what goes on within its walls, an aspect which is often neglected in discussions of school culture. School buildings are themselves, as Reid (1986, p.64) points out "cultural products embodying ideas and images which affect social activities taking place there". For instance, the school boundaries convey the idea that the school is cut off from society and what is taught there is different from what is taken to be knowledge outside of it (Reid, 1986) . The egg-crate design of classrooms (Lortie, 1975), for example, carries the message that the learning group must be of a certain size and the activity of teaching is of a certain sort. It privatises the activity of teaching and turns the classroom into teacher's territory, allowing the teacher a certain discretion over what happens behind the classroom door. Subject rooms are indicative of the status ascribed to curriculum subjects and the resources required to teach them. The staffroom is another important space in a school where particular cultures emerge, develop and eventually become an integral part of the school. It serves as a space where teachers can find relief from the stresses of the classroom (Woods, 1984) and offers the teachers an opportunity to talk, in an informal atmosphere, about the different aspects of their professional practice which serves as "a kind of collective stocktaking in which teachers compare notes and bring themselves up todate about the pupils whom they all face in the classroom" (Hammersley, 1984, p.212). The playground is by and large student territory where play activities are taken up freely and organized on the students' own terms but not without the supervision of adults. In the architecture of schools, playgrounds as supervised spaces have always been assumed to play an important role in the moral development of the students.

Ceremonies and rituals

Rituals and ceremonies are part of the everyday life of schools. One of the most conspicuous is the assembly. The most culturally significant is the one held every morning either in the school yard or the hall. It offers an occasion for the whole school – students, staff and the administration – to come together to start the school day. During this ceremony messages are communicated, prayers said and the national anthem sung. There is an affirmation of authority in such a gathering and its acceptance by all concerned as well as the implicit transmission of political and religious values and beliefs which enable the students to socialize themselves into the culture of the community. Mifsud's (1994) interesting study of St David's College, a private church school, demonstrates how ceremonies, rituals and symbols serve to communicate the hierarchical set-up, the perceived status of the school in the community and the authority relationship between the teachers and the students. Finally, an important ceremony which has embedded itself firmly in our educational culture is the school Prize Day. Through the acknowledgement and rewarding of students' achievement in public the high value placed on competitive individualism (Hargreaves, 1982) is communicated not only to the students and their parents but also to the community as a whole.

Significant objects, artefacts and wall displays

As a workplace, the school has developed its own tools to be able to carry out the task of teaching students. In the early days there were long or dual benches, blackboards, chalk, pointers, maps, books, teachers' charts, copybooks, ink-wells and writing materials. As a result of technological developments, the film projector and the tape-recorder were later added. More recently, the products of information technology have been introduced. One must point out that it is not only the existence of these objects and artefacts in the school but also the way they are organized and used that demonstrates the occupational culture of teaching. For instance, the rows of tables with the teacher's desk and the whiteboard at the front convey an image of teaching underpinned by particular pedagogical principles. The use of the teacher's chart, film-projector and the tape-recorder indicates new ideas about the teaching and learning process and how it can be promoted more effectively.

The visual dimension of the culture of the school is also made evident through the displays on the walls either of classrooms or corridors. These normally consist of students' work, teachers' charts, pictures and other kinds of visual information. Many of these mediate implicit messages about school knowledge and the pedagogical theories which underpin it (Daniels, 1989). The organizational format of secondary schooling in our case has not encouraged the display of students' work. It is quite common, in fact, for classroom walls to be kept bare although wooden strips and boards are made available to teachers inside classrooms.

Conclusion

In this chapter, an attempt was made, firstly, to clarify the meaning of the concept 'culture' as an important pre-requisite for understanding life in schools and classrooms. Admittedly, cultural analysis raises complex issues, however the task is worth pursuing because we can make more sense of what we see and hear in schools and consequently gain insights into the cultural context of professional practice. Secondly, it argued that, besides the formal school culture which is generated by a

complex set of factors, other sub-cultures emerge, of which two – teacher and student cultures – were examined. Finally, drawing on the ideas from visual sociology, the point was made that the culture of the school manifests itself in different ways and through a variety of processes.

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CLASSROOM INTERACTION IN MALTESE SECONDARY SCHOOLS

MARY DARMANIN

Introduction

Many of the important questions about teaching and learning, such as how best to teach, what to teach and to whom, when and where, as well as considerations about the particularities of teachers and learners, finally find some type of resolution when teaching and learning are considered in context. This context includes not only the global, national, regional and school context as has been demonstrated in studies of cultures of schooling (Fenech, this volume*,* Hargreaves *et al.*, 1996a) but more centrally, the classroom context.

As pupils, we recall how different classroom settings, which could include the teacher and his or her strategies and biography, the subject, the group of peers in that class, the physical or ecological classroom arrangements and others, gave each classroom encounter a different and particular dimension. Whilst there are many commonalties in secondary school classrooms there are also differences that have considerable impact on the learning encounter.

Early classroom research

With some notable exceptions during the 1930s (Waller, 1932) when the impact of cultural anthropology on American sociology of education was strong, Anglo-American classroom research until the late 1970s tended to follow the model of large scale, context -free research provided by the positivist and functionalist models of psychology. In this type of research data was collected across classrooms in a vast range of schools on issues such as classroom factors in educational attainment (Roseshine, 1971) and teacher expectancy effect (Brophy & Good, 1970), to give but two examples. Whilst a number of context factors were considered, such as the type of teacher questions or teacher expectations of pupil success, these were not disaggregated to provide an in-depth account of a particular learning situation, but rather aggregated into a large data set about the particular topic. Useful findings about the effect of teacher expectations were made yet these left larger questions, such as what this meant for individuals or groups of pupils, unanswered. Moreover, difficult questions that moved from *what* teacher expectancy was and *how* it worked, as to *why* this phenomenon could be found in certain contexts, were unlikely to be answered with this type of research.

A new generation of British researchers in the late 1970s began to find that the collection of pen and pencil data within the systematic observation school was unable to answer many of the pressing questions of the time. Delamont (1975) gives a first person account of the critiques of the older paradigm and the development of a new one in classroom research. These included the impact of differentiation and polarisation in secondary school on pupils' identities and careers (Lacey, 1984), the effects of pupil labelling on pupils' deviant behaviour (Hargreaves, 1984), and the education of elites (Delamont, 1984) amongst others.

Other researchers within the symbolic interactionist ethnographic paradigm started to look at teacher strategies in context. Questions were raised as to whether these facilitated or replaced teaching (Woods, 1979, 1980a). Within one secondary school Ball (1981) was to find that teachers of different pupils and different subjects differed considerably in their pedagogy, their expectations of pupil success, and their own role and commitment to teaching. More work on pupils and their strategies in context was developed (Woods, 1980b).

 Soon it was recognised that teaching and learning are fundamentally *situationally embedded.* Even the temporal factors such as initial encounters (Ball, 1980; Beynon & Atkinson, 1984) or the experience of transfer and first days in a new school (Delamont & Galton, 1986) were shown to have continuing effect on classroom interaction. Key theories regarding the *negotiation of a working consensus* (Pollard, 1980) and the relationship of this to teaching and learning were developed. The work on teacher and pupil strategies in classroom interaction gave classroom researchers the opportunity to examine the impact of constraints on strategies (Hargreaves, 1980). By looking for the provenance of specific constraints on teaching and learning it became possible to further contextualise classrooms. From the micro-level of classrooms, questions could be raised about the meso-level of school cultures or 'institutional bias', as well the macro-structures of regional, national and global systems. New findings about the centrality of pupil and teacher biography and career in the learning encounter gave educators the opportunity to use classroom research to critique their own work and to develop alternate pedagogies.

Understanding interaction in the classroom

The renewed interest in *interaction* arose from an appreciation of the *symbolic interactionism* of G.H. Mead (1934/1970) whose philosophy and social psychology were seen by classroom researchers as to closely approximate how human subjects, also known as 'actors', acted in the real world. Woods (1979) identifies three basic premises of this theory:

 (1) *Human beings act towards things on the basis of the meanings they have for them.* For example, a student who appears 'bored' in a lesson we would consider interesting needs to have this boredom taken seriously, since if this is the meaning she has attached to this lesson, then her behaviour in it will be determined by her 'interpretation of the situation'. As interactionists we would be interested in finding out what these process of meaning-making mean to the 'actors' involved.

(2) *this attribution of meaning to objects through symbols is a continuous process.* Objects include all sorts of things such as the actions of others, the content of lessons, the ecological aspects of the classroom, the allocation to a stream, such as Form 4 A or Form 4 F. Symbols include the use of language (calling the course 'Systems of Knowledge' 'kanna') and other symbolic systems such as clothing and body piercing, graffiti, or the stickers in a pencil-case or 'pocket'. The emphasis on *process* reminds us that the attribution of meaning is in a state of flux and changes as situations and actors change. Thus, a student may find a particular subject 'boring' in one term and 'cool' in another.

(3) Finally, and in keeping with the interest in the social embeddedness of teaching and learning, *this process takes place in a social context.* Students and teachers interpret the actions of others, construct meanings and take lines of action on the basis of this ascription of meaning. Particular situations will be given particular definitions, which are social and subjective as well as being social and objective (that is, shared, not neutral). 'Actors' will then act according to these definitions.

We also need to consider how some actors (student and teachers) have the *power* to impose their definition of the situation on others, whilst others have less or no power in the construction of meanings and identities in interaction. Since we are interested in the construction of meaning through definitions of the situation, the concept of power in the establishment of these communities of meaning is of central importance.

In Maltese schools

One of the first ethnographies of Maltese schools (Darmanin, 1990) used an interactionist framework to understand how teachers' definitions of the system, in this case of centralised curriculum planning and streaming, lead to particular interpretations and pedagogies. Within the same research, Darmanin (1995) was able to compare the classroom interaction and pedagogies of teachers in Year 6 state and Church school classrooms. Again the social context offered different teachers different situations to interpret. Moreover, teacher and pupil biography produced very particular interactions.

One very important study of the Maltese secondary school sector is Sultana's (1992) multi-site ethnographic study of a number of trade schools. Under Sultana's leadership, the project involved a number of researchers spending many hours in trade schools and classrooms and workshops. Some of these studies have shown how students attribute particular meanings to their classroom situation which leads them to various forms of absenteeism (Chircop, 1997). Others (Mallia & Mallia, 1997) found that teachers both overtly and in a more hidden way such as through comments on ability and aptitude, through orientation visits to places of work and others, were 'warming up' some students and 'cooling down' others. Within these context students made their own interpretations of what their future would be and behaved accordingly. A study of an elite boys' secondary school (Mifsud, 1997) found that both within the school and within the classroom, hierarchies of authority and prestige provided the situational context for students to construct a particular social ethos and learn their own route to privilege and rank.

In this chapter I will be referring to two main sources of ethnographic data on classroom interaction in Maltese secondary schools. The first is from a four month period (February-May, 1999) of full-time fieldwork I carried out in a Girls' School (an ex-opportunity centre) a school were students who obtained less than 15% of the global mark in their 11+ or Junior Lyceum entrance examination were sent, instead of attending either a Junior Lyceum or Area Secondary School. 'Tama',[1] had a very caring school ethos which tended to put the social welfare of the students before other educational considerations. It was a constant struggle to keep students in school and the rate of absenteeism, though constantly improving, was still worrisome to staff. A second major objective was to provide a type of second-chance education, given the poor record of schooling these girls had had in the feeder primary schools. My observations were made in the Form I classes of this school, though I did sometimes sit in some other classes to see whether the pedagogy changed from year to year. At the time of the fieldwork there were 35 students in the Form I intake who were divided into three classes of approximately 12 students each. The school had started the scholastic year with 250 students but by February only 200 were on its rolls. Many students took the first opportunity they could to leave school, despite the school's valiant attempts to keep them in. Very few of these students would leave school with a Sec certificate. The school was trying to find other forms of certification, such as NVQs for the students. During this period I also carried out two weeks of fieldwork in a boys' Area Secondary School. The intention was to have some compare and contrast data. My focus was on the opportunities to learn different pupils had in similar or differing conditions.

The second study that provides most of the ethnographic data for this chapter is from the undergraduate education dissertation of Saliba (1999). This is an excellent account of organisational practices in the case-study girls' Junior Lyceum given the pseudonym 'Southbrook'. Unlike 'Tama' school, 'Southbrook' has a student population of around 1100, all of whom were successful in the five compulsory subjects sat at 11+ for the Junior Lyceum entrance examination. Saliba (1999) focused on the experiences of Form 4 students, where she observed lessons and interviewed students in 3 of the twelve Form 4 classes. The school had adopted a system of 'partial streaming', where an attempt was made to keep some measure of 'mixed ability' by creating classes with an intake of students within a broad band of marks as well as grouped according to subject choice. Moreover, students perceived as difficult were spread across the twelve Forms and some friendship groups were also dispersed. Some students felt they had been incorrectly allocated to a class on the basis of behavioural rather than academic reasons. Later in the chapter, it will be possible to see how their attitudes to this allocation affected their attitudes to the classroom situation.

Initial encounters

Every year thousands of young people move from primary school to secondary school. The transfer may be relatively straightforward such as when a pupil is simply promoted from the junior school of his or her school to the senior school of the same school. In other cases it may be more problematic. Pupils have a period of uncertainty when they do not know whether they have passed the Junior Lyceum entrance examination or not. They may face their new school career with the disappointment of failure. They may have heard 'scary stories' (Delamont & Galton, 1986) about the new school, the teachers, the difficult curriculum (Morales &

Sciberras, 2000). From dealing with one classroom teacher in the primary school, students now have to learn to deal with around ten different subject teachers. Each one has a particular biography and attendant personal and teaching style. The subject matter may also have an effect on the classroom climate. Within certain subject cultures, English language and literature for example, students are expected to contribute to the discussion, including with personal comments. In other subject cultures, such as mathematics, there may be more emphasis on universals and conformity. Whatever the subject culture, in the first encounters, known as the initial encounters (Ball, 1980; Beynon & Atkinson, 1984) students will be looking for signs that tell them what this particular teacher expects from them and how they should work. There is a 'testing out' period when students try to 'suss out' how far they can go. Can they have more time for their work? Less homework? More laughs?

In this second period following the initial 'honeymoon' there sometime is a pessimistic environment since both teacher and students are somewhat suspicious of each other and are testing each other out. Initial encounters may go on beyond the first week, and can only be said to have been completed when a successful *working consensus* has been achieved. Pollard (1994, p.24) describes this as 'the social rules and understandings which tend to become established in any particular setting as a result of interaction'. These rules are '*intersubjectively understood*' (Pollard, 1980, p.44) which means that all the participants in the interaction must share some basic understanding of the situation. If a teacher has one interpretation and pupils another, for example, that the homework assigned is too difficult to do, then it is unlikely that a working consensus will be achieved. Since more opportunities for interaction provide more opportunity for the establishment of the working consensus, we often find that in the initial encounter both teachers and pupils are trying to reach a common understanding of the situation, whilst as time goes on they find that many assumptions about the classroom situation become taken-for-granted and routine.

The following extract from my field diary describes my first classroom observation in 'Tama' school. The 22nd February 1999 was my first day in class but the pupils had been in school since the preceding September. The lesson was a Form I needlework class which was very informal, though with its own rule structure. This is an abridged account of part of the double period lesson.

'Tama' School   **Monday, 22nd February**

Fieldnotes

Needlework lesson, 11 am

The headmistress, Miss Demicoli takes me into the needlework room and introduces me to Form I A. Nine girls are present out of 12. A Form III girl is with them, 'għax għandha bzonn tbiddel il-karattru'. I do not know the teacher's name. The room is lovely and large with sewing machines on the side, an iron and another three 'Singer' type machines. Teacher takes the register without looking at the girls. Then gives them back their work which they put in a file. Six girls are sitting around a large oval table near her, the other three near me. Rosa, the Form III pupil is near her to see what to do. They have a handout to work on -the directions are more like a conversation. It doesn't seem like a normal structured lesson.

The girls shout a lot -however room is really large and with high ceiling. Everyone talks at the same time. A lot of comments are about procedure.

The pupils are sticking a cut-out of a needle and thread onto file paper. A pupil near the teacher is measuring something. Some are copying from the handout -they write in blue when it is English and red for Maltese. The Maltese is a translation of the formal English text but it is not clear whether they understand the English they copy. The language of instruction is Maltese.

Teacher refers to 'mhux hekk is-soltu' both for the colour used for each respective language and also in instructing them where to put the handout.

One pupil has some difficulty.

T: Għax inti xellugija. Dejjem nibdew fl-istess post.

Teacher demonstrates using her own right hand but making it clear what they are doing.

T: Dan ngħidulu 'Even tacking'

She then switches to Maltese and explains what happens with 'even tacking'. Eva is trying to thread a needle but has cut the thread. The lesson is about threading first, whilst cotton is still on the reel. Eva tries again. T. has not stopped talking encouragingly to those by her (11.20am). Daniela has now started her tacking.

T: Ma rridux......oqgħod għax jeħlu fil-magna.

(Girls repeatedly ask for help, especially with the written work).

..Teacher does not go around, they go up to her. Is this a follow-up of a previous lesson or an introduction to tacking? The girls are having difficulty getting stitches an even size and the teacher is still demonstrating by sewing some herself. They then have to iron the ready tacked pieces. Four are still (11.30 am) writing notes they missed.

T: Nixtieq naralkom il-ħolqa f'idejkom.

At 11.40 Rosa (Form III) is called up.

T: Rosa, ejja ħa naghtik xi ħaġa x'tagħmel.

Rosa looks very fed up and has been constantly arranging her hair and looking in the mirror. T. is now at another table with R. Measuring something. Two pupils are copying from a long text. One of them has read it first.

.. 11.55 am T. and 2 others around Rosa trying to show her what to do. Some are patiently doing their stitching and others still writing. T. has been standing for the whole lesson.

We are all having difficulty threading tacking cotton. I try but cannot manage. I ask a girl near me if she uses saliva. She says they are not allowed to do so. With her back to the teacher she then puts some spit on the cotton and tries again.

There are many aspects of this lesson which show that a working consensus has already been established and this is not an initial encounter. The teacher and pupils started work without much formal introduction to the tasks. Pupils took their places also without being told where to sit and asked for help in a way which was acceptable to the teacher. This included standing by her waiting their turn or calling out a short question. The teacher did not use whole class teaching in the usual way of most school subjects, yet as she demonstrated the stitching to one pupil she also made sure the others could follow. Her standing for the whole of the double period demonstrates this. Sometimes pupils have to be reminded about procedure 'mhux is-soltu', but there is no need for negotiation since this has been achieved in an earlier period. As a novice 'pupil', I want to use saliva to wet the cotton I am trying to thread, and I inadvertently tempt a pupil to break a well-known class rule. This is done with her back to the teacher. She does not want to directly challenge the teacher, and the teacher too ignores the back turning in favour of more important matters such as making sure there are no knots in the stitching which would damage the machines. These rules are non-negotiable, which means pupils cannot change them.

Pupil identity and teacher attitudes

The Anglo-American classroom interaction research of the 1970s and 1980s found that there was a very clear link between school organisational cultures including streaming, setting or tracking cultures and pupil identity. For example, Lacey (1984, p.11) suggested a model for the process of *differentiation and polarisation* which describes the passage of pupils through selective secondary schools. *Differentiation* being 'the separation and ranking of students according to a multiple set of criteria, which makes up the normative, academically orientated, value system of the grammar school.' *Polarisation*, Lacey (1984, p.11) finds, 'takes place within the student body, partly as a result of differentiation, but influenced by external factors and with an autonomy of its own'. The work of Lacey (1984) has been taken up buy a number of scholars including Saliba(1999) who uses it to explain what is happening to the pupils in Southbrook.

Saliba (1999, p.44) finds that in Southbrook school teachers systematically covered topics differently depending on the class-stream they taught. One clear statement in this regard was Mr Long's comment on the work he does with Form 4.6, the middle stream of the twelve Form 4 classes.

> Mr Long: Għidt, ħa nħalli xi affarjiet barra, aħjar jitgħallmu dil-biċċa u jitgħallmuha sew. It will still help in their exam. Minflok nipprova minn kollox u nħassar it-topic kollu bażikament. Aħjar dik il-biċċa u ħaduha at least.

Although the process of differentiation and polarisation often lead to different pupil attitude to teaching and learning, we must also remember that across the whole range of pupil achievement, adolescents are looking for relevance and interest (Hargreaves *et al.*, 1996). They will share a variety of interests often related to their own youth

culture but also to other areas such as the environment, health and beauty, work and family (Fornais & Bolin, 1995). Saliba (1999, p.50) gives examples from pupil response to lesson content and form. She considers that in the higher streams pupils were soon bored with lesson content that was not challenging. In the lower streams, relevance was interpreted to mean less interest in the challenge of the task but more in the relevance of the content. We would need to ask how different these pupil interpretations actually are? In both cases are looking for challenge and for relevance, that is, they have used the same form of their cultural response. Not surprisingly, however, within their cultural repertoire, they are finding different contents relevant or irrelevant.

> Fieldnotes (8/5/98) - 4.01 (English)
>
> In the introductory set up, the discussion about different types of mail was not very stimulating. Pupils kept talking to each other and murmuring never ended. Then just as the teacher made the least reference to the book's poem, all students reverted their attention to what she was saying.
>
> Fieldnotes (23/4/98) - 4.11 (Maltese)
>
> My Lyden spent 15 minutes giving hints and guidelines on how to write the essays. The girls only showed interest in the last title, namely 'Fejn tmur il-qalb jimxu r-riġlejn' , asking when they could narrate a personal experience.

Pupils in Southbrook, as in other schools in Malta and internationally, were very sensitive to the informal messages teachers gave about their expectations for pupil achievement and success. In a pupil interview, Saliba (1999, p.45) found that in the German language Form 4 class where pupils had been 'uncommonly' mixed due to the small number taking up this subject, pupils found that interaction favoured the perceived higher ability pupils.

> Frida: Per ezempju fil-German dejjem tal-4.01 tqabbad jaqraw qishom huma biss jeżistu. Jien xorta nuri nteress imma ma tikkalkulanix. Inkunu mħalltin mill-4.01, 4.06 u xi klassi oħra. Il-maġġoranza tal-4.01 u iktar għandha preferenza magħhom, dejjem tqabbad l-istess nies. Huma veru juru iktar interess, imma anke jien nipprova nuri nteress pero għalxejn.

Saliba (1999) uses Frida's case to demonstrate how the pupil's definition of the situation had some impact on her self-identity and peer group alliances. Frida (Saliba, 1999, p.75) felt she had been incorrectly allocated to her stream. She noticed how the English Literature text selected for the top streams (Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*) was different to the text chosen for her Form 4.06 class. She feared that the following year she would not be reallocated to a higher stream since she would have followed a different syllabus. Saliba's (1999, p.71) sociogram of friendship choices within Frida's class, shows that Frida chose only one other girl as a friend and only this girl chose Frida. She was in effect practically an isolate, not

forming part of any of the four 'cliques'. Teachers recognised that Frida stood out amongst her peers and she too felt this.

> Frida: Ħafna minnhom mhux it-tip tiegħi, m'humiex interessati li jitgħallmu iktar jew Illi jġibu marki tajbin. Jikkuntentaw ruħhom b'marki baxxi, u dejjem itellfu, jiġifieri. Jien irrid inġib marka għolja biex inkun kuntentat..Jiena nara l-iktar li huma it-tip tiegħi fil-4.03 qiegħdin. Ħafna minnhom kienu f'tiegħi s-sena l-oħra. It-tip tiegħi, li jixtiequ jitgħallmu, fhimt, u li jikkuntentaw ruħhom b'xi 75 'il fuq, hekk u mhux inqas.

Despite being called a 'nerd' by classmates, Frida managed to hold on to her objective of achieving high standards. She was promoted to Form 5 the following year. Not many pupils in this situation do maintain the self-esteem and resilience that Frida showed. They often take on the label and become polarised along the lines of the school organisational culture (differentiation). In Frida's class, Francesca, a complete isolate with no choices toward her in the class sociometric test, was one such case. Saliba (1999, p.71) uses interview data to show how the status of 'repeater' (repeating the year) lead Francesca to develop a recalcitrant attitude toward schooling. Missing her friends now in Form V, the classroom became increasingly less attractive. Francesca regularly absented herself from school, using the three days monthly 'allowance' for which she would not need to produce a doctor's certificate for non-attendance.

Saliba (1999) shows that the presence or absence of friends (and therefore of a shared cultural repertoire) in the secondary classroom can have a considerable impact on the pupils' definition of the situation. For example, another Form 4.06 pupil, Fabienne, who like Francesca had repeated the year, had a far more positive attitude to her situation and behaved accordingly. Initially she cried and cried, finding the new classmates 'nerds'. She was going to drop out from school when she made new friends 'kollha laqghawni' and changed her definition of the situation. Saliba (1999) also found that many From IV year groups had made friendship choices from pupils in other classes. Whilst the top streams were more conservative and closed in their choices, the other classes in the year group showed considerable openness.

Interestingly, Furlong (1984) finds that the early research on formal and informal groups in the classroom was rather too rigid depending either on an unchanging external (the allocation to a particular Form) or internal (individual personality) context to explain the grouping. Furlong (1984) suggests that pupils are far more fluid in their interaction with each other, continually adjusting their behaviour and without very consistent norms. They develop different patterns of interaction in different contexts, such as different subject lessons, groupings (a German mixed ability class compared to the English 'set/homogenous' class) and others. For Furlong (1984, p.148) this interaction leads to the temporary formation of an *'interaction set'* which 'at any one time will be those pupils who perceive what is happening in a similar way, communicate this to each other, and define appropriate action together'. Moreover pupils build up respective lines of conduct as they go along. The same pupil may have a different interpretation of the classroom in one context (for example, in history) to another (say, biology). One may be defined as 'boring and irrelevant', the other 'challenging and cool'.

These interaction sets can offer a pupil the opportunity to develop one identity in a particular subject, say as an attentive and diligent pupil and another in a different class, say, recalcitrant and low-achieving. The informal communication channels in the school may mean, however, that teachers may not be able to see beyond already established labels. Furthermore, if pupils are allocated to Form classes on the basis of global marks rather than being set for each subject, the opportunity to display their multiple intelligences may well be lost.

Teacher strategies in the secondary school

In Woods' (1980a, p.10) introduction to the volume titled *Teacher Strategies: Explorations in the Sociology of the School* both the micro-work in classrooms based on the interactionist framework and the more 'structural' work of Marxist scholars have to consider strategies. Strategies are ways of achieving goals. They link the action of individuals to the social structure by making us ask questions about what it is teachers or pupils want to achieve in a particular context. Hargreaves (1978) calls these teaching strategies *'coping strategies'* since for him strategies are *'constructed responses to institutionally mediated constraints'*. Despite the importance attached to the situational embeddedness of the strategy (the limits imposed on action by the context) Hargreaves (1978) considers that they are 'adaptive'. Woods (1980a p.24) defines them thus:

> 'Strategies are thus individually motivated, culturally oriented and interpersonally adapted. They are also situationally adjusted. Teachers' methods are heavily conditioned by the circumstances in which they work.'

Because the contexts in which many teachers were teaching included very difficult aspects such as large classes, recalcitrant pupils and low level resources, many teachers were observed to be using strategies to 'survive'. Woods' (1979) classic study of a London secondary modern found that amongst the *survival strategies* being used were *domination, absence or removal, occupational therapy* (where pupils were given low cognitive skill work simply to keep them 'busy') and *morale boosting* (with teachers assigning easy work so as to reassure themselves that pupils were coping). Woods (1979) also found *negotiation* (for example, of the demands of schoolwork), *fraternisation,* and *ritual and routine* to be commonly employed in a range of teaching situations. Other scholars called these strategies 'coping strategies'. Of late no distinction is made between teaching or coping strategies and survival strategies. It is simply recognised that there exist a range of teaching strategies, some of which *facilitate* teaching (for example, choosing a topic that will ensure interest, but then using it to move to more demanding and even abstract work) whilst other strategies *replace* it (by allowing a low level of engagement with curriculum work).

These extracts from my fieldnotes for 'Tama' school Form IA show how teachers who have interpreted their situation to be a 'survival' one can combine facilitating strategies with replacement ones. On the 25th February 1999, Form I A returned from the Lenten sermons in the parish at 11 a.m. Their first lesson was English and for this they had a replacement teacher. Their own teacher Mrs Cortis then took the class

at noon. The replacement teacher had had a very focused lesson on sentence structure in English.

> Fieldnotes (25.2.99) Maltese Lesson, 12 noon
>
> Mrs Cortis comes in and the atmosphere changes altogether - resistance, shouting and rudeness.
>
> Bridget: Break issa.
>
> Teacher: Malti.
>
> Gulia: Malti xi dwejjaq, uh, uh.
>
> A number of girls are out of place, there is much shouting, T. shouts too but does not get control easily.
>
> T; Aħna lesti? Ħa naraw. (Waits till they are all sitting down)

Initially insisting on compliance before starting 'hard work' appeared like a commonly successful facilitation strategy. As this lesson progressed and after more observation in this class it became clear that at the slightest hint of resistance the teacher simply withdrew and stopped teaching. The outcome was reduced 'time on task' and reduced opportunity to teach and to learn. The lesson continued thus:

> T: Ħa naraw min se jaqrali dak li hemm f'ic-chart.
>
> In chorus they read the days of the week from a chart written in English!

It is well-known that teachers use a variety of pedagogical strategies to interest pupils, to enhance thinking and memory skills, to extend practice. Often visual aids or resources, even textbooks are used for this purpose. A further goal is to minimise fatigue, especially in a contexts where a teacher is juggling a number of interests-at-hand, one of which is health. Sometimes however, ill-chosen teaching aids may actually be replacing teaching. Mrs Cortis had the good intention of introducing the grammar lesson with a quick introduction to the days of the week. The use of English in a Maltese language could however be considered inappropriate. When pupils are asked to read from the text book as a class (albeit of 9 pupils since three are absent) it is apparent that a number have difficulty even with this basic level. Yet hearing the text read, even if by a small group, reassures the teacher that all is well and she may proceed. This is a typical example of *morale boosting*. The teacher has heard 'reading' and considers that all is well and she may proceed. But there are a number of costs to pay. Some pupils simply mime the reading. Others resist the 'choral' reading by reading in a very sing-song babyish fashion, repeating some of the patterns of the early years classes they have been in.

> T: Il-ġranet tal-ġimgha kollha xorta għalikhom.
>
> After a number of pupils give different reasons for preferring a particular day of the week, Amalia calls out.

Amalia: Miss, staqsi lil kulħadd.

T: Mela ħa nstaqsi lilek -il-mama tiegħek kollha l-istess?

Here the question about whether all days of the week are the same to one's mother has been allocated to Amalia, since from her comment it was clear that she wanted an opportunity to participate. The teacher is happy to content her especially since this seems to fit in with the general trend of the discussion. Soon, she asks the pupils to take out their textbook (a number then get up and go to their lockers) and to turn to the appropriate page. They are told to read quietly first *'taqraw f'qalbkom qabel ma nibdew'*. It is now 12.10 p.m. and it is not clear whether this is again a form of 'occupational therapy' (occupying pupils with undemanding tasks to kill time) or a clearly planned pedagogical strategy. I note that Mrs Cortis asks one girl to start reading, whilst another is standing up, one cleaning the board of the words of the previous lesson and Gulia has left the room to go to the bathroom. Since the pupil asked to read has difficulty, the teacher takes over and starts describing the pictures of the oral comprehension. She is doing most of the 'hard' work which again can be seen to be a form of 'morale boosting' since the very poor understanding of her class is not immediately obvious. This means that Mrs Cortis has interpreted the situation in such a way as to not to have to change her pedagogy or face the real difficulties of her class. Whilst it is true to say that many pupils have considerable difficulty with basic literacy, at the same time many of these strategies are replacing rather than facilitating teaching.

Here there is not the space to give full examples of some of the effective coping strategies of many excellent secondary school teachers. Some of these include spending long hours of preparation of handouts or work on the computer so that pupils can maximise their work on task and even take it home to extend their learning time. Teachers find examples from a variety of different sources, increasing interest, ensuring relevance and introducing pupils to the topic through a variety of media that replicate their application of the lesson in the real world outside the classroom. Many have files full of resources which would have taken hours of research, but then minimise fatigue in the classroom. Some purchase whole sets of an innovative textbooks or CD-Roms to add to those pupils are already allocated. Others use their personal repertoire of artistic skills such as art and drawing, music, acting or humour to add interest and variety, to prompt recall and for a number of other valid pedagogical reasons. All of these facilitate teaching and increase opportunity to learn. Teachers also share resources with other teachers, as well as incorporating many suggestions from their pupils in their planning.

Pupil strategies

In secondary schools most classroom interaction involves pupil activity. Even with a conventional two-thirds rule (where teachers talk two thirds of the time) we find that pupil compliance is fundamental. Without the negotiation of this working consensus, the lesson cannot happen. Such is the (relative) power of pupils to make a lesson successful or a failure that they have been called 'critical reality definers'. Often at their cost, teachers have found lessons disrupted or ignored by small or large groups of pupils. When pupils use strategic compliance a more stable situation is present. Just as teachers have to cope with certain constraints, pupils too face particular

circumstances such as 'getting through the day' or maintaining self-image, which require strategical action.

Based on his work in London schools in the 1970s, Woods (1983, p.117) presented a first typology of pupil strategies. He considered that *conformist* modes of adaptation to the classroom situation would lead to a strategy of response and receptivity to the teacher and the curricular demands. A second type of strategy was *colonisation* or *ritualism,* where pupils apparently go through the motions of satisfying the teacher or curricular demands, but by cheating, guessing, changing the date on work and other such strategies. There is simply an appearance of hard work and commitment. Strong self-interest prevails and pupils get by. However, this strategy often leads to poor academic achievement, and these pupils may be shooting themselves in the foot. The final strategic adaptation is *rebellion* or *retreatism*. Pupils openly contest the teacher's authority, challenge the demands made on them or withdraw their co-operation, even their person from the classroom situation. These strategies correspond to being *supportive, detached* or *oppositional*.

 Woods (1983) looks at a number of pupil strategies in the classroom such as 'having a laugh', and finds that in different context the strategy may be supportive, detached or oppositional. A joke may be shared in a supportive way. A teacher's humour and attempts to fraternise may be met with a detached silence. Finally, an open act of rebellion may be found in some types of laughter where the teacher and his or her action and person are the butt of the joke. In some cases, 'silliness' can also divide pupils. Different groups of pupils will behave strategically toward one another. In mixed sex secondary schools girls often deal with the 'silliness' of boys by ignoring them in the 'detached' strategy.

Different pupils interpret the same situation differently, and from their own perspective. Now that they have moved from the primary socialisation of the family during which period they would have had little or no choice but to take on the perspective of the 'significant others' of their childhood, adolescence and secondary socialisation provide new demands and opportunities. In secondary socialisation there is the 'internalisation of institutional or institutional-based sub-worlds' (Woods, 1983, p.12). Here pupils need to understand the institution and its values and take them on for their own. Rejecting them is also internalisation, since this cannot happen unless one first fully comprehends (in an embodied way) what these worlds are. For example, pupils who hand in an essay which is far shorter than the desired length will only do so because they first internalise the demand for length and *then* reject it. The same applies to infringements of the rules regarding noise in the class, time-keeping, and dress codes.

 In this period of secondary socialisation, pupils also have to develop *role specific knowledge,* including *vocabularies* and *tacit knowledge*. For example, the pupil must learn deference to the teacher even if at home the pupil has an adult role as the carer of younger children. A pupil will learn that some behaviour, such as repeated questioning about how to pace their work, is acceptable in a Form I class but is not acceptable in a Form III class. They will learn that the vocabulary used to describe a biology experiment on plants is not same as that used to describe a flower in poetry. Other roles give pupils different opportunities to interact differently. For example, a football captain role gives a low stream pupil a good opportunity to 'conform' and to

be supportive of the teacher and curricular objectives, something that may not be as easy to achieve in the same pupil's physics class.

One excellent example of pupil strategies in a Maltese secondary school is Mifsud's (1997) account of the boys in an elite Church secondary school. Mifsud (1997, p.342) shows how teachers used different pedagogies and different control strategies in the different streams. Whilst the A stream were encouraged to use higher cognitive order thinking and to develop an number of alternative explanations and reasonings, the E stream were given very limited access to a narrow range of classroom 'knowledges'. The E stream found that they could not identify with the dominant academic school ethos. They developed a number of classroom and school-wide pupil strategies as a way of maintaining their self-image, for enjoyment and to reduce stress. They developed a particular peer group culture, as this passage clearly describes (Mifsud, p.348):

> 'Favourite modes of resistance on the part of the E class included making fun of teachers, passing satirical comments, selecting a teacher's particular habits or characteristics and mimicking them or commenting on them, copying homework exercises, writing love letters during religion classes, making funny faces behind the teacher's back, and so on. The boys engaged in passive resistance when the teacher was particularly strict. They started out of the windows, and sometimes even dozed off. One student always had the latest issue of *Amateur Photography* open under his desk. Other resistant acts had a symbolic value. Nikos bit his textbooks as soon as his teachers looked in a different direction, for instance.'

Different situations put different demands on pupils and can lead to different interaction and strategic action. The effects of differentiation and polarisation have been turned into a type of possibility for this E class, enabling them to cope with the constraints imposed on them. Strategies are not however the copyright of one type of student group as might be presumed from these examples. All pupils, regardless (and perhaps because of) of class background, ethnicity, gender, dis-ability and sexual orientation or any other form of social difference, have their own interests to achieve in the immediacy of the classroom. Pollard (1984, p.248) calls these 'interests at hand'. The primary (because they are fundamental to their personal and social well-being) interests-at-hand and the enabling or secondary (because they can only be achieved after and if the primary interests are achieved) are presented in table form below.

Table 1: Pollard (1984) - Pupils' Interests-at-Hand

Primary Interests-at-hand	**Enabling Interests-at-hand**
• maintenance of self-image • enjoyment • control of stress • retention of dignity	• peer group membership • learning

Conclusion

In this chapter we have looked at how teachers and pupils interpret their context and give meaning to it. Their interpretation of the situation is personal or subjective but mediated through social structures and systems. For example, it is likely that the common experience of being allocated to a low stream will partly produce a common interpretation from the pupils so affected by the allocation. At the same time, biographical factors will give individual pupils access to different strategic resources depending on their particular interests-at-hand. We therefore find much variety in pupil strategies too. Teachers' biographies and careers also mediate their interpretations of the classroom context and make classroom interaction personal as well as social or structured. In the classroom, a number of factors are seen to be relevant to the quality of the interaction and the type of teaching and learning that takes place. Constraints remind us of social structures such as the national and school educational systems, whilst teacher and pupil strategies reassert the unique dimension of each interactive moment. Teaching and learning are situationally embedded.

Notes

1. 'Tama' is the pseudonym I have given to this school, because of the strong aura of hope that the Headteacher and teachers established for their students.

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CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

CHRISTOPHER BEZZINA AND JOSEPH FENECH

Introduction

Whilst successful teachers operate in many different ways, they have one thing in common – an ability to manage their classrooms effectively. As Wragg (2001) points out, without this basic skill, the most inspiring and knowledgeable teacher will fail. As you go through your first School Experience you are gaining first hand experience as to what teachers are doing to address the varied challenges of the National Minimum Curriculum. You are also realizing that secondary school teaching implies more than just teaching a particular subject. You need to know about formative and summative forms of assessment, portfolios and profiling, learning styles, motivation theory, differentiated learning, identification of learning difficulties, gender issues, parent participation and a host of other things.

Whilst teachers have to think of content (i.e. knowledge of a particular subject), of lesson planning and preparation, of activities, handouts, ICT, etc., we also realise 'that we are employed so as to take a group of students and turn them into interested and productive learners' (Bezzina, 2001, p.13). Therefore, the first thing teachers need to know is how to manage a class full of students. This is what this chapter aims to address.

This chapter focuses on what we consider to be some of the most important issues when discussing the area of classroom management. These are treated in a number of sections. In the first section we discuss a more inclusive definition of classroom management which goes beyond mere discipline and control. This takes us to a consideration of the requirements at the psychological level of the teacher to manage the class effectively. From there we move on to discussing the characteristics of the classroom as a learning environment which we consider to be another important requisite in the process of learning to teach. Undeniably, this process also involves the acquisition of basic skills which we describe at some length in the concluding section.

What is Classroom Management?

Traditionally, the teacher's task was conceived as consisting of two separate and separable commitments. First he/she was expected to be skilful in the keeping of order and discipline and, secondly, to be able to communicate knowledge to the students. In the nineteenth century, the first was given far more importance than the

second. In fact, being able to discipline and control classes, even in the absence of a satisfactory knowledge of subject matter and pedagogical skills, qualified a candidate for teaching (Grace, 1985). It is this pervasive assumption that is captured in Delamont's (1976, p.99) observation:

> Much teacher behaviour is in accordance with the role expectations held for them by their pupils and society at large. They attempt to control their classes and then to teach them something.

The management task of teaching was not only narrowly conceived as consisting of the ability to control students in the classroom, but it was assumed that control preceded instruction.

Decades later, educators, especially those involved in teacher training programmes, while accepting the distinction between the two roles, redefined the first one to include, besides discipline and control, the following skills:

- Establishing rules and procedures;

- Developing a rapport with students;

- Managing time;

- Using resources; and,

- Organizing the classroom space.

However, it became increasingly apparent that, in learning to teach, the twin tasks of management and instruction flow and feed into each other. This is evidenced even by everyday experience. The advice in the pedagogical folklore to beginning teachers *first* to establish order and *then* begin to teach may not be that logical after all because the way the teacher selects and organizes subject matter and communicates it to the students with the support of appropriate resources, is an enabling factor in the successful management of the classroom. A forceful argument for the integration of the twin tasks of management and instruction has been made by Boostrom (1991), Richardson & Fallona (2001) and Fenwick (1998).

Therefore, classroom management includes many different skills, including the way a teacher arranges the classroom, establishes classroom rules, responds to misbehaviour, monitors student activity, selects rewards and reinforcement, and uses daily routines to maintain a caring, supportive, efficient and productive learning climate.

If you ask a number of teachers how they handle particular classroom management issues, you are likely to receive several different, and perhaps even contradictory, responses. As Davis (1983) has pointed out, different teacher personalities, teaching styles and management practices will create very different classroom atmospheres. We go on to add, that, as a result, they will encourage different forms of feedback from students. Depending upon their own experiences and personal views, teachers approach classroom management from a number of different philosophies. For our

purposes, these approaches to dealing with classroom behaviour can be grouped into three general traditions.

One tradition emphasizes the critical role of communication and shared problem solving between teachers and students. This approach is called the *humanistic* tradition and is represented by the writings of Ginott (1972) and Glasser (1986, 1990). The second tradition comes from the field of *applied behaviour analysis* and is best represented by the writings of Madsen & Madsen (1970), O'Leary & O'Leary (1977), Alberto & Troutman (1986), Jones (1987) and Canter (1976,1989), who apply behaviouristic principles, such as behaviour modification, to the classroom. The third approach, which is the most recent, emphasizes skills involved in organizing and managing the classroom. This approach is called the *classroom management* tradition, and its major principles can be found in the writings of Kounin (1970), Doyle (1986), Good & Brophy (1990), Emmer, Evertson, Clements & Worsham (1997) and Wragg (1994, 2001).

Our discussion in this chapter will emphasise the classroom management tradition. We have chosen to highlight this approach because its principles are derived from research in the classroom and the central role that teachers play in the learning process.

The research indicates that the amount of time that students spend actively engaged in learning activities is directly linked to their academic achievement. It also shows that teachers who are good classroom managers are able to maximize student engaged time or academic learning time.

Various research studies of teacher effectiveness (e.g. Wragg, 2001; Emmer, Evertson and Anderson, 1980; Brophy & Evertson, 1976) report that classroom management skills are of primary importance in determining teaching success, whether it is measured by student learning or by ratings. Given this, management skills are crucial and fundamental. A teacher who is grossly inadequate in classroom management skills is probably not going to accomplish much (Bezzina, 2001).

As MacDonald & Healy (1999, p.205) state, competent classroom management is essentially a human relations skill. It reflects a teacher's ability to purposefully organize individual and group learning activities within a supportive classroom climate. Teachers need to possess the leadership skills to draw students into orderly encounters with activities/tasks which they may initially be indifferent or resistant to. This usually requires a firm presence and a strong sense of purpose, qualities that need to be balanced with considerable patience and good humour.

Two important concerns of classroom management are: (i) the strategies teachers adopt to bring about effective discipline and control and, (ii) the students' attitude to the teachers' management style. Insights are gained into these from Saliba's (1999) interesting ethnographic account of a school's organizational practices on the students' cognitive development and social relationships.

The organization of learning groups, based on the attainment of students in the different subjects of the curriculum, was highly influential in the management strategies teachers adopted with their classes. Classroom observation data in Saliba's (1999) study reveal the following facts:

- Students in the higher streams were rarely reprimanded for misbehaviour;

- Teachers adopted defensive (Clandinin, 1986) instructional strategies according to the class they happened to be teaching. In the low ability classes they simplified the subject matter in order to make less demands on the students;

- It was highly stressful to teach the low-attaining classes and the teachers' time and energy were largely taken up with efforts to keep class control. As one of the teachers put it 'to deliver a lesson you have to be totally, constantly, on your toes to keep the low ability students quiet, to keep them active' (Saliba, 1999, p.51);

- Misbehaviour, especially in the top streams, which the teacher anticipated would remain circumscribed and not spread to the entire class, was nearly always ignored;

- Sometimes teachers resorted to what Saliba calls 'non-punitive exile' which entailed sending the misbehaving student to the back of the classroom, at least for a period of time.

The sociological literature (Denscombe, 1985; Hargreaves, 1982; Furlong,1976; Nash, 1976; Woods, 1976) reveals that students develop their own notions of 'good' or 'bad' teachers. Students expect the good teacher to be firm but fair, respectful, friendly, able to explain things well and gets work done. Largely consistent with the findings of the published research, the girls in Saliba's (1999) study expected their teachers   to:

- Deliver interesting and original lessons, although the author does not provide descriptions of these;

- Give 'good' notes and a reasonable amount of homework;

- Use discussion as a pedagogical strategy and involve students;

- Exercise discipline as well as reward students' efforts to motivate them;

- Give enough opportunities for self-expression; and,

- Be cheerful, caring and understanding.

There are no simple formulas for nurturing and maintaining an appropriate learning environment in a classroom. You need to avoid thinking of classroom management as a set of prescriptions to be applied when behaviour problems arise. That is, as synonymous with 'discipline'. Instead, your ability to keep students constructively involved in learning will be the result of an environment you manage to create, a group climate you have a major role in establishing, one which hopefully supports and facilitates the learning you are seeking to bring about.

To become a skilful leader of the learning (or otherwise!) that will take place in your classroom (or any other environment for that matter) you will need to learn and accept the fact that you *should not* dissociate the act of lesson preparation and

planning activities from planning class management, that is collecting ideas and methods for setting up appropriate procedures (i.e. organized ways of doing things) as an integral part of your teaching. Therefore, classroom management includes all of the things that a teacher does towards two ends:

1. To foster student involvement and cooperation in classroom activities.

2. To establish a productive working environment.

To foster student involvement and cooperation, the effective teacher plans a variety of activities that are appropriate for learning. These activities may include reading, taking notes, participating in pair/group work, taking part in discussions, games, producing materials, art work and mobiles. An effective teacher has every student involved and cooperating in various activities – what Kounin (1977) describes as having a sense of 'withitness' and 'smoothness' which shows students that teachers care, are interested in what learning is taking place and want the students to achieve.

This leads to the important point raised by MacDonald & Healy (1999, p.206) who state that effective classroom management depends on three main factors: *commitment*, *perceptual sensitivity* and *management strategies*. Let us explore each in turn.

Commitment: Class control is made easier if you do your utmost to develop learning experiences that are meaningful, important, and of worth for the students you are teaching. Secondly, you need to develop a determination to develop and maintain a supportive environment in which they can learn.

Perceptual sensitivity: Effective management of students – whether individually or in groups – involves an ability to recognize when the classroom climate is appropriate to a particular activity and to sense when adjustments are called for. This 'sensitivity' implies that the teacher is very much aware of the human dynamics that are evolving in the class.

Management strategies: To maintain a productive and learning class atmosphere you will need to have at your disposal a repertoire of behaviour management tactics that you can skillfully apply to a variety of classroom situations (e.g. Cummings, 2000; Borich, 1999).

The Psychology of Classroom Management

Teachers who manage effectively create and maintain conditions in which students can learn efficiently. They organize the classroom in such ways that promote learning, and set a positive classroom climate; they establish productive classroom and group norms, routines and procedures, while teaching lessons, organizing and monitoring learning, maintaining good student behaviour, and evaluating classroom management and student achievement (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000; Thody, Gray & Bowden, 2000).

Effective classroom management requires that there be something personally and educationally important that you want to achieve with the class. When you come to

the class feeling confident because you have prepared the lesson to the utmost of your abilities, you will be more mentally prepared to insist on a favourable learning climate than when your primary concern is merely to get through the period. The management task will not loom in your mind as something extraneous to the act of teaching, as something you do out of self-defence or because it is expected of you.

Conversely, when you allow yourself to approach a class with little or no personal commitment to a clear and worthwhile learning goal, you lack a strong motive for promoting student involvement. You are less able to generate the essential teaching momentum that will, at its best, allow classroom management to become an integral part of the lesson itself. In other words, you put yourself at a psychological disadvantage when you fail to think of the control function as simply a means to help students accomplish a goal to which you are educationally committed. Unless you see it in this light, your endeavours to keep the students on task and possibly quiet and orderly are bound to appear artificial. In the students' minds, your attempts to control them will tend to be perceived as a coercive or manipulative game. Students have become used to teachers insisting on their paying attention and co-operating without getting any significant learning out of the deal, and they can be expected to respond with anything from apathy to overt compliance, to outright resistance, thus creating the potential for control problems of one sort or another (Weber & Roff, 1983).

Of course, this is no easy task and it will take ongoing hard work, and in particular hard thinking to keep coming up with lessons that will help to have 'management' arise out of the nature of the task itself, so that it is what the students are doing, and their interest in doing it that, in a sense, manage their behaviour. Yet, teachers who are constantly good class managers do by and large succeed in keeping themselves mentally prepared to meet their students mainly because their teaching also emerges out of what they are concerned about, in their case the learning and personal/social development of their students. Although at times they may feel weighed down by the long hours they spend with student groups, and the heavy pressures involved in working within a system, they nonetheless find ways to maintain, and when necessary to renew their enthusiasm and to avoid becoming stale. Your own endeavours to stay vital as a teacher will heavily depend on whether you really want students to learn, for purposes that you have fairly clear in mind.

Sensitivity to the Learning Environment

Whether we take a traditional view of classroom management or not, it is important for the teacher to develop an insight and understanding of the classroom as a site of professional practice. One of the most prominent writers on classroom management to place emphasis on the context of practice is Doyle (1986). In his extensive review of the literature on classroom organization and management, he identifies six properties which distinguish the classroom as a learning environment.

The first characteristic of the classroom which is evident even to the casual observer is its *multidimensionality*. The student group, coming from different family and cultural backgrounds, is marked by different needs, interests and abilities, making therefore competing demands on the teacher. In such a crowded place (Jackson,

1968) with the teacher having to achieve pre-set goals with limited resources, the demands on the teacher's skills are always complex and pressing.

A consideration of the events (planned or unplanned) that happen as the classroom process unfolds, surprises the observer with their *simultaneity,* a second characteristic feature of the classroom. During a writing task, for instance, the teacher may be required to provide help to an individual student, monitor the behaviour of the class and deal with the request of another student, all at the same time.

What is also clearly noticeable in the classroom process, is the rapidity with which classroom events happen. *Immediacy*, therefore, is another feature of classroom life. This is evident in the immediacy with which the teacher has to provide feedback to students, respond to their difficulties, deal with disruptions, maintain a brisk lesson pace and so on.

Furthermore, research into classroom processes indicates that, although the teacher goes with plans about what to do, once he or she is in front of the students, events do not always develop in the manner predicted. This is due to a number of factors. Students may not be as cooperative as the teacher has anticipated; unforeseen interruptions may stem the lesson flow; and the apparatus or technology may fail to function as expected. Hence, *unpredictability* is another feature of classroom life.

It is also highly noticeable how, inside the classroom whatever one does, whether the teacher or the students, has the others for an audience. If the teacher heaps praise on a student for work well done, then the whole class gets to know about it; a student's displayed work on the classroom walls attracts the attention of the other classmates; the teacher's reprimand for some misdemeanour is witnessed by the whole class. The teacher's skills or lack of them are publicised not only to the class but also to the whole school. The implications for classroom management of this feature of *publicness* of the classroom process, therefore, are obvious.

Finally, it has to be pointed out that life in classrooms is of a fairly long duration, normally the whole scholastic year. As a consequence, through the application of norms of behaviour and styles of management, a culture is generated which provides both constraints and opportunities for the development of learning activities. Everybody gets a feeling of how things are done in that particular place. This constitutes what Doyle (1986) has called the *history* of each classroom. And, it must be remembered that it is in this *history* that a student's, as well as the teacher's, biography as a learner and practitioner is inserted.

Such an awareness leads to greater sensitivity to the learning environment. To become an effective class manager the teacher needs to recognize when students are in sync with him/her and with one another. This is in large part a perceptual and observational skill. It entails an ability to sense when environmental conditions are right for the kind of learning activity you want to promote. As Kounin (1977) points out, teachers who are aware of the situation are quick to notice when students' attention is elsewhere, when they are fidgeting, or talking to one another. They immediately sense when a group is slow to settle down or when they just are not ready or willing to work.

One major impediment to classroom communication is unrestrained chatter, the inclination of some students to talk compulsively often to no one in particular. This sort of talking has become an increasingly difficult management challenge for teachers in today's schools (Cummings, 2000). Otherwise competent teachers sometimes allow themselves to become used to accepting a certain amount of noise. These teachers' perceptual faculties seemingly become desensitised to behaviour that so obviously interferes with any form of teaching and learning.

So why do teachers put up with classroom conditions that get in the way of conducting a 'proper' lesson? Knowing the answer to this question can be the first step to dealing constructively with the problem. One reason that Good & Brophy (1997) have identified is the lack of finely tuned classroom sensitivities. This usually involves a failure to work from a clear notion, a mental picture as it were, of just what constitutes appropriate classroom conditions, and thus a failure to recognize when these conditions are or are not met.

Another possible factor, is the absence of an abiding resolve to develop and maintain a classroom atmosphere that is aimed at tackling particular learning outcomes. This lack of resolve can contribute to class inattention and eventual misbehaviour. Teachers who feel disorganized or uncertain may ignore inattention and minor forms of misbehaviour because they are not clear about why they are teaching what they are teaching, or they may ignore it out of the inability to see the connection between student misbehaviour and a well-developed and focused lesson.

However, the most common reason why some teachers appear insensitive to inattentive and distracting behaviour in their class is what Brophy (1983) and Emmer *et al.* (1997) have described as a lack of confidence in their management skills. This lack of confidence usually stems from not having a knowledge of the skills needed for class management. The next section will explore the basic techniques that help teachers maintain good order in their classroom.

Acquiring basic Management Skills

To be an effective classroom manager you will need to have a range of ways of responding to and correcting minor or major instances of misconduct in your classes (see Figure 1). You should learn to apply these techniques quietly and efficiently, yet firmly and fairly, while calling as little attention to the problem as possible. By working to implement good low-profile corrective strategies, you can begin to ensure that you do not inadvertently become what Rinne (1982) has described as a distracting influence in your own classroom.

You should make basic management skills, as illustrated in Figure 2, part of your professional repertoire. By learning and practicing these skills (e.g. Emmer *et al.*, 1997; Doyle, 1977; Kounin, 1977; Kounin and Doyle, 1975) you can greatly reduce the number and severity of any classroom management problems that you may encounter.

As you gain further experience in schools you will note that the best class manager possesses an assortment of low-key tactics for gaining student attention, maintaining a smooth and productive flow of activities, and responding to inappropriate

behaviour. Once they have been mastered, many of these maneuvers can be performed almost automatically and effortlessly, becoming subtle ingredients of your classroom style. Others require a greater degree of calculation and planning to implement. Some of these are verbal moves, whereas others involve nonverbal skills. These can be categorized as: 1) gaining attention, 2) correcting misbehaviour, and 3) preventing misbehaviour:

Figure 1:   Classroom Techniques and Corrective Strategies

Getting Attention	Correcting Misbehaviour	Prevent Misbehaviour
Cueing	Eye contact	Scanning
Tuning	Gesturing	'T' Messages
Pausing	Moving in	Synchronizing
Restarting	Relocating	Prepping
	Insisting	Renewing
	Defusing	Positive framing
	Time-out	
	Conferencing	
	Referral	

Whilst it is not the scope of this chapter to explore all these management tactics we will briefly explore what we consider to be the basic management skills that need to be observed and discussed at this stage.

Developing 'withitness'

Teachers who have developed what Kounin (1977) calls 'withitness' are able to deal with different students at the same time. This faculty seems to convince their students that any misbehaviour will be noticed promptly, a healthy conviction that tends to keep them on task.

To develop this faculty teachers stand where they can be seen by all students when presenting a lesson. They make frequent eye contact with as many students as possible by glancing often at where they are positioned. Teachers also use 'stage' turns (i.e. face the class as they turn) so that they can maintain eye contact with students as they move towards the whiteboard; standing at an angle to write on the whiteboard so that they can see as many students as possible. They circulate to various parts of the room as the lessons unfold and, when they stop to help one student or group, they give glances to the rest of the class.

'Overlapping'

As Lang, McBeath & Hebert (1995) point out, skilled teachers train themselves to overlap (i.e. handle two or more situations or activities simultaneously), allowing the flow of productive classroom activity to continue uninterrupted while they deal with a particular need. They avoid becoming so immersed in one activity that they neglect the others that requires attention. The effective use of overlapping depends, of course, on constant 'withitness'.
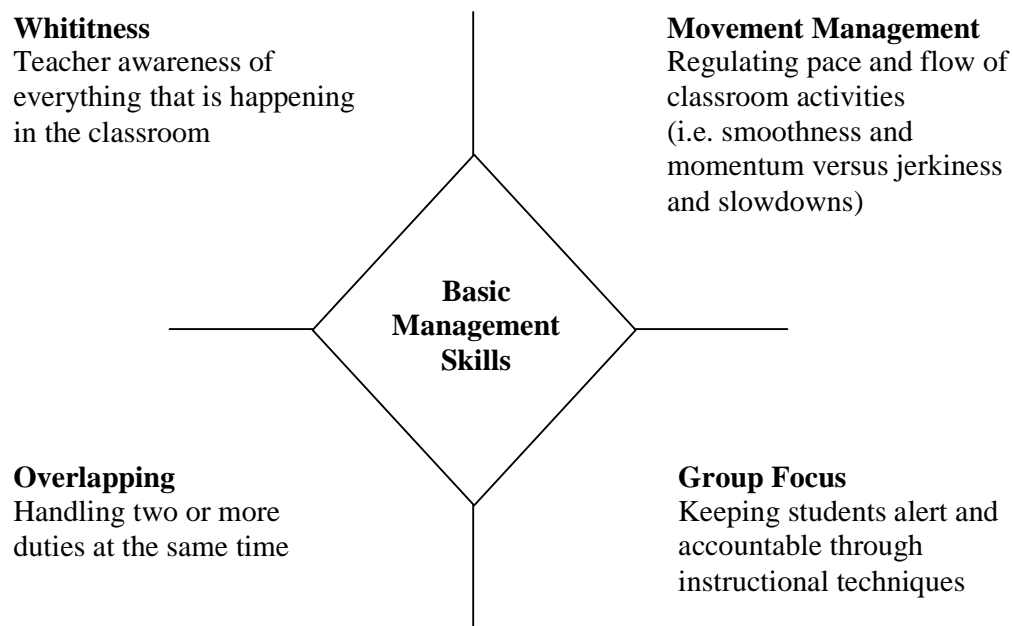
The teacher may apply overlapping skills by:

- Making eye contact, teacher gestures (e.g. sign language to denote different messages), moving in (i.e. moving calmly in the direction of the misbehaving student(s));

- Directing a question to a student who has not been paying attention to regain his/her attention;

- Acknowledging raised hands with a nod or other nonverbal signals to avoid distracting other students who are on task;

- Removing an object a student is playing with without interrupting a presentation and therefore slowing the pace of the lesson;

- Gesturing to deter a misbehaving student from pursuing an inappropriate activity to avoid focusing the attention of other students on the misbehaviour.

Managing Movement

Skilled teachers learn to regulate the pace and flow of the lesson, by identifying activities that keep the students engaged and 'on task'. To manage movement effectively the teacher does his/her best to:

- Organize materials, teaching aids, learning centres/areas so that they are there for immediate use,

- teach students particular procedures (e.g. what to do at the start of a lesson; what books to come to the lesson with) so that they are ready to begin and little to no time is lost,

- teach and use efficient routines for the distribution and use of resources,

- establish clear procedures for various activities so that students know what to do at particular stages of a lesson or activity.

Figure 2: Basic Classroom Management Skills

Whititness
Teacher awareness of
everything that is happening
in the classroom

Movement Management
Regulating pace and flow of
classroom activities
(i.e. smoothness and
momentum versus jerkiness
and slowdowns)

**Basic
Management
Skills**

Overlapping
Handling two or more
duties at the same time

Group Focus
Keeping students alert and
accountable through
instructional techniques

*Source***:** *Based on Discipline and Group Management in Classrooms*, by J. Kounin, 1977, and *The Uses of Nonverbal Behaviors: Toward an Ecological Model of Classrooms,* by W. Doyle, 1977.

Fostering Group Focus

Whilst this is indeed one of the most challenging aspects facing teaching today, using collaborative and group activities is an essential technique that cannot be left untapped. Students must not only learn to get along in a turbulent, ever-changing society, they must also be prepared to contribute to it. Collaborative and group activities help build the skills learners will need to think critically, reason and solve problems in an adult world, and help them acquire the social skills that can make their reasoning and problem solving effective.

In cooperative learning, the interaction occurs in groups of four to six members who share a common purpose and task, so the teacher's role is to fit his/her responses to the level of understanding common to the group. Instead of bringing individuals to a greater understanding and awareness of their own thinking, the primary goal is to help the group become more self-reflective and aware of its own performance (Borich, 1999).

During cooperative learning, feedback, reinforcement, and support come from peers in the group, whereas the teacher monitors and provides focused interventions. An essential ingredient of cooperative learning is the desire of each learner to facilitate the performance of his/her fellow members. Cooperative learning also encourages group sharing and decision making.

Fostering activities that encourage cooperative group learning involves the use of 'withitness', 'overlapping' and productive movement management.

To foster a group focus the teacher would:

- Pace lessons quickly enough to maintain students' interest but at the same time not confusing or discouraging them;

- Frame questions at a variety of levels, and involves all students and thus keeps students alert and focused;

- Accept responses only in the pre-identified manner (e.g. unsolicited responses that are blurted out are not recognized)

- Circulate during the group work in order to ensure that students understand and are learning, to help individuals, and to provide immediate feedback and reinforcement.

From this section one can conclude that the characteristics of a well-managed classroom are encapsulated in the following statements:

1. Students are deeply involved with their work, especially with academic, teacher-led or guided instruction.

2. Students know what is expected of them and are generally successful.

3. There is relatively little wasted time, confusion, or disruption.

4. The climate of the classroom is work oriented, but relaxed and pleasant.

The indicators to help you understand these four characteristics are illustrated as follows (see Figure 3):

This is at the centre of the teaching and learning process.

Figure 3: Indicators of the Well-managed Classroom

Characteristics	Effective Teacher	Ineffective Teacher
High level of student involvement with work	Students are working.	Teacher is working.
Clear student expectations	Students know that assignments are based on objectives. Students know that tests are based on objectives.	Teacher says, "Read Chapter 2 and learn the material by heart." "I'll give you a test covering everything in Chapter 3".
Relatively little waste of time, confusion or disruption	Teacher has a discipline plan. Teacher starts class immediately. Teacher assigns tasks/work	Teacher makes up rules and punishes according to his or her mood. Teacher takes roll and dallies. Students repeatedly ask for work to be assigned.
Work-oriented but relaxed and pleasant climate	Teacher has invested time in practicing procedures until they become routines. Teacher knows how to bring the class to attention. Teacher knows how to praise the deed and encourage the student.	Teacher tells but does not rehearse procedures. Teacher yells. Teacher uses generalised praise or none at all.

Source: Bezzina, 2001, p.19

Central to classrooms being described as safe, busy, buzzing with learning or even chaotic are ***procedures.*** Students readily accept activities. As Thody *et al.* (2000) point out, the lack of procedures also leads to students acquiring undesirable work habits and behaviours that are then quite difficult to handle and correct.

Thody *et al.*(2000, p.17) talk about a framework for the development of positive behaviour involving four elements (see Figure 4). These elements work together to create a caring community of learners in which all the strands are interdependent and all are dependent on the quality of the relationships in the school.

Figure 4: The Four Elements of Positive Behaviour
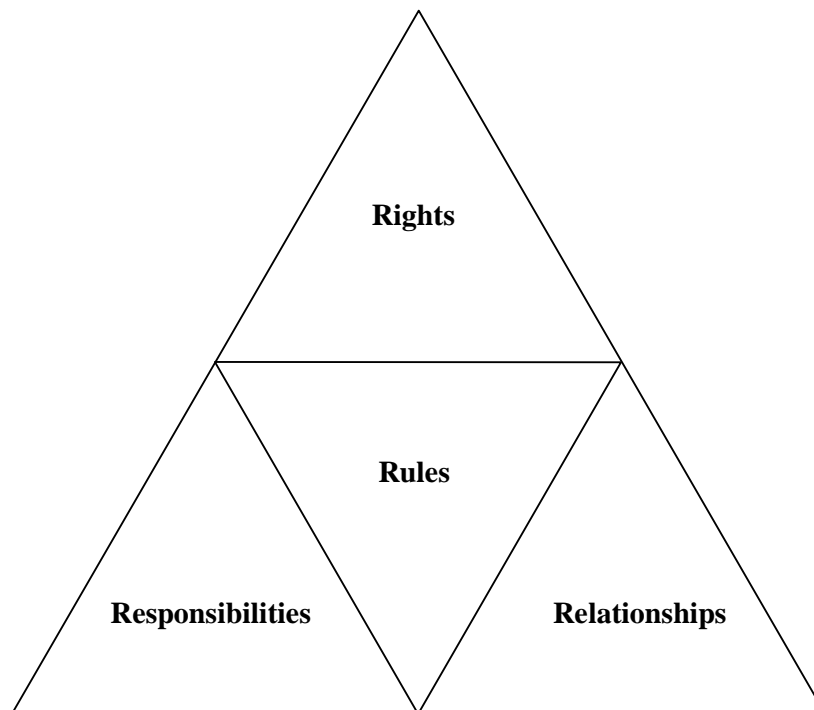
These four elements show that, whilst each element is distinct from the other, they are closely bound:

Rights: The right for everyone (teacher and students alike) to feel safe (physically and emotionally); to be treated with dignity and respect; to be listened to, and to learn.

Responsibilities: According to Thody *et al.* (2000, p.18) 'responsibilities go hand in hand with rights'. Covey (1989, p.71) expresses this well as 'response - ability', which he defines as 'the ability to choose our response'. To demonstrate responsibility, students need to be given opportunities to practice. In this way, students learn the skills of making decisions and *reflecting* on the effects of their choices.

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Rules: Rules are based on rights and responsibilities. There are, at least, two types of rules which are used in schools: *School rules and Teacher's rules.* School rules, which can be similar or different from those of other schools, concern issues such as dress code, behaviour in the school yard, gym or science laboratories. Then, there are teacher's rules on matters such as talking and movement and setting-out of work. It is essential to remember, that rules need to be expressed in positive phrases, written in terms which show what the teacher and the students will do.

Effective teachers present their rules clearly and provide reasonable explanations for their need. In fact, the most successful classes are those in which the teacher has a clear idea of what is expected from the students and the students have a clear idea of what the teacher expects from them (e.g. Wragg, 1994).

- Rules are expectations of appropriate student behaviour

- Rules help to create a work-oriented atmosphere.

- Rules create a strong expectation about the things that are important to you and the school.

- It is important to clearly communicate to students in both verbal and written form to   students what you expect from them as appropriate behaviour.

- As a teacher you will have more confidence in your ability to manage a class if you   have a clear idea of what you expect from your students and they know that that is   what you expect from them.

- It is easier to maintain good behaviour than to change inappropriate behaviour.

Relationships: Positive relationships are built when people feel valued and respected. Establishing effective relationships should be tops on our agenda. We would go on to add that relationships are essential at all levels: administrators and teachers; teachers and teachers, teachers and students, students and students, and the school and the community. All forms of relationships will, to a large extent, effect the rapport that people build *within* the school and more so between teachers and students.

Learning is enhanced or hindered by the social processes at work. When good relationships have been established, we can create opportunities for personal development. You have the necessary building-blocks for creating a positive climate for learning when members of the class community know and trust each other, are able to skilfully communicate with each other and are able to solve relationship problems. Genuine openness requires self-awareness and self-acceptance: you need to be able to trust to be able to express how you feel. All members of the class community should be enabled to listen to each other and to learn how other people want to be treated.

Naturally, we all know that this is far from an easy undertaking. At this point, therefore, the question: 'What about the need for discipline?' is legitimate.

Isn't discipline necessary for learning to take place? Effective teachers know and research shows (Bennett & Dunne, 1992) that the more time on task spent by students the more they learn. Learning takes place when students are focused and at work. All discipline does is stop misbehaviour. The reason coaches have their teams go through certain steps or paces over and over again is that the more they practice the better they will be to execute them during the game. The reason parents have their children practice the piano is that the more they practice, the better they play. Descriptions of the effective and ineffective classrooms are captured in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Effective and Ineffective Classrooms

An Effective or Ineffective Classroom

Effective Classroom	Ineffective Classroom
The students are actively involved in meaningful work. The procedures govern what they do and they understand how the class functions. The teacher is moving around the room, also at work, helping, correcting, answering, monitoring, disciplining, smiling, and caring.	The students are in their seats doing busy work or nothing. The only person who is observed working is the teacher. The teacher is in control of the class. Learning only occurs when a person is actively engaged in the process.

Procedures, like rules, communicate expectations for behaviour. However, they apply to specific activities. Teachers of well-managed classrooms think about appropriate behaviour during different activities. These procedures fall into three categories:

- beginning of class

- during the class

- end of class

Procedures need to be clearly explained, modelled, and reviewed with students. Procedures for starting class should not require your input or attention to begin. Students will try to distract the teacher from his/her task. The teacher needs to be consistent about reinforcing the opening procedure. Materials for the start of class should be centrally located so that students may get them and quietly get to work. Distractors, such as calling out names, should be avoided.

Consistency is essential to maintain a productive classroom. Procedures need to be established that the teacher will be able to reinforce all the time. Some students are conditioned at home to wear the rule-giver down. Effective teachers set standards that they will not negotiate. In establishing these standards they also consider the time of day. Teachers may consider varying standards in the time after lunch, for example, if they feel that the students need a little leeway. So long as the students know and appreciate what the ground rules are than this option should be considered.

Never assume that they know or understand your expectations. These clearly need to be set and discussed at the start of a scholastic year.

Research shows that teachers can increase student learning by taking time at the end of class to summarize the day's objectives. To do this they establish clear ending procedures and watch the clock carefully. At the same time the end of lesson/day bell should never be the signal for students to move out of class. It is always the teacher who should dismiss students.

Conclusion

This chapter has helped the reader to appreciate what it takes to create a positive and rewarding climate for learning to take place. It has shown, amongst other things, that the most important factor governing student learning is classroom management. It has been emphasized that how teachers manage the classroom is the main determinant of how well students will learn. The chapter has shown that teachers who spend the first days/weeks of the scholastic year establishing procedures and routine help to set the class up for success to take place. Indeed, the teacher makes the difference in the classroom.

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THE CURRICULUM

CARMEL BORG AND PETER MAYO

Introduction

Most of the debate on education, in Malta and Gozo, throughout the last few years, has centred around the concept of *Curriculum*. The reason for this is that we have been witnessing, during this period, a long process of consultation with respect to the development of a new National Minimum Curriculum (henceforth NMC). *Curriculum* is one of the key concepts in educational debates, a very basic concept which is not easy to define. Definitions reflect their proponent's values. People define the curriculum according to their belief as to what education should be and, often, according to the educational experience to which they have been exposed. It is extremely difficult to reach agreement on a definition regarding what is a curriculum in the same way that it is extremely difficult to reach an agreement on what education is and should be.

Among the most common definitions, listed by Colin Marsh (1997, p.3), we discover the following: 'Curriculum is that which is taught in school", "Curriculum is a set of subjects', 'Curriculum is a set of performance objectives'. To these we can add 'Curriculum is a *set of principles* governing life within schools and other educational settings', 'the Curriculum provides an *educational vision*' for schools (adapted from the preamble to the NMC, Ministry of Education, 2000, p. 13).

The idea of a *vision*, based on principles, general aims and educational strategies, can provide the basis for a working definition of the concept of *curriculum*. It would be, however, a working definition and nothing more. No definition of *curriculum* can be complete, given the complexity of the concept. The definitions provided above and elsewhere, in the vast literature in the area, have their merits but are also limited. Our working definition is no exception.

One can easily notice, when reading the various definitions, that the concept of *curriculum* is broad in scope, encompassing a broad range of areas that contribute to the learner's education. If one takes Malta's new NMC document as an example, one comes across such areas as 'assessment,' 'language,' 'the physical and social environment,' 'teacher competence and effectiveness,' 'subject areas,' 'principles of learning,' 'inclusive education' and 'holistic education,' to mention just a few examples. In this respect, a curriculum is to be distinguished from a *syllabus*. The curriculum might, for example, identify a number of languages that are to be taught, including, in Malta's case, the two official languages, Maltese and English. It does

not indicate, however, the specific tasks and content that have to be mastered for each of the languages, often, as in the case of Malta, in connection with an exam or test (Marsh, 1997, p.4). The content for a specific subject area constitutes the *syllabus.*

The Curriculum: as process

The reference to the National Minimum Curriculum can convey the false impression that curricula can only be national or possibly, as in the case of larger countries such as Canada, regional. The existence of national and regional curricula in many parts of the world indicates that national and provincial governments constantly seek to provide curricular guidelines for the many different schools and educational settings that exist within the area of their administrative jurisdiction. Curricula however can be school-based. In fact, the concept of a National *Minimum* Curriculum implies the establishment of a core curriculum common to all schools which co-exists with other differentiated curricular aspects that serve to distinguish one school from another. In short, the idea of a national *minimum* curriculum presupposes that schools are allowed to develop their own curricula on the basis of which their specific school identity is established. Schools are therefore encouraged to develop their own curricula which are broad enough to encompass aspects that distinguish them from other schools and a core element common to all schools. This is a relatively new phenomenon for Maltese state schools that have traditionally been regulated by a centralised system of administration. One gathers that schools will be allowed to develop their own curricula, something which church and private schools have been doing for years. This process has allowed specific church and private schools to develop their own identities.

Both National Minimum and school specific-curricula, or more precisely, the sum total of the two that constitutes the curriculum of a particular school, would, according to the terms of our definition, reflect a particular educational vision. The question that arises is: *whose* vision? In short, *who* participates in curricular development and reform? The whole process can be 'top down' i.e. a very *prescriptive* process in place. At the national level, this can mean that the written curriculum can be formulated by a board of education officers and other personnel appointed by the Minister. Designated as experts, they decide what people should learn at school or in other educational settings. Malta's 1989 NMC was criticised for having been very prescriptive, the product of a 'top-to-bottom' approach (see Borg *et al.*, 1995; Wain, 1991). The process marking the development of the more recently written NMC provided the alternative to this. A considerable attempt was made to render the process of development of this written curriculum as democratic as possible. It is a process that entailed several stages and the writing of preliminary documents, the penultimate draft document serving as the basis for an attempted broad process of consultation. This lengthy approach was based on the recognition that the stakeholders involved in education (those who are affected by and who should, therefore, have a say in the whole process) are many. These would include teachers, educational administrators, education officers, Directors in the Education Division, politicians, employers, unions and other constituted bodies, examination boards, publishing houses, parents and students. If one looks at the process of consultation which occurred in Malta in 1996, in preparation for the development of the new NMC document, one discovers that the following stakeholders were

consulted: Education Division officials, the Faculty of Education, the Association of Private Schools, the National Council of Youth, the University Students' Council, the Employment & Training Corporation, the Federation of Industries, the General Retailers & Traders Union, the Malta Union of Teachers, the General Workers' Union, all schools in Malta, the Association of School Councils, the National Commission for Persons with a Disability, the Commission for the Advancement of Women, Sedqa (the National Agency against Alcohol and Drug Abuse), the Department for Consumer Affairs, the Maltese Chamber of Scientists (Vella *et al.,* 1998, pp. 6, 7).

The broader the process of consultation, the greater would be the level of consensus concerning the overall educational vision provided in the written NMC document. The debates and compromises involved, as well as the views expressed in committees, the media (print and broadcasting) and written as well as verbal responses to draft versions of the written curriculum, underline one very important point. The Curriculum, whether national or school-based, is a *site of contestation* (see, for instance, Apple & Beane, 1999; Feinberg, 1998; Pinar, 1997; Pinar *et al.*, 1995). Different people, as individuals or groups, have different values, different interests and different priorities. They have different *voices*. To what extent can any process of consultation, with respect to the development of a curriculum, accommodate different voices? Much depends on the ability of specific groups to lobby for their cause. Some voices will thus be accommodated while others will remain unheard and not be taken on board. Groups of people whose interests are supported by state-recognised or constituted bodies stand a much better chance of having their interests, or some of their interests, satisfied than those who remain marginalised.

The list of groups of people who were consulted, with respect to the new NMC document, is quite large. It cannot however be large enough. There are other groups, such as, for instance, the Gay Support Group, who remained marginalised and whose lobby was therefore not strong enough to have a bearing on the outcome of the written curriculum's development process. The stronger the group becomes in numbers and in its lobbying powers, the stronger will be its level of contestation of the curriculum. The curriculum will always be a site of contestation. It constitutes, to use Raymond Williams' phrase, only a 'selection from culture' or rather a selection from the 'cultures of society.' Given that society is made up of different cultures, with respect to ethnicity, gender, class, ability/disability, age and sexual orientation, only a selection of these cultures would be present in the curriculum. It has been argued that the traditional school curriculum in Malta has for instance been middle class, male, heterosexual, Catholic, white and able-bodied orientated. The lobbying engaged in by, for instance, the Commission for the Advancement of Women, prominent feminists, the National Commission for Persons with a Disability, and other persons working in the area of disability, has led to a more gender and disability sensitive curriculum document than was the case in the past. Of course, there will always be room for greater contestation in these two areas, as in other areas. Other groups will emerge in future to highlight aspects of the curriculum that run counter to their legitimate interests as citizens living in a purportedly democratic community. They will contest the curriculum on such grounds. Their specific culture is not given the esteem they feel it deserves within the educational system and they would expect

a more democratically developed written curriculum to go some way toward putting this right.

To summarise this section, we would argue that the curriculum is 'strongly connected with a process whereby different cultures are engaged in a contest for legitimacy. Established curricula accord legitimacy to different kinds of knowledge at the expense of others.' (Borg & Mayo, 2001, p.63). They establish 'Official Knowledge' (Apple, 1993) in a process, characterised by cultural domination and contestation, that can be broadly termed *cultural politics*. Whenever one examines closely such important policy documents as national or school-based written curricula, one must bear in mind that these documents represent only a selection from the many cultures that make up society. Traditional curricula have attached great value to the cultures of those who have access to power: male cultures at the expense of women cultures, the culture of dominant ethnic groups at the expense of the culture of ethnic minorities, middle class cultures as opposed to working class cultures, the dominant religious cultures as opposed to those of religious minorities such as Muslims and Jehovah Witnesses. There has always been a strong connection between the curriculum and *power* (on this, see Hill, 2001, p.96). Viewing curricula in this light, one might ask: Given that the curriculum is a *selection from culture*, in *whose interest* has the selection been made (for further reading on this, see Hill, 2001, pp. 96, 97)?

In drawing on the views of a large number of stakeholders, the steering committee entrusted with developing the new NMC document in Malta sought to render the task as democratic as possible. Hopefully, the process engaged in at the national level will also be reflected at the level of school-based curriculum development. Once again, any attempt at a democratic process of curriculum development within schools and other educational settings should be characterised by widespread participation, including the participation of teachers, administrators, parents, students (especially at certain levels of the educational system) and community leaders/representatives.

Despite all laudable efforts that go into the development of written curricular documents, much will depend on the way the curriculum develops within the school, educational setting or, in the case of national curricula, throughout the entire educational system. We should avoid providing a static and often simply idealistic 'curriculum of fact' (Young, 1988, pp. 24-27) and develop, instead, a fruitful *dynamic* and *ongoing* process of curriculum development. Written curricula are simply documents that provide guidelines for curricular development. They often represent " the *ideal* rather than the *actual* curriculum" (Marsh, 1997, p.4).

There is a whole implementation process which has to take place and, if this is to be democratic, it is likely to be a lengthy one, characterised by different phases involving a variety of people of different background. One can refer, once again, to the case of the new NMC document in Malta, involving a series of work groups focusing on different aspects of policy concerning the issues raised in the curriculum document (e.g. gender, disability, language, democracy, community schools) . The papers developed in each work group were presented at a national conference in June 2000 (see Giordmaina, 2000). This was followed by the setting up of focus groups. How is the curriculum document 'reinvented' at school in the day to day *interaction* between teachers, administrators, learners, parents and other members of the community? Curriculum development is an *ongoing process* involving the way

teachers and students *mediate*, *reinterpret* and *reinvent* principles within their specific learning setting.

This brings us back to the earlier question: *whose* vision? The vision provided in the written curriculum, ideally the result of a broad process of consensus building among stakeholders, might run counter to the vision of education embraced by the learners inside classrooms. Different learners have different visions. Much actual curriculum development depends on the level of interaction between the different visions embraced by the different parties involved in the educational experience, primarily the teachers, who provide their own interpretation of the document, and the students themselves who derive their own meaning from the educational experience. It can also involve parents. All these parties bring their own cultures to bear on the learning setting. This process of interaction therefore entails a 'conversation between cultures' (Quicke, 1999, p. 91), the different cultures of the teachers, students, parents and any other party involved.

It was argued earlier that no definition of *curriculum* can be complete, but at least this definition from Marsh (1997, p.3) takes into account part of the reality to which we have just referred. It places the learner in the foreground. The curriculum is defined in terms of 'what an individual learner experiences as a result of schooling' (Marsh, 1997, p.3). Marsh (1997, p.5) goes on to make a very important point, in this regard, namely that the student acquires knowledge from two types of curricula, the *formal* or *overt* curriculum, that which is official, and the *hidden* curriculum, the latter consisting of the day to day school procedures.

The overt curriculum tends to be 'universalistic' in nature. It includes syllabuses, prescribed content, length of school periods and examination procedures (Marsh, 1997, p.36). On the other hand, the hidden curriculum refers to 'particularistic' aspects of schools and includes elements such as: streaming; grading; time-tabling practices; methods of teaching; school rituals; texts treated as the most authoritative sources of knowledge; facilities; assignment of senior teachers to particular classes; assignment of highly qualified teachers to particular schools; assignment of female teachers to particular years in primary; and reward systems. According to Lynch (1989), the hidden curriculum is largely responsible for increasing inequalities in outcomes.

To stream or not to stream – The Curriculum as a Site of Contestation [1]

The history of the development of Malta's NMC document provides sufficient material for a case study that can bring to life, through appropriate contextualisation, some of the forgoing issues. It is specifically to Malta's NMC document that we now turn. The 21-month long process of consultation leading to the final document of the NMC was marked by a fierce debate on the overt and hidden aspects of the Curriculum. The synthesis of the national debate was a final document that recognises the importance of full inclusion. It also adopts the concept of entitlement as the guiding principle for the distribution of and access to resources:

> ... the educational community must remain committed to social justice and invest most in those children who for different reasons, risk repeating the school year, being absent from school, becoming school 'drop-outs' or completing their schooling period lacking the necessary skills and with low self-esteem. (Ministry of Education, 2000, p. 36)

Informed by a commitment to democracy and social justice (Ministry of Education, 2000, p. 25), besides placing the emphasis on outcomes, the new NMC document recognises social location, identity and difference as fundamental principles. This particular document challenges the concept of the 'whole mass of students' of the old Curriculum document by recognising the importance of promoting a school culture characterised by 'individual and social differences [which] enables and requires a pedagogy based on respect for and celebration of difference' (Ministry of Education, 2000, p. 30). The 'politics of absence' that marked the 1989 attempt at curriculum development, is replaced by an overt struggle to foreground gender 'equality', critical citizenship, multiculturalism, sexuality education, moral education and genuine inclusion.

Despite the foregrounding of these important elements for the democratisation of education in Malta, several compromises had to be made with respect to some of the issues raised in the *Tomorrow's Schools* and the Draft NMC documents. The term 'equity' was one of the major casualties. Although the idea of equity is reflected in such statements as the one, just quoted (Ministry of Education, 2000, p. 36), affirming the NMC's commitment to social justice and to investing in those who are most 'at risk', the gender issue is, alas, couched in terms of equality (Ministry of Education, 2000, p.54).

The follow-up document, provided by the 'Gender in the NMC' Committee, criticises the use of the term 'equality' in the final document:

> The stronger principle of equity (rather than equality) is needed because this obliges educators to ensure that each young person is properly engaged in the curriculum and will leam to a degree where there will be sameness of outcome though not necessarily of process. (Mizzi et al., 2000, p. 372)

In its document, the 'Gender in the NMC' Committee provides important guidelines for the promotion of gender equity in the Maltese educational system, grounded in a detailed critique focusing on such issues as school uniforms (they criticise the 'policing of the girls' body' which takes the form of misplaced regulation of girls' wearing of skirts when it is the harassing boys who should be regulated), physical education and sport (important sites for the construction of different masculinities and femininities, with one of the recommendations being that there should be an inclusive co-education PE policy), sexual harassment (the Committee argues for greater sensitivity to the effects of 'hegemonic masculine school cultures' and for 'a no-tolerance approach') and funding and resources (the Committee calls for the Education Division to have a gender equitable policy in this regard and for school council members and Heads to view their spending from an equity perspective) (Mizzi *et al.*, 2000, pp. 378-380).

The Committee redefines Principle 11 as Gender Equity, which entails: an equal chance for learning for females and males; equitable opportunities to learn subjects and prepare for future education, jobs, careers and civic/political involvement; no limits on expectations or outcomes due to gender; equal encouragement for both females and males to develop, achieve, earn and thrive; equitable treatment of male and female students; a process that builds peaceful and respectful relationships among females and males. (Mizzi *et al.*, 2000, p. 373)

This, however, was not the only serious compromise made. The Draft document's advocacy of de-streaming at primary level, comprehensivisation of secondary education and the elimination of the selective 11 + examination was regarded as too radical. The fear of such changes could have possibly been caused by memories of the policy of comprehensivisation introduced in the state school system in the 1970s. The Malta Union of Teachers (MUT) had, then, advocated the policy of general comprehensivisation of the Maltese educational system. Its implementation in the State sector was, however, decried by this same organisation for the lack of preparation which characterised such a drastic change. The MUT President, John Bencini, signed the 1998 draft document, advocating the policies of de-streaming and comprehensivisation. He commented, in a newspaper interview, that:

The major change envisaged in the draft of the curriculum is a push towards what we call 'comprehensive education. 'Another change would be the phasing out of streaming in the primary schools. These are radical but necessary changes. (Delia, 1998, p. 15)

The above comment is in keeping with the tradition of his union being against selectivity in education. The suspicion, though, is that this stance is rarely echoed by many teachers (see Ministry of Education, 2000, p. 36). As Sultana (1997) remarks: '... the MUT is held hostage by its own conservative membership base' (p. 421).

The majority of parents equally detest such radical changes. In a research project, supervised by one of the authors, 1140 parents of children attending Year 1-Year 3 primary classes and 1180 parents of children attending Year 4-Year 6 primary classes answered a questionnaire which included a section on streaming; 80 and 79 respectively answered that streaming constitutes a just practice with primary schoolchildren (Duca *et al.*, 1999). Some of the reasons put forward by parents, to justify their 'dismay and horror', are best exemplified in this letter written to the local press by a group of vociferous parents:

In Utopia, equality is possible, in reality it is not! The irony of the situation is that with the dismantling of the junior lyceums (grammar schools), it will be the children most in need of help who will be most adversely affected. Even though streaming does not exist in the first four years of primary education, even very dedicated and qualified teachers are often unable to cope with overcrowded (usually there are 30 children in a class) mixed ability classes. The result is that children

who have not grasped even the basics merely lag further and further behind. Sadly streaming must always be a reality in state schools due to the tremendous difference in social and educational backgrounds of the children. [2]

Sensing a strong reaction to the draft document's proposed changes, the then Labour Minister of Education, Evarist Bartolo, addressed the issue, in front of the press, to allay fears concerning de-streaming and comprehensivisation. [3] This action on the Minister's part is open to many interpretations. In response to a question concerning 'the latest status on the new National Curriculum', the MUT President stated:

> There was supposed to be a national debate about the draft. With all due respect to the Minister of Education, I feel that some comments he made during the press conference launching the draft might have pre-empted a healthy and open debate which one anticipated with interest. I have every respect for the Minister, but I must say that, because of pressure he might have been subjected to, he committed himself not to introduce a mixed ability system. He also disclosed that the government does not plan to go for a comprehensive system of education. I feel that these matters are at the heart of the draft. I wish that if the Minister had something to say, he should have waited until others had their say. (Delia, 1998, p. 15)

Others would go along with Minister Bartolo's official version that the process of de-streaming should be introduced gradually and any drastic and sudden changes in this regard can only undermine popular support for the Curriculum document and the much-augured reforms it is intended to introduce. In a speech given to participants at a seminar organised by the Association of School Councils on 20 July 1999, Evarist Bartolo, then Opposition spokesperson on education, was reported, by the Labour press, as saying: 'In education it is better to move slowly and on the basis of national agreement than purport to go fast without national consensus.' [4] The present Minister of Education, Louis Galea also shared this position, when the Opposition Education spokesperson. An Editorial in a leading Maltese English Language daily states:

'We already know that Dr Galea, like Mr Bartolo before him, is opposed to the draft's recommendation that comprehensive schools be introduced .[and] it is heartening to see that on this same topic, at least, there appears to be agreement between the two main political parties.' [5] In its affirmation of its commitment to 'An Inclusive Education', the final NMC document states:

> The reactions received by the Minister of Education, with respect to the draft Curriculum, clearly indicate that teachers do not feel sufficiently prepared and supported to address this great challenge. Therefore, while this document acknowledges the principle of inclusion as the one which should be followed throughout the Maltese educational system, the forthcoming years should be considered a transitional period. During this period, one should lay the necessary educational infrastructure, commence the necessary preparation of

teachers for such a change and carry out an educational campaign among parents intended to bring about a change in the social perception of education. (Ministry of Education, 2000, p. 36)

It was not only teachers and parents who expressed their opposition to de- streaming and comprehensivisation. The Maltese Episcopal Conference, through its Secretariat for Catholic Education and Culture, argued against de-streaming. It stated that, given the NMC's acknowledgement that students learn through different means, pass through different phases of development and develop at different levels, 'then we just cannot cater for all in one system of education (comprehensive system). This would create, it seems to me, a great injustice.' [6]

The position taken by this important body warrants serious consideration, given that the Church, although running non-fee-paying schools and casting lots for the selection of children into its primary school classes (exceptions are however made for those whose siblings already attend the school in question), still promotes a selective system, based on meritocracy, at the secondary and sixth form levels. The above quotation indicates reluctance, at least by the Secretariat, to dismantle this selective system. While proposing the elimination of the state school sector's 11+ examination, the draft NMC document did not explicitly propose a similar move with respect to the Church's common entrance examination for its secondary schools.

If the Draft's proposals were realised, we could have faced, certainly in the short term, the possible co-existence of a comprehensive state school system alongside the Church's and private sector's selective systems (a meritocratic secondary school system in the Church's case and a fee-paying system in the case of private schools). A similar co-existence, introduced in the 1970s and terminated, through the introduction of state-run Junior Lyceums in the early 1980s, is often judged to have sparked off an exodus of pupils towards the Church-private sectors (church schools were fee-paying schools at the time), thus undermining the development of a national socially inclusive educational system. One can only surmise whether these concerns weighed heavily on the Labour Minister of Education's decision, in 1998, to address the press and allay parents' and teachers' fears regarding the draft NMC document's proposed introduction of comprehensivisation in the state sector.

Conclusion

How should schools be organized? What do schools teach, how should they teach, how is learning to be gauged, and who should decide? These are some of the questions around which curriculum theory and practice have evolved. This chapter was intentionally designed to capture some of the discourse that has nurtured the field of curriculum development.

Notes:

[1] This section is reproduced, in its entirety, from Borg and Mayo (2001).

[2] Vella et al, *The Times* (Malta), 10th March 1999, p.15.

[3] As reported in the daily newspaper, *L-Orizzont*, 5 June 1998, under the heading: '*M'hu se jsir l-ebda terremot fis-sistema edukattiva ta'pajjizna*' [There will be no earthquake in our country's educational system]. See also the Minister's column in the Sunday newspaper, *Kulhadd,* 7 June 1998, under the heading: 'Morna Ahjar L-Iskola' [We have done better at school].

[4] Literal translation from the original in Maltese which reads: 'fl-edukazzjoni aħjar nimxu 'ftit' u bi qbil nazzjonali milli taparsi nimxu 'ħafna' b'diżgwid nazzjonali', *Kullħadd,* 28 March 1999.

[5] Editorial entitled 'Draft national curriculum,' *The Times* (Malta), 2 December 1998.

[6] Submissions to the Hon. Dr Louis Galea, Minister of Education, by the Secretariat for Catholic Education and Culture of the Maltese Episcopal Conference, dated 14 December 1998.

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THE PROCESS OF LEARNING

PHILIP BONANNO

Introduction

> 'No educational objective is more important than learning to learn and how to function as an independent, autonomous learner, and that learning should not be seen merely in the context of the school but as a lifelong experience.'
>
> (Howe 1984, in Herring, J.E. 1996).

Learning to learn has become the buzzword of the moment. Many promote its importance, but only few show the direction. Whether done tacitly through experience or formally through educational channels, learning to learn is the main agenda in everyone's life. Fundamental to this life-long learning process is the awareness of one's cognitive and affective characteristics. One's consciousness of the major assets and tendencies, together with a realisation of which personal factors impede or distract one from learning, are crucial in managing learning strategies. Awareness leads to better control. The objective of this chapter is to point out some of the individual characteristics that determine one's progress in a subject or particular domain of knowledge.

Learning is a complex process based on a wide range of personal characteristics and social interactions. Most of 'what' we think and to some extent 'how' we think are socially determined. One must also appreciate the intimate relationship that exists between thinking and feelings. Thinking, feeling and doing are fundamental ingredients of any learning experience. But while it is essential to be aware of the whole network of variables that contribute to learning, one should also focus on how particular aspects contribute to learning. A greater understanding of each of the components will help us understand better the whole process.

The Individual Aspect of Learning

Learning as a cognitive, acquisition-oriented, personal activity

Many consider Intelligence as the number one factor determining learning or performance in a particular field of knowledge. Though many times promoting fatalistic tendencies, such a conception of learning promotes the belief that students differ in learning because some are more intelligent than others therefore by default

more prone to learn than others. Surely this is founded on a misconception of intelligence. How can one decide that one particular student is intelligent and another is not! Are we mixing intelligence with being school 'smarts'?

Some psychologists proposed a genetically determined General factor responsible for intelligent behaviour. The more one has of it, the more academically smart s/he is and thus stands a greater chance for success in life. Besides being extremely fatalistic, such an approach is very naïve and portrays intelligence as a static personal quality that transfers and manifests itself in any aspects of ones learning.

This contrasts a lot with the approach adopted by a number of other psychologists. Our ability to learn and perform is not determined by a mysterious, transferable general ability but by a hierarchy of abilities. According to this view of cognition, General intelligence is composed of three subordinate forms of intelligence: Fluid intelligence, Crystallised Intelligence and Visual Perception. We can easily explain these by adopting a computer metaphor. Fluid intelligence, known as G_F, represents the hardware of the computer – equipping learners with an excellent memory, quickness in identifying objects, numerical and word fluency, spatial manipulation and quick decision-making. It represents our cognitive processor giving us our personal tendency of processing information and reasoning. Teachers tend to reward this aspect by considering smart students those gifted with an excellent memory enabling them to remember quickly previous work. Such students are always quick in giving correct answers and at arriving instantly at the right conclusions when facing decisions.

Crystallised knowledge is the software component of our cognition. It represents the store of information acquired through experience. Intelligent students are also characterised by two types of knowledge. One is their vast background knowledge and the other their deep knowledge of any particular field. These are cumulative and at any particular moment serve as Prior Knowledge to learning. What one presently knows serves as a structure on which further elaboration will take place. Crystallised intelligence represents all the knowledge, skills and abilities that one brings to the learning situation prior to instruction and thus indispensable for understanding the new information. Students lacking this knowledge would not profit significantly from instruction. Imagine a student entering for the first physics lesson having to face a heated discussion about Einstein's theory of relativity. On the same note, a Maltese student attending the first lecture in a foreign language with no supporting translation in Maltese or English will be faced with the same dilemma! Such student, having had minimal exposure to basic ideas and vocabulary, would have a very limited knowledge base on which new information will be integrated.

Visual perception is another aspect of intelligence expressed in one's confidence with use of visual imagery and in perceptual integration, the ability to create mental pictures from simpler visual stimuli. In the context of computers, this represents the visual interface, such as the windows operating system, where meaning is conveyed in and through pictures. Simple commands or inputs have a bigger expression or effect in such environment. Our memory processes and stores information not only as words but as a complex neural patterns integrating verbal and visual information. Some evolutionary psychologists are of the idea that verbs developed as words from mental pictures representing instances of action. Another level of perception is our

ability to infer information and emotions from facial expressions. For example, during a lesson both teacher and students are continually assessing each other's facial and body expressions, consequently provoking corresponding thought processes and feelings.

The idea of intelligence as content and process drove a number of researchers in adopting a different approach. Howard Gardner proposed a theory of Multiple Intelligences. People are good not in tasks of a general nature but excel in activities within special areas of interest and competence. Gardner defines an 'intelligence' as a set of competences that is somewhat autonomous from other human capacities, has a core set of information-processing operations, has a distinct developmental history (stages of development), has plausible roots in evolutionary history and that it can be encoded in a symbol system. He outlined nine major fields of excellence observed universally among human beings. Some people are good in one or more of the following cognitive abilities. Verbal-Linguistic intelligence is shown through the ability to use words and language while Logical-Mathematical intelligence involves the capacity for Visual-Spatial intelligence comprises the ability to visualise objects and spatial dimensions, and create internal images and pictures. Body-Kinaesthetic intelligence relates to the ability to control bodily motion in the process of expressing oneself. Musical-Rhythmic intelligence manifests itself by the ability to recognise tonal patterns and sounds, and a particular sensitivity to rhythms and beats. Interpersonal intelligence is shown by one's ability to form relationships with others and to promote human communication while intrapersonal intelligence concerns the inner states of being, shown by self-reflection and awareness of ones cognitive, affective and social attributes. Some people show a particular inclination towards Natural Classification manifested by skills in distinguishing between one class of things and another and to use this ability productively. Others show high degrees of Spiritual intelligence shown by their tendency to live and promote spiritual values based on personal belief systems.

Sternberg emphasises more the process of learning, putting less weight on the 'what' that we learn. People tend to show three types of intelligence: Practical, Analytic and Creative. Each of these implies a general individual tendency to think and act in a particular way. Those having a natural tendency to implement ideas developed by others show practical intelligence. These people make successful careers as managers, teachers, policeman, nurses, journalists etc. Others are good assessors enabled by a higher level of analytic intelligence making skilful judges, system analysts, Personnel managers, accountants, business or educational evaluators, literary critics. Creative intelligence enables people to pursue a career based on developing new products or ideas, such as Architects, designers, writers, composers and researchers.

This approach emphasises the intimate relationship between cognition and personality. Thinking style or Cognitive style is considered as the bridge between these two aspects of an individual. The 'how' we learn is as important as the 'what' that we learn.

Research about cognitive style evolved around a number of constructs. For example, Kagan (1966) introduced the terms impulsive versus reflective thinkers shown by tendencies for quick against deliberate responses. Hudson (1968) investigated another

aspect of thinking. Converging tendencies are characterised by narrow, focused, logical and deductive thinking rather than diverging characterised by being broad, open-ended, associational thinking. Witkin (1977) explored how persons show different tendencies in extracting detail from a particular field of view. He termed those with the ability of focusing on detail and less on the background as field Independent while those emphasising more the background rather than local detail as Field Dependent. Pask and Scott termed Serialists those persons showing a tendency to work learning tasks or problem solving incrementally as compared to Holists who adopt a random and multilevel approach. Riding & Rayner (1998) identified a large number of such constructs and organised them into two dimensions. The Wholist-Analytic dimension shows a tendency for individuals to process information in parts or as a whole. The verbal-imagery dimension indicates the tendency of an individual to think in words or pictures. Riding linked those having a verbalising tendency with an extrovert personality having the necessary tools for communicating easily. Imagers are linked to an introvert personality as they lack in verbosity and thus in communicating their ideas with others. These natural tendencies are manifested by broad bands of people. For example, science-oriented people are comfortable when dealing with subjects requiring a sequential, analytic approach. They tend to engage themselves in solitary activities, communicate their ideas in concise, unelaborated statements and normally keep back from large group interactions. Other humanities oriented students are repelled by such life style preferring to engage in person-oriented activities requiring a more global, random approach. They prefer group work, are very verbose when communicating ideas and show more affection when dealing with others.

One must emphasise that these stylistic labels are only signposts to indicate one's tendencies in thinking, learning or communicating. One should never consider these as personal qualities that are fixed and unchangeable. Contemporary research concerned with the biological basis of thinking show that the brain is a malleable and versatile organ equipped with enormous powers for adapting to different situations. If there are natural tendencies in processing information, the brain is able to develop compensating strategies to meet demands where it is lacking. A person with Wholist tendencies can train him/herself to behave analytically in particular situations. Even a person lacking in verbosity can develop an awareness and control over his linguistic abilities. The adage 'Practice makes perfect' is extremely relevant here.

Skilful teachers should point to these stylistic differences and use them to improve individual learning. They should also exploit the diversity found within groups promote awareness about stylistic tendencies. Pairing people with different stylistic tendencies can lead to personal enrichment for both. When developing instruction, using a wide range of teaching styles is likely to be more successful as it provides learning experience for the various student styles.

Motivational and Conative Factors

While admitting the importance of cognitive aspects in performance, one must not underestimate the role of affective factors such as attitudes, feelings and moods that students bring to the learning situation. Psychologists contend that behaviour is never

caused by a response to an outside stimulus but in most cases it is inspired by what a person wants most at any given time: survival, love, power, freedom, or any other basic human need. This drives the course of action a person takes at any particular moment. But this decision is not instinctive or unconscious! While, in most cases, action is primed by motivation, it will be enacted by volition. We find ourselves in many situations where we appreciate the importance of studying or doing some other task, we would like to do it, and possibly in the best way we can, but we simply don't find the energy or urge to do it. Thus one must consider intentional states as distinct from motivational states. The pre-decisional state is labelled 'motivation' and the post-decisional state is labelled 'volition'. When an individual makes a decision to pursue a particular goal, the motivational state is terminated and the volitional state is begun. Motivational processes mediate the formation of decisions and promote decisions whereas volitional processes mediate the enactment of those decisions and protect them.

The distinction between motivation and volition is necessary because even well-motivated students choosing clear goals may have difficulty enacting their intentions; they may be distracted by internal events, such as task-irrelevant thoughts or stylistic incompatibility, or by external exigencies, including the actions of other persons. Typical cases include situations creating stylistic conflict or persons who serve to arouse negative emotions. It is common class experience that motivated students do not learn if they have trouble at home, or just terminated a relationship with their boy/girl friend. Others, while showing keen interest during lessons of particular subject teachers, prove to be problematic with other teachers of the same subject. They either had some personal conflict with that teacher and therefore negative feelings predominate that session or they find his/her teaching style conflicting or disturbing. Such emotionally charged situations will surely inhibit learning through the creation of an atmosphere that impedes communication and sharing of ideas.

Volition is directly determined by one's self concept. The self-concept is the most significant cognitive structure organising an individual's experience, while self-esteem is the most influential affective evaluator of this experience. The self-concept organises all that we think we are, what we think we can do, and how best we think we can do it. A student coming from a family where s/he is continually bombarded with degrading comments always pointing to his shortcomings and failures will surely develop a very low and negative self-concept with strong feelings of insufficiency. On the other hand, students coming from a background that approves personal assets and exposes them to experiences of appreciation for personal qualities or accomplishments, develop a much healthier self-concept and a subsequent positive attitude to life. These self-concepts determine the self-esteem of the individual, the extent to which they are pleased by that concept, or feel worthy. Together, they comprise the self-theory or model of experience that helps us explain our past behaviour and predict our future behaviour.

A strong sense of efficacy enhances human accomplishment and personal well-being in many ways. People with a strong sense of personal competence approach difficult tasks as challenges to be mastered rather than as threats to be avoided, have greater intrinsic interest and deep engrossment in activities, set themselves challenging goals and maintain strong commitment to them, heighten and sustain their efforts in the face of failure, more quickly recover their sense of efficacy after failures or setbacks,

and attribute failure to insufficient effort or deficient knowledge and skills which are acquirable.

People with low self-efficacy may believe that things are tougher than they really are, a belief that fosters stress, depression, and narrow vision of how best to solve a problem. High self-efficacy, on the other hand, helps create feelings of serenity in approaching difficult tasks and activities. As a result of these influences, self-efficacy beliefs are strong determinants and predictors of the level of accomplishment that individuals finally attain. For these reasons, Bandura (1993) has argued that beliefs of personal efficacy constitute the key factor of human agency.

What are the pedagogical implications here? Many teachers complain that today's students are 'unmotivated'. If students are not motivated to do their schoolwork, it is because they view schoolwork as irrelevant to their basic human needs or worst because it harms their self-system. Insufficient attainment or failure continually impoverishes their self-concept and lowers their self-esteem. In front of such situations teacher must decide between two possible courses of action.

Bossy teachers use rewards and punishment to coerce students to comply with rules and complete required assignments. Adopting such a legalistic and managerial attitude deprives growth on an affective level, serving only to forced, frustrated survival from the students part. Research shows that high percentages of students recognise that the work they do, even when their teachers praise them, is low-level work. Though they comply, they feel alienated from their needs and from their true growth.

Lead teachers, on the other hand, avoid coercion completely. Instead, they make the intrinsic rewards of doing the work clear to their students, correlating any proposed assignments to the students' basic needs. They are concerned about the effect of the school system on the beliefs and attitudes of their students and work to develop, through encouragement and appropriate challenge, the self-system of their students. Plus, they only use grades as temporary indicators of what has and has not been learned, rather than a reward. Lead teachers will 'fight to protect' highly engaged, deeply motivated students who are doing quality work from having to fulfil meaningless requirements.

The Participatory Aspect of Learning:

Learning as Collective, Situative, Participatory activity

One leading theory about learning as a social phenomenon was proposed by Vygotsky. He emphasised the social nature of thinking and learning, recognizing that the way people think and learn is deeply influenced by the communities and cultures with which they interact. Learning is a phenomenon that occurs within 'Communities of Practice'. Learning is essentially the act of participating in such communities where knowledge is integrated in their way of living through the sharing of values, beliefs, languages, and ways of doing things. Knowledge is embodied in the social relations and expertise of these communities. Besides providing the physical context where knowledge is built, these environments present novice learners with models

with whom they can identify their 'possible-self'. Becoming a lawyer, a biologist, a teacher, or any other profession, involves not only taking academic courses and reading books about a particular area, but also entering within circles of people practicing in that field. This is why a teaching practice within a particular school can provide such an enriching experience. For this same reason, students learning a foreign language should visit the relevant country or come in contact with native speakers of that particular language. Today, this experience within a group has become extended and facilitated through Information and Communication technologies that provide access to virtual communities or links to sites where knowledge is continually being developed, used and embodied.

Within such communities learning is mediated in various ways and occurs at different levels. Initiation, the stage when a learner first comes in contact with a 'Community of Practice', involves the acquisition of basic knowledge and skills by a process of learning from others, mainly through apprenticeship. A student teacher going for the first time in a class as an observer starts the process of observing a 'model' teacher in action. Being exposed to a person equipped with so many 'tricks of the trade' facilitates awareness of the skills being practiced and hence smoothes the progress of their adoption. Given the chance to present a short lesson, the student will then try to imitate that teacher by putting into practice these observed 'tricks of the trade'. If the 'model' teacher or a tutor is present in class during this session, the student teacher will be given feedback on his/her performance highlighting both positive and negative aspects of the performance. Identifying the positive aspects should serve to strengthen and possibly elaborate the learned skills through practice. But the 'model' teacher or tutor serves also as a guide to refine other less developed skills. Once these initial skills are learned, new skills and directions to follow will be proposed to the novice teacher.

This is the first and most obvious form of learning that occurs in human society when a person or a team helps an individual to learn. Technically it is known as 'Active Social Mediation of Individual learning'. The key term here is 'Active'. The learner is challenged to think. Social interactions create questions, or cognitive disequilibrium (Piaget), and thus the learner is challenged to find answers to these questions. A true learning situation is one that provokes more questions than it offers answers. Questions raise the level of cognitive performance. Through individual questioning a higher level of thinking and doing things is achieved. Interacting with others challenges and raises the level of this performance. This is what Vygotsky used to call the 'Zone of Proximal Development'. Interacting with others help you ask different and more challenging questions! Working in groups creates situations where every member is challenged to refine his/her ideas, many times providing facilitation of 'still to-be formulated ideas'. If these ideas are communicated to the group, a higher-level communication occurs: 'objectivisation' of one's thoughts. The externalised ideas become 'objects' which the group can share, discuss, examine and elaborate upon as if they were external objects. This richness in learning can occur only if there is social mediation of learning by tutors or peers. Learning occurs only if there is informative feedback, challenge, guidance and encouragement. All these are socially based occurring only when one comes in contact with others and cannot be easily met by most learners without the facilitating social context.

A higher level of learning within a 'community of practice', involves 'learning with others'. Groups can serve as a continual source of learning and enrichment. Interactions with colleagues can expand the possibilities of learning beyond individual limits. It is a common experience among students that when they revise a topic together before a test, they get a deeper insight of that knowledge. The same applies for a class of students in a school or a group of motivated teachers during 'Staff Development Sessions'. Being exposed to different points of view builds a more refined and detailed knowledge structure embedded in a wider experience thus referred to as distributed knowledge. Knowledge building is not just a thinking process. It involves our feelings. Groups provide a wider information base together with the relevant feelings that emotionally 'tag' our knowledge structure turning it into an experience.

'Learning *with* others can be appreciated if one compares the state of affairs in the initial stages of a group (the first day of school for a newly formed class) and the situation after a period of interactions (the same class after one year). Surely there will be a marked increase in the level of information, interactions and awareness of assets and shortcomings that each member of the group has. Although externally there are the same learning experiences - individual tutoring, team problem-solving, co-operative learning - the learning products of this system, jointly constructed as they are, are distributed over the whole social system rather than possessed by the participating individual. Participation becomes the key concept here, as contrasted with acquisition, conceptual change, serving as both the process and the goal of learning. A fundamental question to ask here is whether we should consider the major goals and outcomes of learning primarily as collections of sub-skills or as successful participation in socially organised activity and the development of students' identities as learners?

Social learning experiences can serve as 'tools' to facilitate two types of learning. Suppose a teacher divides a class in small groups for project work. S/He should be aware of two sets of objectives. What are the intended learning outcomes OF the Group and WITH the group?

Learning experiences designed to develop an effect OF (or as a result of) the social participatory process have the specific objective of refining the individual's cognitive structure. One should consider which situations make participants work with a team on joint problem solving activities to improve individual problem solving abilities. Here the outcomes are mastery of knowledge and skill the cognitive, acquisition-oriented, solo learning. In this case, interpersonal skills have secondary importance. The theme and its development is the crucial aspect of this group work. This will determine what knowledge and domain related skills the students will acquire.

Learning experiences designed to develop an effect WITH (or as part of) the social participatory process have the specific objective to develop and refine members' interactions. In other words, which situations make participants work with a team on joint problem solving to improve their collective problem solving activity? Here the outcomes are both situated in the particular interactive context and distributed among participants. The teacher here would use project work to build teamwork and development of interpersonal skills. The theme of the project will have secondary importance. This implies a totally different frame-of-mind and a set of distinct criteria

to assess learning outcomes, as traditional tests are designed to assess only effect OF the group.

Thus, besides speaking of individuals that can learn, one can consider a group as a learning system. Imagine an orchestra, a choir, a football team or a class of students. Every member must be competent and efficient on an individual level. But very good musicians alone do not compose an orchestra! Members of the orchestra must train themselves to learn together, finding ways of acquiring knowledge, understanding and skill collectively. The orchestra is what its members build together. A sports team attains patterns of co-ordination among the individuals that might be quite useless for any one of those individuals functioning alone, meaningless without the context of the team. The interactions are horizontal - from member to member. The relationship is not one-to-many as in a classroom, but one-to-one, as with a coach and team or a tutor addressing the needs of a particular student. Moreover, where there are no leaders or a 'teacher', for example, a study group, a club, a research group or an organisation, teams learn on their own, sustained by practical interests, subject to auto regulation.

'Communities of practice' also provide the context for another important aspect of learning. A fundamental tenet of the teaching profession is: 'If you really want to learn something try to teach it'. Communicating your ideas to others enables you to clarify and elaborate them. Teachers are continually refining their concepts and skills while preparing their lessons. Mediating others' learning for personal development is thus the next level of growth within a domain. By time, experience and reflection one develops an extensive knowledge structure and a wide selection of skills that will change him/her into a mature and seasoned practitioner. This will lead one to the highest role within a 'Community of Practice' that of a field model, embodying the skills and knowledge of a domain. Every one of us has a key model representing his/her ideal teacher, scientist, the ideal architect, musician etc. When we think of these persons we find that they transform the ideal attributes of their profession into concrete qualities that can be experienced and propagated. Their major role is to contribute to the learning of the collective. The function of experienced teachers, heads of schools or departments and academic staff is to utilise their vast knowledge and experience base to help others in the process of becoming a mature functional member within that particular community.

One important aspect of this social dimension of knowledge is experienced through the use of tools, characterising each 'community of practice'. Tools are social mediators of learning. Here the term tool is used in a wide sense including physical implements, technical procedures like arithmetic algorithms, computer programming or design procedures, together with Symbolic resources such as natural languages, mathematical and musical notation. To appreciate the importance of tools in learning one must compare how people learned, developed and stored knowledge and did tasks such as writing, communicating, or modelling two centuries ago. Think how the same tasks are done today. Imagine the possibilities offered by today's various forms of printed materials: TV, radio, Computers, Modelling Software, and Internet. They not only improve learning but also transform it to such possibilities not available before, many times extending beyond human limits.

Tools are mediators of learning because they embody accumulated social wisdom. Just consider the voluminous research and extensive experience there is behind contemporary book printing, filmmaking, TV programs, Advertising, Software applications and so many other tools in numerous areas of human endeavours. There is a continual process of refinement and innovation regarding the tasks being mediated by these tools. Writing a document with a word processor gives possibilities not imagined when typewriters were used.

How do schools compare in this aspect? Schools are equipped with books, Information boards, Charts, duplicating machines, photocopiers, TV sets, VCRs, Computers and so many other learning tools. These basically serve two purposes. The first is as a learning aid and the other as a measure of one's progress within a domain. Observe the type of relationship one has with tools, and you'll get a clear picture of the status of that person in that domain. A young learner holding the pen for the first time or reading the first words from a book is clearly manifesting his novice status. A teacher showing students how to write or helping them understand passages from their reader is expressing a different level of knowledge through a different use of the same tools. Tools say a lot about their user. Not only they manifest clearly the status of the person utilising them but what's more important they express and expose the underlying philosophy adopted by the learner or the "Community of Practice' to whom he pertains. Does the extensive use of the photocopier in our educational system indicates something? Which pedagogical principles are being propagated through 'chalk and talk' approaches? What about using the computer just as another teaching aid and not as the fundamental medium of instruction? Using Papert's metaphor, isn't this equivalent to fitting a jet engine to a horse carriage, or practicing modern medicine using blood sucking leeches, or going to war equipped with swords in the era of laser guided missiles and intelligent bombs? Tools indicate our accepted philosophies and are a sensitive gauge of our growth and adaptability in a technological society. Consequently one asks, do we give tools due importance to develop meaningful learning experiences? The answer is not a straightforward yes. A pedagogy based on the use of tools is one based on a 'Doing' approach. Tools primarily are artefacts for doing a task not for learning about something. Adopting a 'Learning by Doing' pedagogy involves much more work and preparation. This is obviously considered impractical with large numbers of students. Adopting a teaching approach simplifies the situation for the teacher. It is easier to tell how tasks should be done without actually doing them. It is easier to talk about the atom, chemical bonds, the cell, heart beat etc. without going through the process of using the instrumentation that define these words. So what is the solution to this dilemma? Creating rich learning experiences based on a combination of persons and tools is one possible solution. In a world with such a high level of knowledge and tools specialisation, worthwhile learning experiences can only be developed in 'Communities of Practice' that provide the stimulus and relevant support to achieve these objectives.

Conclusion

The above discussion just skims through different aspects of learning. Learning is a web of interacting variables. Some are of a very personal nature. Others arise from the environment. If teachers really believe in the holistic growth of their students they

should take into consideration both individual and social aspects of learning. They should consider how learners build personally meaningful mental constructions after passing through socially mediated experiences. They should continually strike a balance between the individual and the group, guided by the principle that the understanding of cognitive and motivational differences among individual community members can only serve to promote learning and instruction for the whole. That is, within any community of learners, there will be sub communities who share similar cognitive and motivational patterns. By uncovering these various sub communities, teachers may have a greater likelihood of orchestrating learning environments that serve not only the collective but also the individual.

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BILINGUALISM ACROSS THE CURRICULUM: AN AIM AND A MEANS

ANTOINETTE CAMILLERI GRIMA

Introduction

This chapter deals with issues relating to the use of two languages in the educational process. It gives a brief overview of some well-known examples of bilingual education as a background to the Maltese model. Codeswitching is dealt with in some detail and explained from a pedagogical point of view. Some questions on bilingual education in Malta are raised for discussion at the end.

In some countries all linguistic activity is carried out across the curriculum through one language that is normally the mother-tongue of the students, and the national and official language of the country. We are familiar, for example, with the use of Italian in Italian schools, of French in French schools, and of German in schools in Germany. In many other countries, however, two or more tongues share important roles as school languages. In Malta, for instance, both Maltese and English have important functions in the education system.

Some form of bilingual education has been in existence in Malta since the beginning of schooling. In many other countries, however, bilingual programmes started to become popular only recently. These are now developing rapidly, either as bilingual streams in monolingual schools or as fully bilingual courses. There are several reasons for this. To take an example, bilingual education – in the mother-tongue and in an international language like English in traditionally monolingual countries like Germany and Austria – form part of an endeavour to give a European dimension to their education, as well as to achieve higher levels of competency in the foreign languages. In other contexts, such as those of immigrant communities in Australia, the U.K. and the U.S.A, bilingual education is a means of preserving the non-English speaking children's mother-tongue. This is an important way to support them in their learning through English, for them a new language. Their eventual bilingual competence is also viewed as an additional resource within a pluralist and multilingual society. In some other situations, like those of native minorities such as the Friesians in the Netherlands, and of Welsh speakers in the U.K., bilingual education is a matter of identity and political ideology.

The reality of bilingual education is often complicated and there will be, in any one scenario, a variety of reasons for organizing a bilingual programme. In fact, bilingual education ranges from attempts in developing countries to include and maintain mother-tongue medium of instruction alongside a lingua franca and/or international language – as in the language maintenance programmes; to what is sometimes termed 'elitist' bilingual schemes for which the more educated opt in developed countries. The latter could be considered as 'higher status' schools. Such is the case of the Canadian immersion programmes, and of the 'language and content integrated learning' in Europe.

In the international literature on bilingualism there is a very strong argument in favour of bilingual education. Several positive effects of bilingualism on cognitive development have been repeatedly reported (see various chapters in Bialystok, 1991). Bilingualism has positive effects regardless of which two languages are involved, be they Spanish and English or Arabic and French. Studies of bilinguals who have, roughly, equivalent abilities in two languages, have shown that bilingualism provides cognitive and social benefits as long as both languages are supported academically and affectively by society.

The environment plays a large role in determining whether schooling will result in additive or subtractive bilingualism. Subtractive bilingualism, i.e. the loss of a language that results in monolingualism, occurs when the mother-tongue is a low status minority language which is rapidly replaced by the high status language. Additive bilingualism, i.e. when a speaker learns and uses more than one language regularly, on the other hand, is associated with cognitive benefits such as creativity, analogical reasoning, concept formation, classification, visual-spatial adeptness, metalinguistic abilities and social skills.

Both cognitive and social development are fundamental in the educational process and this is why bilingualism across the curriculum is both 'an aim' and 'a means'. Bilingual education needs to be appreciated as an aim in itself, with all the advantages it brings. At the same time, it is a means towards more efficiency in the teaching-learning process.

Models of bilingual education

'Bilingual education' is the most frequently used term to refer to those contexts where two languages are used and promoted in education, are taught as subjects, and are used as media of instruction. Recently, the use of a second language has become popular as a medium of instruction in a number of European countries. For example Fruhauf *et al.* (1996) describe instances of 'Teaching Content in a Foreign Language', and Marsh *et al.* (1998) give examples of 'Content and Language Integrated Learning'. There is one common factor in all cases: the use of another language than the mother-tongue of the learners, normally a second language, or a foreign language, as medium of instruction in non-language subjects.

'Immersion education' is a type of bilingual education in the sense that students add on another language to their repertoire through its use as medium of instruction at school. The first immersion education programmes were set up in Quebec, Canada in

1965 as a result of considerable pressure by English-speaking parents who desired their children to become highly proficient in French, a low status language but also the language of the majority of speakers in the French-Canadian region.

In the Canadian immersion programmes all students come from the same language background: English. Their teachers are bilingual but use only French in class. While the use of French is strongly encouraged, students are allowed to use English. Both English and French are taught as subjects, and total immersion in the use of French as medium varies from one course to another. Immersion in French is introduced step by step, increasing the students' exposure to it every year until all instruction is given through French in later years.

The evaluation of immersion programmes has shown that there are linguistic, academic, social and psychological gains for the learners who, in fact, reach a high level of proficiency in both English and French. In terms of content learning they acquire the same grades and sometimes even score better than their monolingual counterparts; and they develop less rigid ethnolinguistic stereotypes, in this case of Canadian French speakers (Swain & Lapkin, 1982).

In 'language maintenance programmes', sometimes also known as 'Enrichment Maintenance Bilingual progammes', instruction is given for some years in the students' first language. The aim is to ensure that the student has good facility in both mother-tongue and second language. The first language, the language of the home, is maintained in adult life, as a result of its use at school in addition to the acquisition of proficiency in the second language.

Enrichment minority language programmes are based on the desire of ethnic group members to have their children retain their language. Language, a vehicle for transmitting culture and for fostering a sense of self-esteem, provides an environment for ethnic identity and pride among the minority children living in countries foreign to them. The Foyer Model of bilingual education in Belgium, for instance, was set up by a non-state organization for the welfare of immigrants. It seeks to create the right conditions for children to become bicultural (in their own culture and that of Belgium), and trilingual (in their own mother-tongue, in French and in Dutch). Instruction is given in the various mother-tongues (e.g. Italian, Spanish, Turkish, Moroccan), and in Dutch, while the school language environment is French (Byram & Leman, 1990). Jaspaert & Lemmens (1990) report that there have been positive outcomes from these programmes. Children in the experimental group who had a large mother-tongue input did not suffer deficiency in the second and third languages. Although they were at a disadvantage initially, they caught up in the course of primary school. Other research on maintenance bilingual education has shown that by the time students reach school leaving age their first language is maintained in addition to the acquisition of a second language (Appel & Muysken 1987; Hamers & Blanc 1989).

'Teaching content in a foreign language' and 'content and language integrated learning' (CLIL) refer to the use of a modern foreign language as the language of instruction in a subject other than language. The aim is for students to achieve a higher level of competency in the foreign language where the students' mother-tongue is the dominant language in the country or community in which they live. The

foreign languages chosen are normally French, German, Spanish and mostly English. Such programmes, which can vary from the teaching of only one subject in the foreign language to a whole school effort (as happens in vocational training in Finland), were initiated in recent years and take different shapes across schools in Europe.

The motivation for these bilingual programmes is that of improving learners' fluency in the target language and thus enhancing their employment prospects in the European labour market. In addition, bilingual education is viewed as an integral part of internationalization and developing pupils' cultural awareness. Some schools also use bilingual education as a means of creating an impressive school profile that will attract more pupils in an increasingly competitive market (Fruhauf *et al.* 1996).

It is important to note that both Fruhauf *et al.* (1996) and Marsh *et al.* (1998) point to the need for educating teachers who work in a bilingual classroom environment in pedagogical issues related directly to bilingual education. The more research is carried out the clearer it becomes that knowing, speaking, teaching and learning in two languages (or through one language in a bilingual set up), is not an extension or a reduplication of a monolingual environment, but is another milieu to be planned and monitored in its own right.

Planning for bilingual education

Bilingual education takes place either through the concurrent use of languages or through the teaching of subjects in the second or foreign language. Language planners in education sometimes insist on language separation as medium of instruction. This choice is generally based on a number of beliefs:

- That language separation would lead to uncontaminated acquisition of either language. On the other hand, the concurrent use of both languages would lead to confusion, language mixing and inadequate development of both languages.
- That language separation is a way of approaching the child's learning through two languages allowing them to become bilingual by means of two monolingual processes.
- That separation by time, by person, by location, and even by subject, will facilitate and improve the learning of two languages as the student learns to associate one language with some experiences, and the other language with others.

When interlocutors are bilingual, codeswitching is inevitable. This is reported in all literature on bilingualism and bilingual education (see the various chapters in Martin-Jones & Heller, 1996). However, the following are possible ways of obliging bilingual speakers to use languages separately in school:

Separation by person. This requires the presence of two teachers in the classroom one of whom communicates consistently in the students' first language and the other in their second language. In this approach the children become accustomed to the fact that a given language is chosen according to the person whom they address. This approach is used in the U.K. for instance where a monolingual class teacher uses

English and works together with an aide, usually a native speaker of the language of the ethnic minority children, who translates the lesson or generally talks to the children in their mother-tongue (Martin-Jones & Saxena, 1993).

Separation by location takes place when a different language is used in a different classroom. Sometimes activity centres in the same classroom serve the same purpose such that the location highlights the need to use one language rather than another. A major problem related to this approach is that it is a most artificial way of separating language use. Bilinguals do not normally use each language separately on the basis of location only, but rather according to interlocutor or topic.

Separation by time, like separation by location is difficult. In this option each language is used at a different time, e.g. one language in the morning and another language in the afternoon, or one language one day alternating with another language the next day. The more successful models of separation by time are those where the switch of languages takes place after a long period of exposure and use of each language. For example, in Luxembourg, primary education is through Luxembourgish and German, and secondary education is through French. Furthermore, separation by time does not exclude codeswitching. In fact research has shown that from a pedagogical point of view it is not a matter of how much time is dedicated to each language, but which functions are assigned to each language that has a significant impact on acquisition and attitude.

Separation by subject means that some subjects or topics are taught in one language and other subjects are taught in the other language. The assignment of languages to subjects is at stake here. Decisions have to be taken and criteria established on the basis of which one language is assigned to one subject and another language to another subject.

The strict assignment of a single language to particular subjects is related to the belief that proficiency in a language is directly related to the amount of exposure to that language in the classroom. According to this hypothesis, known as the Maximum Exposure Hypothesis, students need maximum exposure to the second language, and need to start instruction in and through it as early as possible. This hypothesis, however, has been proved wrong. There are more relevant and important cultural, societal, and school factors that determine the outcome. When maximum exposure means 'submersion' in the second language then students continue to fail in the totality of their educational experience (Skutnabb-Kangas & Cummins, 1988; Lado *et al.*, 1980). On the other hand, when students are educated through the language they are most familiar with, even when it has a lower status in the community, they perform over time as well as, or better in the second language than those taught exclusively in the second language (Byram & Leman, 1990).

Apart from the language separation approaches, concurrent approaches are also acknowledged in the literature. These refer to situations where both languages are used side by side, in various ways and to varying degrees. This is, in fact, the truth behind most bilingual programmes ranging from the immersion programmes in Canada to the multilingual classes in many African and Asian countries, and in Europe. It is also a reality in many Maltese classrooms.

Bilingual education in Malta

The National Minimum Curriculum (Ministry of Education 1999) (henceforth NMC) states that it 'considers bilingualism as the basis of the educational system' (Principle 10 p.37). It 'regards bilingualism as entailing the effective, precise and confident use of the country's two official languages: Maltese, the national language, and English' (p.37). Furthermore, 'this goal must be reached by the students by the end of their entire schooling experience' (p.37). Under the heading 'Implementing a Policy for Language Teaching', the NMC 'obliges teachers of Maltese and English to teach in the language of their particular subject' (p.82). Furthermore, it recommends (p.82) that:

- teachers of Maltese, Social Studies, History, Religion and PSD teach these subjects in Maltese;

- teachers of foreign languages teach in the language in question; and

- teachers of the remaining subjects teach in English.

The rest of this chapter describes some of the ways in which bilingual education is put to practice in Malta. It is based on school and classroom observations, video- and audio-tape recordings and lesson transcriptions, in both state and church schools in a number of secondary school subjects (Camilleri, 1995; Camilleri Grima, 2001).

The NMC acknowledges separation of language by subject. In reality, the most important distribution of roles between Maltese and English in Maltese schools is that between the spoken and the written functions. Written work such as classwork, homework, examinations, and the use of textbooks and reference work in all subjects is carried out in English. To work on some topics in Social Studies, Religion and Maltese History, subjects that are assigned to Maltese, it cannot be excluded that the reading of reference works takes place in English. Furthermore, in all subjects spoken communication involves Maltese in various ways and to varying degrees.

Camilleri (1995) gives a detailed analysis of the use of Maltese and English in a number of subjects in both state and non-state secondary schools. Over all, English is used about 52% of the time while Maltese is used 48% of the time (the analysis is based on the number of words and speech units). English is used slightly more due to the use of English terminology (words and phrases) in those lessons that are otherwise conducted through Maltese. On the other hand, lessons conducted through English at the spoken level include some Maltese.

The variables that seem to determine the choice of language as spoken medium are outlined below.

The school

Until recently state schools did not have individual language policies. The NMC (1999) now holds state schools responsible for establishing their own school development plan which is to include a policy on language. The NMC states:

'Each school must develop a linguistic strategy which reflects the particular linguistic needs of its students. In so doing, it should not overlook the fact that Maltese society has its own native language and recognizes English as an official language that has also developed into an international lingua franca. Equal importance should be given to the teaching of the first and second languages at all levels.' (p.38)

It is too early to say more about the implementation of this policy. It would be useful, however, to point out to several factors that in practice bear on the choice of language at the school level. Apart from an official written and accepted school policy, there are other indirect factors that influence the use of language at school. The preference for a particular language by the head of school, for instance, has a bearing on the day to day use of Maltese and/or English. The head of school, consciously or unconsciously, decides which language is used for school assemblies, for communicating with teachers and students, for internal and external school circulars, at school prize days and open days, and other school activities.

The teacher

The teacher decides, consciously and/or unconsciously, how to set the linguistic climate in the classroom. In my research (Camilleri 1995) I found that there is a correlation between the choice and use of language by teachers, and the following factors:

- Their own experience of language at school as students. Teachers who attended English-medium schools are more likely to use English themselves as a medium of instruction in their teaching.

- Their experience of language in their own homes. Teachers who come from English-speaking families are more likely to use English as a spoken medium in the classroom (and outside it, of course!). They are also more likely to have attended English-medium schools themselves. Similarly, teachers who commonly interact in Maltese outside the classroom, or for example, in dialect as is the case in Gozo, are likely to use standard or dialectal Maltese respectively as a medium.

- Teacher training. Until the mid-seventies teacher training in Malta was run by British religious orders. Teachers trained in that system are more likely to use English as a spoken medium of instruction than younger teachers who have been trained since then at the University of Malta.

- Teachers' perception of their students' proficiency in Maltese and English.

This means that regardless of the type of school a teacher is working in, the factors just listed would normally prevail over other school variables.

The June 2000 conference which discussed the implementation of the NMC emphasises the role of the individual teacher. At the conference a serious problem was raised by participants representing the teaching community related to cases where teachers are either unwilling or incompetent to use a specific language, be it

Maltese or English, as a medium. Furthermore, they argued, the educational and linguistic climates vary so much from school to school, and from class to class, that it is unrealistic and impractical to legislate a language policy that would suit all contexts. Therefore, in the Conference document on bilingual education it is recommended that:

> 'On-going training is to be given to teachers on various issues including action research which can help in generating structured individual language policies. Individual language policies should be integrated with school-based language policies in the School Development plan.' (p.7)

This seems to be a very realistic and useful recommendation especially in view of the research results obtained in Maltese schools.

The learner

According to some of the teachers interviewed in Camilleri (1995), English is preferred as a medium of instruction with higher-ability learners, while Maltese is the only possible spoken medium with weaker learners. One teacher, for instance, was observed teaching higher-ability and lower-ability students, in the same girls Junior Lyceum, and was able to conduct the lesson totally in English with the higher-ability class, but continually resorted to Maltese with the weaker learners. Clearly, she was perfectly proficient in English but used Maltese to bring the weaker learners into the interaction, and to make sure they understood her explanations.

Other teachers have commented that the exclusive use of English in the classroom seems to create a barrier between the teacher and the students, regardless of ability. Maltese, they think, permits more learner participation as the majority of students feel more confident to speak Maltese rather than English.

The language needs of specific learners over-rule all other considerations. Normally, when a non-Maltese speaking student is in class, the teacher tends to use more English, and gives personal attention to the student through English. In this way the other students are further exposed to English than would normally be the case.

The subject/topic

The choice of Maltese or English sometimes depends on the particular topic being treated in class. If the only available texts are in English, then regardless of whether it is a lesson in Religion or Social Studies, English is used for reading and speaking purposes in class. Similarly, a switch from the normal medium of English to Maltese takes place if a particular topic in, say, Biology or Geography is more easily discussed in Maltese, especially if it relates to the students' immediate experiences.

Very often, neither Maltese nor English are used exclusively by any one teacher and in any one lesson. There are many reasons for switching from one language to another in the classroom. As is explained below, teachers and learners will use the medium that best fits their particular pedagogical and communication needs at that particular moment, depending on the activity at hand.

Codeswitching

A number of sociolinguistic variables determine the use of either Maltese or English in the classroom. One important factor that results in the need for codeswitching in the Maltese classroom is the fact that the written text is in English, while the students' first language is Maltese. Reading and writing are more often carried out in English than in Maltese because textbooks, reference material, and examinations are in English. Written classwork and homework are also done in English.

Knowledge is constructed in the classroom through social interaction. One of the most frequent and important linguistic activities carried out in Maltese classrooms is the interaction between the written text in English as it is translated, paraphrased, and reinterpreted by teachers and learners. As Lemke (1989, p.136) explains,

> 'The problem of learning through texts is… fundamentally a problem of translating the patterns of written language into those of spoken language. Spoken language is the medium through which we reason to ourselves and talk our way through problems to answers… When we approach written text, we need to be able to do more than just decode letters to sounds… To comprehend it, we need to be able to paraphrase it, restate it in our own words, and translate its meanings into the more comfortable patterns of spoken language.'

In a monolingual classroom, the written text is translated into spoken text in the same language. But in classes with a bilingual environment it will result in codeswitching between, for example, the written text in English and the spoken language which is Maltese. Codeswitching in this sense is instrumental in bridging the gap between the knowledge that is presented through English, and its mediation through Maltese.

The following extract from a mathematics lesson in a Form 4 class serves as an illustration. Most of the time the teacher uses Maltese. The sums that are read out in English from the textbook are translated into Maltese.

L: (reads from a textbook in English) A square room has a square carpet placed in it...This leaves an area uncovered of nine metres squared. The area of the whole room is twenty-five metres squared. Find the length of one side of the carpet.

T: Issa di tixbaħ lil din t'hawn hux veru? Imma l-area tahielna maħduma din id-darba, sewwa? Issa, area illi għandha a square room, x'għandha a square room?

Ls: Kollox indaqs

Ls: Four sides equal

T: *Kollox indaqs.* Four sides equal, orrajt, square root *immarkajniha.* **Issa** has a square carpet symmetrically placed in it. *Il-*carpet *ikbar jew iżgħar mill-kamra?*

Ls: I\g]ar

T: Iżgħar. Marica suppost qegħdin attenti u ma niktbux, orrajt, din ukoll hija square, qed nimmarka s-sides jien ħalli ma nitgerfixx, għandna, eh this leaves the area uncovered of nine metres squared, mela għandi l-biċċa t'hawnhekk uncovered, taqblu miegħi?

The teacher explains the text in Maltese by eliciting from the learners the meaning of what is read in English. For example, the teacher wants to know the meaning of 'square' in Maltese to make sure the learners have understood the mathematical concept. In fact, the learners reply 'kollox indaqs'.

As the teacher works out the sums on the blackboard she consistently uses textbook terms like 'area', 'square root', 'carpet', 'square', 'uncovered'. Although there are equivalent terms in Maltese, the English version is used in the classroom because the learners are familiar with it through the written text. By switching from English to Maltese when the students' first language is Maltese, she accommodates their language preference and this is motivated pedagogically as explained below.

For explanation

Teachers switch from English to Maltese when they are not sure that the learners have understood fully what has been said in English. All the teachers interviewed (Camilleri, 1995) said that it is necessary to explain the lesson in Maltese to a lesser or greater degree:

Teacher A: 'nispi``a nag]mel translation tan-notes g]ax meta nu\a l-Ingli\ mhux kollox jinftiehem'
Teacher B: 'ma kontx in]ossni nikkomunika mag]hom (meta nu\a l-Ingli\)'
Teacher C: 'ma tistax taffordja tkellimhom bl-Ingli\ il-]in kollu g]ax jintilfu'

For elicitation

A switch from English to Maltese is noticed at various elicitation points during classroom interaction. Let's take as an example a biology lesson largely conducted through English, where the teacher revises the structure of the leaf.

T: ...they are surrounded by the kidney-shaped cells they are called guard cells
. what else . I told you there is something in particular about them I told
you that these guard cells . have something in particular the epidermis cells
don't have it . what do they have ... *x'għandhom? Għidna s*-cells *l-oħrajn
bħall*-palisade cells *u s*-cells *ta' l*-ispongy layer . *kellhom il*-chloroplasts
biex jagħmlu l-photsynthesis . *orrajt . imbagħad għidna fl*-epidermis *irid
ikun trasparenti bħal . issa dawn il*-guard cells . *li jagħmlu l*-istomata .
orrajt . x'għidna li fihom .. dawna fihom il-chloroplasts . *ukoll* . now let me
explain to you why they have the chloroplasts . ok
...
Did you understand it? *Orrajt mela tgħidli* Kenneth .. tell me in your own
words *kif tagħmel l*-istomata *biex tinfetaħ u biex tingħalaq*

L: Waqt il-ġurnata bis-sunlight tagħmel il-glucose u, ehm bil-glucose din
tistreċċja

T: Tistreċċja għax tieħu, l-ilma

L: l-ilma

T: Ok…

When the teacher requires feedback from the learners she first asks a simple question
in English 'what do they have?', then repeats it in Maltese 'x'għidna li fihom?', and
amplifies it a little bit 'dawn fihom il-chloroplasts'. In this instance she does not wait
for the learners to reply, but a little later she asks another question in Maltese, and
this time nominates a learner and asks the question in Maltese. Together, teacher and
learner, revise the opening and the closing of the stomata in Maltese: a medium more
readily available and comprehensible to the learners.

To establish rapport

In most cases English is fully comprehensible to the learners. Yet its use seems to
imply a level of formality that at certain moments needs to be relaxed by switching to
Maltese. Consider the following example from a home-economics lesson. The teacher
is working on a family budget with the learners. We join the lesson at the point where
they are working out how much money a family of three children living in a flat pays
in electricty bills. They need to establish the yearly amount and then divide it into
four monthly terms.

T: How much?

L: Three

T: Three children. *U* how much do you pay?

L: Twenty

T: Twenty *iva ejja ngħidu*

L: *Imma dawk* flat *għandhom*

T: *Aħna* we are talking about a flat

L: *Ija aħna dar għandna*

T: Orrajt *mela ejja nagħmluha* twenty-five *ħalli ma niġġildux sewwa* . twenty-five . every four months . *mel'ejja ngħidu* twenty-four . *ħa niġu aktar...*

L: *Aħjar hekk għax tiġi* four pounds

Ls: (laugh relieved)

On a few occasions during the lesson, as in the above extract, the teacher disagrees with the replies given by learners. In such cases she switches to Maltese thus rendering her decision, which is in contradiction with that of the learners, more acceptable to them. In fact, one learner finally agrees with the teacher's decision on practical grounds: 'a]jar hekk g]ax ti[i four pounds', and the learners laugh, thus indicating a peaceful resolution to the conflicting exchange.

For topic/information management

In the home-economics lesson just mentioned, which was largely conducted through English, there was an interesting use of discourse markers in Maltese. Each time the teacher says 'issa' she introduces new information about the topic. Each 'issa' marks a new step in the lesson and highlights a new piece of information. On the other hand, each time the teacher uses 'mela', she repeats some already given information.

T: *issa* when we talk about money, what is important for us . to do . let's say the money that comes into the family . to the home .. *mela* budgeting . it is important that we will be able to manage our money properly . *issa* and how can we . manage . how can we budget our money

This was not an isolated case of discourse marker switching. Other discourse markers in Maltese were used in other lessons that were otherwise totally conducted in English. The simple codeswitch in these examples further highlights specific points in the management of information.

For classroom management

A language switch sometimes co-occurs with a change in classroom activity. Each codeswitch is a potential attention-getting device. When a codeswitch co-occurs with an aside or with a change in activity, it also highlights the change in the flow of information. In the example below from an economics lesson in a Form 3 class, the teacher is dictating notes in English. At one point she switches to Maltese indicating that what she is saying is not to be taken down as notes: 'hekk tinkiteb'. In the absence of devices like punctuation in the spoken language, codeswitching seems to serve similar functions for bilingual speakers.

T: is called . a post-dated cheque . *hekk tinkiteb* a post-dated cheque . point number nine . *ħarsu ftit 'il fuq qabel ma tiktbu n-notes . fuq kull ċekk . ikun hemm miktub l-isem tal-bank*

After having seen a few examples of how codeswitching is pedagogically motivated in a bilingual classroom, we shall look again at the policy stated in the NMC and raise a few questions for discussion.

Questions for thought and discussion

Several problems come to the fore when establishing a policy for bilingual education. Rather than giving answers and justifications, I prefer to ask questions to stimulate discussion among readers on the aims of bilingual education in Malta, and on how it functions in our schools and classrooms.

First. What is the aim of bilingual education in Malta perceived to be? Is it a matter of political ideology and identity? To what extent are the social and cognitive advantages of bilingualism given consideration by educators (there is hardly any mention of this in the NMC)?

Second. To what extent should bilingual education be valued as providing equality of opportunity for all types of learners: with either Maltese or English as first language?

Third. Why is bilingual education directly related to proficiency in English? For instance the NMC (see p.82) talks about a 'policy for language teaching' but mentions the medium of instruction and does not give a thought to language teaching methodology. If there is a problem with proficiency in a particular language we should first and foremost examine the teaching of that language as a subject. Blaming non-language teachers and their methodology for their and their students' lack of proficiency in language is very unjust to say the least!

Fourth. Why is codeswitching totally misunderstood as a pedagogical process? Why does the NMC, as well as many educators, dare make negative evaluative judgements on the use of codeswitching in the classroom?

Fifth. Are the aims of bilingual competence being achieved? Do we have a valid and reliable tool of measurement? Do we know enough about bilingual competence or do we continue to judge it in terms of monolingual norms? I would like to suggest that while in descriptive linguistics we have gone some way in understanding and describing bilingual knowledge and skill, in pedagogy the research results have not achieved the respect they deserve from educators who have not updated their linguistic background.

Sixth. In the NMC which criteria are used for the assignment of Maltese to Social Studies and Religion, for example, but not to the expressive arts such as Art, Music or even Physical Education? Furthermore, does it mean that a teacher of those subjects assigned to Maltese as a medium cannot use materials on the subject in English and vice-versa?

More classroom-based research would help us establish how Maltese and English function as media of instruction in different schools and at different levels. In our bilingual context the teaching of Maltese and English as subjects in themselves needs to be given more attention. Among the many variables that policy makers would have to consider are also the perceptions, attitudes and aspirations of all stakeholders; of teachers above all. As already pointed out above, teacher education for a bilingual context needs to be addressed in its own right.

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UNDERSTANDING AND CATERING FOR STUDENT DIFFERENCE

RONALD G. SULTANA

Introduction

In this chapter[1] my main goal is to expand our understanding of student differences, particularly with reference to differential educational achievement. In order to do this, I will first problematise common sense assumptions about the notion of 'ability', on which subsequent definitions of 'achievement' at school are based. I will argue that this kind of critical reflection on the submerged theories we operate with is crucial, for it is through a better understanding of what we are about in schools and classrooms that we can best serve the interests of those entrusted in our care. The categorisation of students as 'high achievers', 'low achievers', and 'under achievers' depends on particular views of intelligence and ability, which have developed over time and which conceal political and economic ideologies that are often not immediately available to us for critique. Nevertheless, these views of the world, of the place of the school within this world, and of the relative worth of different groups of children therein, have an extraordinarily powerful influence on the way we think and act, and therefore need to be unpacked. Otherwise, we risk perpetrating injustices on those we claim to represent (see Canaan, 2001). Having delved into the political etymology of the concept 'ability', we will then explore what it is that can be done to interact more effectively with those who do not fulfil their potential in the school context.

Who is 'able'?

We can identify at least three key currents of thought underlying the word 'ability'. While these currents belong to identifiable historical periods, they can be present simultaneously as we speak about the concept today, even though this leads to a number of contradictory positions (Bisseret, 1979; Nisbet & Entwistle, 1982). Prior to the French Revolution and the subsequent industrialisation of the West, the medieval understanding of 'ability' or 'aptitude' was based on a religious conception of the world, whereby the 'order of things' was ordained by God, and where everybody had a particular place. One was born into a social position, and by God's grace remained in it. In this situation, 'ability' was considered to be god-given and hence immutable, ascribed by birth and hence generally stable from one generation to the next. It was a gift of Nature or of God, conferring no superiority of rank. Needless to say, the

implications of such a conception for the maintenance of social order and social reproduction are myriad. 'Over-reaching' – the attempt to move out of the social station one was born in – was considered evil, a direct challenge to the will of God, a refusal to accept the design of Divine Providence, a rebellion that has perhaps been most powerfully dramatised by Christopher Marlowe in such plays as *Tamburlaine the Great* and *Doctor Faustus*.

Buttressed by the vested interests of the powerful classes, which included not only secular but also religious powers, this notion of ability was to last for centuries, until social change brought about by economic development, the creation of a dynamic new class – the bourgeoisie – and the enlightenment philosophy it bred, led to a more secular and liberal understanding of the term. That philosophy and that economic development did not quite make it to our shores: at the end of the 19th century, for instance, a Maltese 'nobleman' by the name of Salvatore Frendo de Mannarino wrote a treatise on primary education arguing against the extension of schooling to all and sundry, for then people would aspire to move out of the class in which Nature and divine Providence had placed them. These 'spostati', as he calls them, would scorn manual work, so that no one would be left to fix engines, sew clothes, or repair shoes. Education, argued Frendo de Mannarino, was there to help people be happy in the class they were born in; any other way would lead to socialism, which 'wishes to remove every class distinction designed by God Himself in His eternal Book' (Frendo de Mannarino, 1898, p.17).

A new basis for differentiating: 'merit'

The French and Industrial Revolutions brought in their wake new ideas, new social classes, and new opportunities (Beaud, 1984; Hobsbawm, 1996). The bourgeoisie, long frustrated by a situation where they held financial but not political power, reconstructed the social order around the principle – or rather, as it turned out to be – the myth, of equality. Social positions were no longer to be ascribed by birth, but by merit. In this conception of things, 'ability' played a key part, and was now considered to be an internal characteristic bestowed by nature irrespective of the social class of individuals. Status was to be achieved, not ascribed. Nature here no longer implied a theocentric conception, since it was increasingly falling under the control of human beings through such discoveries as the steam engine, electrical power and so on. Theoretically, therefore, the choice positions in society would be held by those who had the qualities required, and schooling rather than the family was to select and distribute such worthy individuals to the slots in the labour market corresponding to their respective abilities. This was a new social order created by people, not by Divine Will, which offered everybody without discrimination the theoretical possibility of physical, intellectual and moral development to the greatest benefit of society which, after getting rid of its inequalities, would be able to achieve enormous progress.

Schools thus early on took on the role of selecting and stratifying children, and with time developed an increasingly sophisticated and (pseudo) scientific vocabulary to identify, test and measure 'ability' in order to justify and legitimise the sorting of students and the subsequent differential treatment meted out. Instead of birth and divine right, notions of equality, merit, aptitude, competence and individual responsibility rallied around a comprehensive ideology, 'meritocracy'. With the rise

of anthropometry, craniometry, psychology and psychometrics, and especially under the influence of social Darwinism, it became easier for the powerful classes to justify social differences and inequalities by referring to processes of 'natural' selection of the fittest, where the domination of some by others was considered to be natural, inevitable and legitimate. Men like Gobineau, Galton, Binet, Mendel dedicated their energies to developing instruments which measured differences in ability, rather than to finding out the possible causes of such differences. Words we use today without feeling the need to justify them – including 'normal curve of distribution', 'intelligence quotient', 'intelligence scale' – know their origins to this time, and are steeped in the ideology that gave birth to them in the first place. Children were, with time, no longer referred to as 'stupid', but rather as 'unmotivated', 'educationally sub-normal', 'learning disabled'. Whether the descriptors used were crass or euphemistic, the underlying theme was that you were either born with 'it' or you were not, and both justice and efficiency were served if those who had 'it' made it to the top, and performed the most difficult and socially responsible of tasks.

This ablist orientation became entrenched in Malta in the 1930s when A.V. Laferla, then Director of Education, followed the lead of the British Hadow Report of 1926 and proposed the division of children on the grounds of ability (Sultana, 1992; Said, 2001). The new emphasis in British educational thought reflected the economic depression raging across the world, and hence stressed realism, vocationalism and the importance of bringing into the school elements of the world of the child – both physical and mental. This implied a diversification of curricula depending on the student's 'abilities' and orientations. Laferla (*Report of the Working of Government Departments*, 1929-30, M1ff.) looks back at 'the terrible legacy of the past' where 'everybody had been dealt with alike'. This had led to a number of shortcomings: everybody received an education which led nowhere in particular; no discrimination was made between the 'intelligent' and the 'stupid', between girls and boys, between those who were destined for further education and those whose place was in the workshop or field. Such an education led working-class boys to aspire for middle-class occupations, and hence to despise their fathers' calling. Girls were not being prepared for the home, and as a result held housework in contempt. A differential school diet was thus introduced, reflecting not only class but also gender prejudices of the day. Of course, there were model educators who offered alternatives to such prejudices: Manwel Dimech and Dun Gorg Preca were powerful and avant-garde contestants of the ablist perspective promoted by Laferla, and did much to democratise knowledge (Zammit Marmara, 1997; Sultana, 1997a). But in many ways they were marginal and their ideas, while taking root, were not legitimised by the key institutions of the time.

The understanding of 'ability' as a quality internal to the individual, as being fixed and measurable was strengthened by the popularisation of the myth of the so-called Intelligence Quotient (IQ), and by theories of mental development proposed by Piaget – or at least particular readings of them. Countless numbers of teachers in Malta have been brought up to consider 'ability' as dependent on biological stages through which children go through as they grow up, where there are internal age-related restrictions on learning. Up to this day, few have been exposed to a different understanding of ability as an unknown potential the development of which depends on the cultural context in which it operates. Vygotsky (1978), together with his colleagues Leontiev and Luria, developed their understanding of mental ability in post-revolutionary

Russia and by the 1930s and 1940s had argued persuasively that changes in the pedagogical context in which learning took place determined the extent to which an individual assimilated new knowledge and skills. Such conclusions were based on path-breaking teaching experiments with mentally 'disabled' children (at what was then one of the first Institutes of its kind in the world) and with 'uneducable' peasants in the Mongol plains. Modelling their pedagogy on the teaching relationship created between mother and child, Vygotsky and his colleagues hypothesised a 'zone of proximal development', arguing that the crux of learning was not the innate 'ability' of the child, but rather the skill of the teacher to provide an effective support as the learner moves from one form and level of understanding to the other (Moll, 2001). They were convinced that a child's intellectual potential could not be assessed independently, and that what was important was the level a child could attain in collective activity, with adult assistance and the aid of imitation. Simon (1986, p.114) synthesises well the views of the Soviet school when she argues that 'what the child can do in co-operation today he [sic] can do alone tomorrow. Therefore the only good kind of instruction is that which marches ahead of development and leads it, which is aimed not at the level the child has attained, as usually advised, but at 'ripening functions''.

Vygotskian perspectives have not made much headway in Malta, except perhaps tangentially in the field of language development studies. Indeed it is only recently that the work of this Russian team has been rediscovered in the West (Wertsh, 1983, 1991; Kozulin, 1990; Daniels, 1993), partly through the efforts of the American Jerome Bruner (1960, 1990) who popularised the most salient elements of the theories in question, and who argued that as teachers we must 'begin with the hypothesis that any subject can be taught effectively in some intellectually honest form to any child at any stage of development' (Bruner, 1960, p.33). Dewey, of course, had made much the same argument much earlier, building on a pragmatist philosophy in order to claim that surprising advances in learning can take place if only students were allowed to collaborate together in the applied search for meaningful knowledge.

Clearly, the ease with which we label learners as 'able', 'less able', as 'low achievers' or 'under-achievers', depends at least partially on which of the three meanings of 'ability' we choose to adopt. The first two currents of thought lead to a preoccupation with measuring, predicting performance, selecting and channelling children, practices which, I have argued elsewhere (Sultana, 1991, 1992, 1997b), still constitute the key distinguishing characteristic of the Maltese educational system, even though, under the impetus of two key documents – namely *Tomorrow's Schools: Developing Effective Learning Cultures* (Wain *et al*., 1995) and the new National Minimum Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2000) – we might very well be embarking on a historic shift away from such a paradigm. Vygotskian perspectives and most recent work in cognitive and constructionist psychology, lead us away from this legacy, which gives way to a preoccupation with developing the right pedagogy and providing the most effective resources for learning. We now look at ability as a construct, and try to trace the elements which contribute to, or limit, its growth. In other words, if a child fails to learn, we should be quicker to point a finger at deficiencies in our pedagogy and in the learning context that we construct rather than at imputed deficiencies in the child.

Let us look a little closer at the basis for such optimism, how such an approach has been developed more recently by the likes of Howard Gardner, and how such views help us explain underachievement as a function of pedagogy, and not of innately determined intelligence. A key Vgyotskian notion is that cognitive development takes place through interaction with more knowledgeable others, and that knowledge is embedded in the action, work, play, technology, literature, art and talk of members of a given society (Vygotsky, 1978, 1994). Such collective learning activity can be represented to children in various ways, namely:

- through a symbolic presentation which is tied to the realm of formal symbols, predominantly language;

- through an iconic presentation which is tied to visual messages in the form of drawing or figures, and

- through an active presentation which is tied to practical work

The problem with schools—and especially with those systems whose curriculum and pedagogy are still entrenched in the 'magisterial' tradition—is that they generally emphasise symbolic and, to a lesser extent, iconic modes of representation, effectively excluding large groups of students whose abilities can only emerge through engagement in alternative forms of pedagogic processes. This cultural difference between groups identified by different learning styles is not due to divergence in innate abilities. Rather, patterns and levels of thinking are products of the activities practised in the social institutions in which the individual grows up. Bourdieu's notions of 'habitus' and 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 1977, 1984), or Bernstein's notion of 'codes' (Bernstein, 1990), help us understand that some of these differences in learning styles are linked to social background and to material practices. Some children will grow up in an environment where practical thinking will predominate, since their cultural milieu is characterised by the practical manipulation of objects. A middle class child's cultural environment is, in contrast, marked by an emphasis on more abstract forms of theoretical activity, which in turn induces more abstract thinking (Luria, 1976, p.xiv). Both children can undertake complex reasoning processes, but according to the Vygotskian school, they do it differently: 'The average middle class child begins his/her schooling with the attitude that problems are something you solve by first talking about them and then doing it, while the average working class child has learned that you solve the problem by acting and then talking about it' (Luria, 1976, p.28).

More recently, the pedagogical innovations conducted under the leadership of Howard Gardner in the U.S.A. have shown the existence of 'multiple intelligences'—ie. different and distinct ways different people have of 'knowing' and understanding the world. In a number of fascinating publications, Gardner (1983, 1993) identified nine types of intelligences,[2] and argues that the question of under-achievement at school should not be addressed by measuring intelligence, but by identifying the type of intelligence that a learner works with. It becomes, therefore, a question of finding the appropriate teaching style to use, given the learning style of individuals. Failure to learn is not a question of lack of intelligence, but rather the inability of the teacher to adopt the right pedagogy.

But is everybody able? The social construction of difference

Those of us who have been raised up believing that intellectual ability is not only innate (if not inherited) and measurable, but constant and largely immutable (i.e. the 'either you have 'it' or you don't' approach) find it difficult to accept the optimism encouraged by Vygotskian perspectives. Our experience in classrooms seems to support rather more easily the first two traditions of thought rather than the last identified above. There are children who grasp immediately what we say, and other who no matter what we do, it seems, simply cannot understand or assimilate. Indeed, our classroom experiences might lead us to think of the belief in the learning potential of all children as superficially progressive but as profoundly cruel. For is it not cruel to expect the same standards from all students, when they are so clearly different?

Such humanist concerns need to be problematised. In the first instance, we must realise that our classrooms, curricula and pedagogical practices are structured on our underlying beliefs regarding 'ability'. We should not be surprised that our experiences as teachers 'confirm' the first two traditions outlined above, given that they are predicated on them. If we were to operate within an environment where the assumption was that everybody can achieve a decent standard of education, where classrooms were well equipped, where expectations of all children and from all children were high, where teacher-student ratios were realistic, where the preoccupation is not with competition, and with sorting, selecting and channelling but with teaching, then I am sure our classroom experiences would tend to confirm the third tradition. In other words, 'experience' – which we as teachers adopt as a respectable and trustworthy referent, especially when contrasted with that dirty word 'theory' (Hargreaves, 1984) – is no guarantee that we have got it right. For experience, like common sense, encapsulates world views. It is a construct of the world we live in and at the same time constructs for us that very same world.

In the second place, a grasp of educational history teaches us quite clearly that our beliefs about the 'ability' of children to follow a set course of studies has changed dramatically from time to time, and that these shifts in expectations had nothing to do with the innate intelligence of learners, and all to do with political ideologies and economics. Accepting for a moment that a University education represents the most intellectually challenging course of studies that our country can provide, it is quite significant that patterns in access to the 'holy of holies' have changed so radically over the years. In 19th century Malta, only a few were considered to be 'able' to follow a University education with profit. The same was true of most other countries in the West at that time. It was then believed, as the quote from Frendo de Mannarino above graphically suggests, that extending an education to all would lead to a collapse of the 'order of things'. Of course, those who propagated this belief were those who had much to lose if the 'order of things' did change! This led to a situation where the privileged classes in Malta siphoned off most of the state aid to education. As the University Senate noted (*Vice-Chancellor's Annual Report*, 1892-3, pts.12-13), 'if the available funds were not limited, if the children of the poor were all enabled to receive free primary education, if the teaching appliances and the school buildings left nothing to be desired, and if the pay of the teachers was adequate in all classes, such a distribution might possibly be defended. These conditions are, however, quite

unfulfilled and, for this reason, there must be a large number of children for whose education the State makes no provision whatever...The State pays from 5 to 30 times as much for the children of the comparatively well-to-do portion of the population as for children of the poor. This is an absolute reversal of the principles upon which the systems of national education of all countries are based'.

The decision as to who is capable of receiving and profiting (in the many senses of that word) from what type and level of education, and from provision of financial and other resources to that effect, depends rather more on the ability of powerful groups to cream off the goodies than on questions of ability. The ideology of 'ablism' which we operate with is, in this sense, a superstructure erected to justify and legitimise a power structure, a re-wording and re-naming of socially constructed injustice in terms of personal deficits. Thus, X does not make it at school, does not achieve university-level education because X is somehow 'deficient', intellectually not 'able', rather than because it is not in Y's interest that X, and many X's, make it.

The class and gender politics behind our notions of 'achievement' become crystal clear when we consider the ways in which women and the popular classes have been excluded from educational avenues in the past and, with a change in political ideology –often fuelled by a change in economic circumstances – have then been included. These are changes in ideology and beliefs, not in 'ability'. The post-war economic boom, the liberal and progressive movements that followed, the belief that we are heading for a post-industrial, high-ability, high-wage society and the faith that investment in 'human capital' (now called 'human resources') leads towards further economic progress, all facilitated the democratisation of universities. As a result, ever increasing numbers of students were admitted to tertiary level institutions. The characteristic enrolment rate in higher education in Europe and the United States in the 19th century was 2%. By 1984 this had risen dramatically, so that more and more from the 18 to 24 year-old bracket were receiving a university education. This is true of the USA (44% of young people are at University), the Netherlands (22%), Japan (21%), France (15%) and the U.K. (15%), to mention only a few countries (Halsey, 1991). Such policies of expansion are not innocent: they remind us of the problems of the scourge of qualification inflation and what Dore (1976) has aptly called the 'diploma disease', where education becomes a positional good, a new way of maintaining and justifying old inequalities. Such policies remind us also of the way governments use educational institutions as convenient holding pens to 'store' unwanted resources during periods of high unemployment. The expansion of university education as much as the raising of the school-leaving age give the state an innocent – even progressive – looking excuse to keep young people off the streets.

Despite their dark side, expansionary policies do help us make the important point that 'ability' is rather more a function of educational policies than of individual persons. They help discredit the traditional view that there is a limited 'pool of talent' in a sea of mediocrity, that there is a 'normal' curve of distribution where a few are brilliant, and most fall in the middle range of ability. Expansionary policies also give credibility to the claim made by some cognitive psychologists that we barely develop a fraction of our intellectual potential, and that the unfolding of human capacity is limited mainly by external circumstances – such as social hierarchy and cultural attitudes – rather than by the grey matter we carry inside our heads. 'Given the right motivation which', argue Brown & Lauder (1991, p.15) 'is socially determined, at

least 80% of the population are capable of achieving the intellectual standards required to obtain a University degree... This view is supported by comparative evidence which shows significant differences in the proportion of students from different advanced industrial societies participating in higher education. Such differences need to be explained in terms of the social, cultural, and institutional differences between nation states'. For, as Sabel (1982, p.22) has argued, it is 'social hierarchy and the world views associated with it that restricts the unfolding of human capacity, and not the limitations of natural endowment'.

A focus on differences in learning styles and strategies

The case of the expansion of higher education internationally is a powerful reminder, then, of the social and economic processes involved in the definition of, and expectations about, intelligence, ability, and people's potential. I am not arguing that there are no differences in intelligence, or in types of intelligence, or in learning styles (see Bonanno, this volume). Some will learn some things faster and more thoroughly than others through the use of one type or other of pedagogy. Rather, what I *am* arguing is that we know so little about intelligence that it would be foolish for us to go about measuring it. It would be equally foolish to underestimate children's ability to learn. A student who fails to learn in one particular situation, with a teacher using a particular pedagogy, will 'miraculously' grasp the concept in another situation, within or outside of school. In other words, children flower in different ways and in different environments, but *all of them have it in them to bloom*. Unfortunately, however, school systems are generally organised on the premise that few are capable of significant practical and academic achievement, of creative thought and skill, and of taking responsibility for informed judgement. Rather than focusing on the individual's attributes – intellectual, cultural or otherwise – to explain under achievement, we need instead to look at the institutional and social contexts in which the learning process is taking place.

How then, do we reach out to those students who are not blooming in our schools? The reflex action in our educational system has been either to ignore them, to place them in separate educational spaces (e.g. lower streams, opportunity centres, trade schools and so on), and to offer them compensatory – or complementary – education. Bernstein (1970) and others have correctly pointed out that the creation of such separate spaces leads to a situation where children – and their parents and families – are treated as 'deficit systems'. Such 'cultural deprivation' theories generate labels which add further to the burdens of the children made to wear them. I have myself documented these educationally destructive processes in Malta's trade schools, where young people – labelled as low-achieving ever since their primary schooling, have owned and integrated that label to such an extent that they do not believe in their ability to learn and have given up on formal schooling (Sultana, 1992).

While we must not let the proposal of compensatory education distract us from the necessary reform of schools, we must not accept idealistically that because we are now changing our views on ability, all students will start achieving. The critique of compensatory education for the under-achieving is important to the extent it helps us

focus on the deficits in the educational system rather than in children. But it must not lead us to treat everybody in the same way simply because we wish that everybody was equal! We would there be guilty of what Bourdieu & Passeron (1977) have called 'symbolic violence', for to hold such views would be tantamount to insisting that everybody should run the same race and depart from the same starting line because we believe that everybody is equal. But, in a very real sense, it is this very mirage of equality which recreates inequality, and which leads children to believe that they are incapable! As Halsey (1988) points out, this does not mean that we therefore believe that children are *personally* deficient, but rather that they are victims of *socially created* deficits. And from this we can infer that such deficits can be *socially remedied* – through such means as positive discrimination, educational priority areas, and so on. These, on their own, will never be sufficient. But through them we engage in the very real politics of educational resourcing – i.e. who gets which resources for what ends.

Reaching out

I have spent a lot of time covering the theoretical ground of this area because I firmly believe that all of us – whatever our respect or otherwise for theories – go around with theoretical assumptions in our heads, and it is these often unexamined assumptions which lead us to adopt one set of actions rather than another. I trust the above has helped us re-examine the kinds of beliefs we have about ability and achievement. Following from what has been argued thus far, it should be clear that we can never really gauge the learning 'potential' of a child, for the term 'potential' implies a judgement about a future we can have little knowledge of. It should also be clear that, given the orientation of our segregationist educational system, we are more likely to underestimate rather than overestimate a child's 'ability' to learn. Furthermore, there are curricular and pedagogical issues that need to be raised in the whole question relating to achievement. Thus, for instance, the selection of knowledge we make, i.e. the curriculum, does not represent the voices and experiences of all groups in Maltese society, and that therefore these marginalised class groups are more likely to be among the so-called 'under achieving' because they find it more difficult to relate to the learning contexts we are offering them (see Borg & Mayo, this volume). Similarly, our pedagogic practices serve to alienate class groups from learning, especially when we emphasise abstract and symbolic modes of representation rather than practical, learning-by-doing types educative contexts. The issue of the language medium of instruction is particularly salient here, given that the common practice of teaching through English increases the disadvantages of at risk students.

What remains now is to suggest guidelines for reaching out to students who have been disabled by the school contexts we have offered them thus far. I will do this schematically below, organising the results of a large number of studies in two sections, referring to those strategies which have generally been found *not* to work for students at risk, and those which have tended to work. I have drawn from a variety of sources, the most useful being Levin (1987) and Slavin & Madden (1989).

What does not work

- Make the under-achieving student repeat the year.

- Use diagnostic/prescriptive pull-out programmes, where students are removed from the mainstream classroom environment for long periods of time and trapped in 'ghetto curricula'.

- Assume that under achieving students will not be able to maintain a normal instructional pace, and that therefore no timetable or programme is required.

- Reduce learning expectations of both the children and their educators. Provide learning situations and curricular material normally used with younger children (as we still do in 'Opportunity' Centres.

- Provide endless repetition of material through drill-and-practice, ensuring furtther demotivation through a joyless and uninteresting school experience.

- Label remediation programmes in such a way that children and teachers involved with them are seen to be inferior, to the extent that there is weak social support for the activity, and low social status for the persons engaged in remediation. Employ untrained teachers to work in these programmes.

- Use in-class remedial programmes without a change in instructional strategies.

- Focus on remediation rather than prevention.

- Tackle learning problems at the secondary school level rather than before.

- Avoid discussing the educational programme with parents of under achieving students.

What works

- School accepts responsibility to see that everyone succeeds. No shifting of blame on parents, television, students, or an abstract educational 'system'. There should be written agreements clarifying the obligations of parents, school staff and students.

- Recognise that success for everyone will not be cheap, and that we must be prepared to pay for additional resources if we really want to do away with educational failure. Use excellent, qualified and motivated teachers.

- Emphasise prevention. Make sure that all students have the targeted level of numeracy and literacy skills the first time they are taught these, i.e. nobody beyond the first year of primary school should have basic reading and math difficulties. Programmes should be in place in Year 1 to ensure that students who do not make adequate progress in reading receive immediate and intensive assistance.

- Remedial programmes are a last resort, not a first one. Focus should be on prevention. When remediation is used, it should be provided in addition to regular classroom instruction, never a replacement for it, and it should be intensive and temporary. In addition, and most importantly, it must be characterised by high expectations, providing high status for participants.

- Develop curricula which are not only fast-paced but which also actively engage the interests of children and motivate them to learn.

- Use continuous progress programmes where students proceed at their own pace through a sequence of well-defined instructional objectives. A successful programme sets a deadline for closing the achievement gap so that ultimately educationally disadvantaged children will be able to benefit from mainstream education.

- Encourage co-operative learning situations, where students work in small learning teams to master material initially presented by the teacher.

- Develop effective programmes, characterised by well-planned, comprehensive approaches to instruction.

- Use short and intensive intervention periods in which to identity learning problems and provide additional instruction.

- Involve parents and teachers in an active manner, rather than having a central authority make curricular and programme decisions. The planning must be made by the educational staff who will offer the programme, and all available parental and community resources must be integrated.

- Wherever possible, use one-to-one tutoring. These could be teachers, but other students, peers, parents and community volunteers (including senior citizens) have also been found to be effective. Computer-assisted instruction presents us with new opportunities if used well.

- Assess student progress frequently and use the results to modify instructional content and pedagogy to meet individual needs.

Conclusion

It is quite clear that it is not only the way we think about achievement and ability that has to be addressed and transformed, but the way we address the educational challenge of combating school failure. Our educational system has not really gone beyond the exclusionary hallmark of the 19th century, and our intra- and inter-school streaming, our primitive and low status remedial education programmes, our reflex to consider 'difference' as an excuse to channel students into separate educational spaces, are ample evidence that we have little faith in the ability of the vast majority of our children to achieve and to benefit from mainstream schooling. It also shows the extent to which we are failing to consider most seriously and systematically the conditions and contexts of the educational environment. As educators and as citizens,

we must mobilise our energies to ensure that future generations will not look back at us with disdain for failing to provide them with one of the most fundamental rights – an education worthy of that name.

Notes

[1] This is a modified and updated version of a paper first published as 'Under-achievement: are students failing school or are our schools failing students', which appeared in F. Ventura (ed.) (1996) *Secondary Education in Malta: Challenges and Opportunities*. Malta: MUT publications. Thanks are due to F. Ventura and the Malta Union of Teachers for permission to re-visit that material.

[2] These are verbal-linguistic, logical-mathematical, visual-spatial, musical-rhythmic, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, natural classification, and spiritual intelligence. This list is not conclusive in any way.

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Assessment Issues in Maltese Secondary Schools

GRACE GRIMA

What is Assessment?

Assessment involves the use of a number of tools to provide information about the progress and achievement of students. It is also used to evaluate the teaching and learning process and give feedback to teachers, administrators and parents both about the learning of students as well as about the effectiveness of the teaching (Chetcuti & Grima, 2001, p.1).

A wide range of tools or methods is used to evaluate students' performance and attainment. These include 'formal testing and examinations, practical and oral assessment, classroom-based assessment carried out by teachers and portfolios' (Gipps, 1994, p.1). Classroom-based assessment, also referred to as teacher assessment or school-based assessment, includes oral questions in class, observations, interviews, written assignments of various forms, fieldwork as well as practical work in laboratories and workshops.

Why do we assess?

Numerous assessment tools have been developed and are used for the different purposes. The main functions of assessment are listed here:
1. *screening*: which is the process of testing groups of children to identify individuals who are in need of special help;
2. *diagnosis*: which involves using tests to identify individual children's strengths and weaknesses;
3. *record keeping*: to provide information for others;
4. *feedback*: on performance about both the child's progress and the teacher's success;
5. *certification*: to provide a student with a qualification which signifies that he or she has reached a certain level of competence of knowledge;
6. *selection*: into different institutions for further and higher education.

<div align="right">(Gipps & Stobart, 1993, pp. 15-17).</div>

Current Assessment Practices in Maltese Secondary Schools

In the Maltese context, assessment is closely linked to an examination system that is dominated by certification and selection. This is due to the high stakes examinations that are found at the two ends of secondary education:

- The Junior Lyceum Entrance Examination and the Common Entrance Examination, which take place at the end of Primary school, form part of the assessment experiences of many Maltese children. Both examinations have a high profile and are considered to be extremely important in the eyes of the public. The former qualifies candidates (males and females) for entry into State Junior Lyceums and the latter qualifies male candidates for entry into Church Schools. This selection process at age 11+ is based on the children's performance on these one-off examinations. It has significant life-long implications for those candidates who make it as well as for those who do not.

- At the end of their secondary schooling, students from the three Sectors (State, Private and Independent Schools) sit for Secondary Education Certificate examinations, set by the local MATSEC Examinations Board and other foreign boards. These external certifications also provide another process of selection because currently, passes in six subjects (English, Maltese, Mathematics, a science subject, a foreign language and any another subject) in practice constitute the compulsory entry requirements into post-secondary education.

Other assessment practices feature in the five-year period that characterises our local secondary education system. The list that is presented below is taken from a document prepared by the National Steering Committee on the Implementation of the National Minimum Curriculum (2000):

- Teacher Assessment is recognised and is recorded in reports for parents alongside examination results. However, school policies on Teacher Assessment do not appear to be clearly defined.
- Informal tests in class are one of the more evident instruments that teachers use in their assessment practices. These tests are used as a diagnostic tool.
- End-of-year examinations are more formal, particularly in the final years of Primary schooling and during the Secondary School years.
- It appears that most of these formal examinations are pen and paper exercises. However, an aural/oral component features in languages, and practical sessions in certain subjects such as Art and Home Economics also take place.
- The weight given to coursework in school assessment is not uniform throughout schools. Generally, coursework is considered more of a component of Teacher Assessment than as a set component of formal end-of-year examinations.

(Working Group 03, p.6)

The same document also makes reference to the school-leaving certificate, which is based on the performance of the Form Five annual examinations and the Record of Achievement, which is used in some secondary schools for subjects in which there is no formal final examination.

Critique of Traditional Uses of Assessment

The over-reliance on examination performance and results for certification and selection purposes is not exclusive to the Maltese educational system. These were the two main uses for assessment traditionally, however in recent years grave concerns have arisen about the negative effects of examinations. Chetcuti & Grima (2001) explain that research has consistently shown that examinations can have a number of adverse effects on students, teaching, learning and curriculum. Examinations can cause labelling of students (Gipps & Stobart, 1993); teaching to the test (Madaus, 1988); shallow learning (Gipps, 1994) and they do not give a true picture of what students have been able to learn (Broadfoot, 1992). Furthermore, they have resulted in "a disproportionate amount of teacher time being devoted to coaching students to perform better on these tests and students devoting their energy to practising test items likely to appear on the test rather participating in more useful classroom activities" (Cunningham, 1998, p.125).

A comprehensive review of the difficulties inherent in educational systems that rely heavily on test and examination performance is given by Black (1999). These difficulties have been grouped into three categories.

Category One relates to the issue of effective learning:
- Teacher tests encourage rote and superficial learning.
- The questions and other methods used are not shared between teachers, and they are not critically reviewed in relation to what they actually assess.
- There is a tendency to emphasise quantity of work and to neglect its quality in relation to learning.

Category Two includes difficulties related to the negative impact of marks:
- The giving of marks and the grading functions are over-emphasised, while giving of advice and the learning function are under-estimated.
- Students are compared with one another, which highlights competition rather than personal improvement. Such feedback teaches students with low attainments that they lack "ability" and that they are not able to learn.

Category Three refers to the managerial role involved:
- Teachers' feedback to students often seems to serve social and managerial functions rather than learning.
- The collection of marks to fill up records is given greater priority than the analysis of students' work to discern learning needs; yet some teachers pay no attention to the assessment records of previous teachers of their students.

Alternative Forms of Assessment

Concerns about the negative impact of examinations have led to a search for alternative forms of assessment. This search for new ways of assessing students is a result of the change in "our underlying conceptions of learning, of evaluation and what counts as achievement" (Gipps, 1994, p.158). Chetcuti & Grima (2001) explain

that the new models of alternative assessment are based on a number of principles. These are summarised below:

1. The idea of multiple intelligences:

The idea that intelligence is a single fixed attribute that can be measured in a reliable and objective way is no longer valid. Furthermore, Gardner (1999, p.96) argues that most formal testing engages primarily the linguistic and logical-mathematical intelligences. He suggests that poor endowment in one or both of these intelligences is likely to result in a poor performance. His recent work on multiple intelligences identifies a wide range of mental faculties or intelligences:

- language (linguistic intelligence, as exemplified by a poet)
- logical-mathematical analysis (in a scientist, mathematician, or logician)
- spatial representation (the painter, sculptor, architect, sailor, geometer, or engineer)
- musical analysis
- bodily-kinesthetic thinking (the dancer, athlete, mime, actor, surgeon, craftsman)
- interpersonal knowledge (of other persons, as in a salesperson, teacher, therapist, leader)
- intrapersonal knowledge (the ability to know one's desires, fears, and competencies and to act productively on the basis of that knowledge)

Gardner (1999) suggests that new assessment practices should focus more on the process of learning rather than the product and also use different tools to assess different forms of intelligences.

2. The "constructivist" idea that students learn and interpret ideas based on prior knowledge:

This approach implies that assessment strategies should be based on processes rather than on knowledge. Black (1999) describes this model as originating from the ideas of Vygotsky (1962) who started from a view that learning proceeds by an interaction between the teacher and the learner. His approach can be linked to another concept introduced by Woods *et al.* (1976) who used the term "scaffolding". The teacher provides the scaffold for the building but the building itself is constructed by the learner. In this view, assessment involves personal communication with individual students intended to directly improve instruction (Cunningham, 1998).

3. *Learning takes place within a social context:*
Children learn in a social context. The different social and cultural milieus can affect the way in which individuals learn as well as the way in which they respond to assessment practices in school. "Assessments have to be very carefully framed, both in their language and context of presentation if they are to avoid bias, i.e. unfair effects on those from particular gender, social, ethnic or linguistic groups" (Black, 1999, p.123).

4. *Resolving the tension between formative and summative assessment:*
Summative assessment serves to inform an overall judgement of achievement, which may be needed for reporting and review, perhaps on transfer between years in a school or on transfer between schools, perhaps for providing certificates at the end of

schooling. Such test results may also be used for judging the achievements of individual teachers or of schools as a whole. Formative assessment is concerned with the short-term collection and use of evidence for the guidance of learning, mainly in day to day classroom practice (Black, 1999, p.118).

In summary, the principles outlined above point to a model of educational assessment which focuses on the process of learning rather than on only on the outcome. Such a model should:

- Capture a rich array of what students know and can do.

- Portray the processes by which students produce work.

- Give the right message to students about what is important.

- Have realistic contexts.

- Provide continuous information to chronicle development and provide effective feedback.

- Integrate assessment with instruction (Arter & Spandel, 1992, p.36).

According to Chetcuti & Griffiths (2000) a pedagogy that encourages such a model of educational assessment needs to be based on the following principles:

- *Relating teaching, learning and assessment to a variety of real life context*s taken from situations with which the students in a particular classroom are familiar. This will enable students to see the relevance of what they are doing and use it to enhance their own learning.

- *Developing a constant dialogue between students and teachers* so that students can get continuous positive feedback about their learning and be able to build a positive self-image of themselves.

- *Making use of multiple forms of teaching resources, learning styles and assessment*. This will enable all students to show what they know, understand and can do in a positive manner.

- *Actively involving members of the community such as parents within the educational community of the school*. This will allow students, teachers and parents to work collaboratively on a number of projects which will enhance the school environment and make it a better place for students to develop in.

- *Allowing students a greater sense of ownership in their own learning,* allowing them to make decisions and choices within the classroom and the school and giving them a chance to develop any skills and talents which they possess. This encourages difference rather than labelling or "stereotyping"

and places value on the differences among individuals.

- *Actively involving teachers in any policy making regarding pedagogy and assessment* so that they will make any curriculum and pedagogy introduced their own and make it work in their classrooms and schools.

The Philosophy of the National Minimum Curriculum

The ideas about assessment which are expressed in the National Minimum Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 1999) are in line with current ideas developing in the international arena (see Gipps, 1994; Gipps & Murphy, 1994). They are based on the principles of a new model of assessment that is based on the philosophy that assessment does not stand outside teaching and learning but stands in dynamic interaction with it. This model has a constructive focus where the aim is to help rather to sentence the learners. In this new model, the emphasis is on the learner's achievements relative to him or herself rather than to others or in relation to defined criteria.

The pedagogy that is implied in the new curriculum is one that:

- *is democratic*. This means that it caters for all students not only those who are labelled as good students.

- *one that strives to strengthen competency and assess learners holistically*. In this context, all students are deemed able to make progress because intelligence is seen as multifaceted and not based on an inherent fixed attribute.

- *one that promotes deep rather than shallow modes of learning and teaching*. This point merits elaboration as it forms the basis of the pedagogy of teaching and learning necessary in our schools and the assessment strategies that are needed to support it. (The following section is adapted from Gipps, 1994).

The Building Block Model of Learning which is associated with the psychological theories of the 1920s assumed that learning is linear and sequential, that complex competencies could be broken down into discrete skills learnt separately, and that teaching and testing should focus on separate skills. Examinations were developed with the assumptions that pupil performance could be measured in a reliable and objective way and that mastery on the test items implied mastery on the intended skills and concepts. This model had its shortcomings for experience showed that assessing separate components encouraged the teaching of isolated components and that this was not sufficient for learning problem solving or thinking skills. Reality also showed that in many cases, shallow learning was taking place. *Shallow Learning* takes place when students are able to work through exercises routinely without understanding fundamental principles. Essentially, then shallow learning is the acquisition of principles without deep understanding.

Current learning theories show that isolated facts quickly disappear from memory because they have no meaning. Furthermore, shallow learning does not lead to application of knowledge, critical thinking and problem solving. Now we know that learners learn best when they actively make sense of new knowledge. *Things are easier to learn if they make sense.* Meaning makes learning easier because the learners know where to put things in their mental framework. Thinking about the meaning of what is being learnt leads to deep learning. Among the characteristics of *Deep Learning*, we find:

- The intention to understand the material for oneself.

- Critical interaction with the content.

- Relating new ideas to previous knowledge and experience.

- Integrating new ideas to one's previous mental maps.

The development of intrinsic motivation, longer retention and positive attitudes to continued learning are associated with this form of learning.

In order to encourage learning for understanding, thinking processes and problem solving, we must use assessment strategies that directly reflect these processes. Assessment strategies need to be ones that reduce the emphasis on the ability to memorise and increase the emphasis on the thinking and problem-solving processes. The latter assess in more depth the structure and quality of students' learning and understanding. This is known as assessment in support of learning. Such assessment necessitates constant dialogue between teachers and learners so that learners can get continuous feedback about their learning.

These ideas are openly expressed in the new national minimum curriculum. Mary Vella, Director of Curriculum Planning and Implementation, explains that in the culture embedded in this document:

(i)   the primary aim of assessment will be to feed back into our teaching and learning strategies and methods;

(ii)   we look out for what the learners are able to do rather than segregate and exclude them for what they don't know;

(iii)   the learners participate in self-assessment as they come to make more and more choices and decisions in their learning (Ministry of Education, 1999, p.10).

Assessment Practices in the National Minimum Curriculum

In the National Minimum Curriculum, the call is for assessment practices which are more formative in nature, focus on the individual learner, focus on process rather than product and give a more holistic picture of what the student has learnt. Principle Nine States that:

> An education which recognises diversity regards formative assessment as indispensable for the carrying out of a democratic agenda. This mode of assessment focuses on the individual student in a manner that is beneficial to her or him…These modes of assessment do not discriminate among students. On the contrary, their purpose is to indicate the stage at which students had started their present stage of learning and the stage or stages they can reach in their individual process of educational development. Formative modes are more accurate in their assessment than those of a summative nature. Formative modes give a holistic picture of the student's development in terms of (1) how much the student has learnt (2) the manner in which the student has learnt (Ministry of Education, 1999, p.37).

The National Minimum Curriculum makes other Statements in relation to assessment policies and practices in Secondary schools. The National Steering Committee on the Implementation of the National Minimum Curriculum (2000) has pointed out that these Statements have received a great deal of attention since the publication of the document. The Statements are reproduced below:

- 'The formative and summative assessments, together with examples of the children's work will be kept in a portfolio. This portfolio will be carried forward by the children from one year to the next throughout the entire scholastic period.' (NMC p.78)

- At Secondary level, one should persist in adopting the summative and formative systems of assessment. This should apply to all years of secondary schooling.' (NMC p.82)

- 'In State (Secondary) schools, in order that schools can really serve as centres that address children's needs, the half yearly examinations as well as the annual examinations at the end of the first, third and fourth year will be organised by the schools themselves.' (NMC p.82)

- 'The annual examination at the end of the second year at secondary level will be organised by the Education Division. The sole aim of this examination will be to indicate to the school how the achievement of its students compares with national and international norms.' (NMC p.83)

- 'Again in these State schools, the school leaving examination will continue to be organised by the Education Division.' (NMC p.83)

- 'The National Minimum Curriculum encourages dialogue between those involved in the different levels of the educational process. This dialogue should guarantee continuity in assessment policies.' (NMC p.80)

- 'A sense of continuity would enable students to realise that education is a process and not a series of disconnected episodes. Throughout the period of applicability of this curriculum, all those responsible for education in our country should adopt those measures that ensure the fulfilment of this principle. A more integrated organisational structure needs to be developed to ensure the child's smooth transition from one educational stage to another.' (NMC p.33)

These Statements necessitate several significant changes in assessment practices in secondary schools. Among the challenges facing these schools, we find the following:

1. What is meant exactly by formative assessment? How does it differ from summative assessment?

2. How can we evolve a system of assessment that facilitates continuity and provides feedback to students a well as parents and other stakeholders?

3. What will an effective system of portfolios entail?
   (The National Steering Committee on the Implementation of the National Minimum Curriculum, 2000, p.11).

In the remainder of this paper, I address the concepts of each of these challenges.

1. Formative and Summative Assessment

The first point that I would like to make is that the key difference between formative and summative assessment is not timing, but purpose and effect. Formative assessment is targeted at informing students and teachers about the learning and teaching that is taking place with the aim of improving learning. Summative assessment, on the other hand, is primarily involved with informing third parties about the achievement of students. The aim here is to help others feel better informed about students. Judgements related to promotion and selection are often associated with summative assessment.

Summative assessment is assessment that reports the overall achievement of students at the end of a course of study (Chetcuti & Grima, 2001, p.81). Gipps (1994, p.17) explains that it is used to provide information about how much students have learned and how well a course has worked. Rowntree (1988) suggests that summative assessment includes any attempt to reach an overall description or judgement of the student. In local secondary schools, teachers and students are familiar with different forms of summative assessment.

Harlen (1995, p.16) summarises the characteristics of summative assessment as follows:

- It takes place at certain intervals.

- It relates to progression in learning against public criteria.

- It produces results for groups of students.

- It requires methods which are as reliable as possible.

- It involves some quality assurance procedures.

- It should be based on evidence from the full range of performance relevant to the criteria being used.

Summative assessment plays an important role in the evaluation of student learning for it provides relevant measures of many important learning outcomes. The validity of the information provided however depends on the care with which such an assessment is planned and prepared. The likelihood of preparing valid and useful classroom tests, for example, is enhanced is a series of basic steps are followed. These include:

- determining the purpose of the test;

- building a table of specifications, thus making explicit the skills that are being assessed as well as the range of the syllabus coverage;

- selecting appropriate item types keeping in mind the students abilities and needs; and preparing a set of relevant test items to meet the needs of the test.

Although the process of writing good tests and examinations involves training and experience, numerous textbooks have been written on the subject to help teachers in developing valid classroom tests and school-based examinations [see Linn & Gronlund (1995) *Measurement and Assessment in Teaching*].

Formative assessment is different because it forms an integral part of the learning process. *Formative assessment* is assessment that provides information to teachers and students about the kind of learning that is taking place in order to improve learning. (Chetcuti & Grima, 2001). It is used essentially to feed back in the learning process and feeds forward the goals to be achieved (Gipps, 1994; Crooks, 1988) The British Educational Research Association Policy Task Group (1992) defines formative assessment as that which provides information for teachers to use in discussing progress with students and in planning appropriate next steps in learning. Essentially, it is an appraisal that is directed towards developing the student and contributing towards his/her growth (Rowntree, 1988).

James (1998) gives the following overview of formative assessment:

- It is essentially positive in intent for it is directed towards promoting learning.

- It takes into account the progress of each child and the effort put in.

- It takes into account several instances in which certain skills and ideas are used.

She explains that in this form of assessment, information is used diagnostically to help the student make progress. She emphasises the point that students need to come to understand their strengths and areas for improvement and how they might deal with the latter in order to be able to make progress. They need to be(come) active learners.

Harlen (1995, p.15) sums up the main characteristics of formative assessment as follows:

- It takes place as an integral part of teaching.

- It relates to progression in learning based on judgements that are child references.

- It leads to action supporting further learning.

- It uses methods that protect validity rather than reliability.

- It uses information from students' performance in a variety of contexts.

- It involves students in assessing their performance and deciding their next steps.

In a recent seminar conducted at the Faculty of Education, University of Malta, Murphy (2001) explained that formative assessment activities that aim to inform teaching and learning need to form an integral part of the teaching and learning process as depicted in the diagram below.

The learning journey
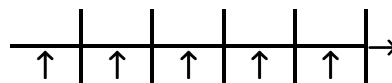
Ongoing formative assessment activities

She highlighted four key classroom processes that are essential for formative assessment to take place. These are:

- *Elicitation* – to establish what the students know, to identify learning objectives and to help bridge the gap between their prior learning and their current learning.

- *Observation* – to monitor the dynamic progress that takes place in students' understanding, to intervene when necessary and to encourage self-assessment.

- *Evaluation* – to provide feedback and consolidate new learning.

- *Reflection* – to recognise success, to identify future learning needs and to link new learning and future learning goals.

Murphy (2001) concluded that a large number of teaching activities have a formative aspect, however they often require a reorientation from normal practice for both teachers and students.

2. Feedback

Feedback is a necessary component of formative assessment. Black and Wiliam (1998) explain that, in education, feedback refers to information about the gap between actual performance and desired performance in a given domain that can be used to close the gap in some way. James (1998, p.96) explains that 'the intention of all feedback is primarily formative: to improve learning and performance'. Therefore, teachers need to find out what kind of feedback is most effective in helping students to close the gap between their actual performance and the desired performance.

James (1998) suggests that "feedback is most effective if it encourages students to think about the task rather than to think about themselves". The kind of task-related feedback that is given is also important. According to Black and Wiliam (1998), a number of points of practical advice can be extrapolated from the research evidence:

- Feedback is most effective when it stimulates correction of errors through a thoughtful process.

- Feedback should concentrate on specific errors and poor strategies and make suggestions about how to improve.

- Students should be given as much help as they need to use their knowledge but they should not be given a complete solution as soon as they get stuck. Complete solutions means that students will not think through things for themselves.

- Students should be helped to find alternative solutions if simply repeating an explanation continues to lead to failure.

- Feedback on progress over a number of attempts is more effective than feedback on isolated events.

- The quality of dialogue in feedback is very important: oral versus written feedback.

- Students need to develop skills to ask for help and to help others.

(adapted from James, 1998).

This list has important implications for marking policy and practices in secondary schools. Although it is a good idea to give oral feedback to students this is not always practicable nor is it always enough especially in secondary schools where students see a large number of different teachers every day. Written feedback is therefore something that needs to take place regularly. James (1998) points out that what is important is that it indicates to students whether and how their performance has fallen

short of the standard and what specific strategies they might use to improve it. They also need to be given opportunities to correct or improve their work. The evidence suggests that giving complete solutions discourages students from thinking for themselves and therefore a better approach would be to draw their attention to categories of errors and to give them suggestions for strategies for overcoming them. Black & Wiliam (1998) conclude that teachers should give *narrative comments* on classwork and homework not grades or numerical marks. Feedback from teachers needs to be of the kind and detail that tells the student what to do to improve. Grades alone, comments such as 'good' or 'good effort' or marks such as 7/10 do not do this. The information that is fed back to the student is only feedback when it is used to close the gap.

Sadler (1989) points out that since the aim of feedback is to help the student to improve, then the student must:

- Have a notion of the desired goal or standard

- Be able to compare the actual performance with the desired performance, and

- Engage in appropriate action to close the gap between the two.

Crooks (1988) concludes that in general teachers need to make more use of learning-related feedback such as narrative comments and less use of feedback for grading purposes. Furthermore, the feedback must always indicate what the student can do to improve his or her performance.

3. Portfolio Assessment

Portfolios are one way in which formative and summative forms of assessment may come together. There are various definitions of portfolios. The main features of this assessment tool are highlighted in the following definition (*my emphasis*):

> *A careful and conscious collection of a student's work which provides a multidimensional picture of a student's learning over time, accounts for both process and products, and includes the active participation of students in their own learning (Jervis, 1996, p.21).*

In essence, the important features of portfolios are the following:

- They are a collection of work over time, rather than a one off product.

- They show process as well as product.

- Students are involved in the selection process and have ownership.

- They indicate success and progress rather than failure.

- They provide evidence of critical thinking and self-reflection.

- They provide detailed information about progress, strengths and weaknesses and targets of development to students, teachers, parents and other interested individuals.   (adapted from Chetcuti & Grima, 2001, pp. 15-16).

Why do we need portfolios?

Chetcuti and Grima (2001) suggest that portfolios reflect the basic principles of alternative models of assessment in the following ways:

- They assess different forms of intelligences. Since they allow students to select the work that goes into the portfolio they allow them to show what they know and can do in different areas rather than only in linguistic and mathematical skills. In this way, they enable students and teachers to explore multiple perspectives of learning, thinking and teaching.

- The observational and anecdotal records that go into portfolios allow students to show the process of their growth and development that reflects a constructivist perspective of learning and teaching. They provide a place to view process and learning as a dynamic, interactive and ongoing activity.

- They allow students to provide evidence of learning taking place within a context and the portfolio itself is developed within a context making the learning more relevant. They give an expanded view of learning and knowledge by incorporating samples of work with different orientations.

- They allow students to engage in formative assessment through a collaborative dialogue with the teacher and they also provide a summative record of the work done by the student throughout the year. The development of the portfolio becomes a collaborative venture rather than a single assessment made by the teacher.

- They allow the students to engage in the process of reflection and to make decisions about their own learning.

A portfolio, then, *is* a portfolio when it provides a complex and comprehensive view of student performance *in context*. It is a portfolio when the student is a participant in, rather than the object of assessment. Above all, a portfolio is a portfolio when it provides a forum that encourages students to develop the abilities needed to become independent, self-directed learners (Paulson, Paulson & Meyer, 1991, p.63).

Types of Portfolios

There are many different types of portfolios that are used to serve different purposes. In this paper, an overview is given of the two main types of portfolios that are used in the classroom: the presentation portfolio and the process portfolio.

The presentation portfolio
The presentation portfolio is a collection of works the student and teacher believe to represent the student's best effort. The student, as well as the teacher, are involved in the choice of what to include in the presentation portfolio. Reflections on how the

choices were made are also included in the portfolio. The presentation portfolio is an opportunity for students to present their strengths and talents and to celebrate their successes. The purpose of such a portfolio is for presentation to teachers, parents, other students, and even perhaps prospective employers. The main limitation of the presentation portfolio is that it only presents the student's best work. There is no evidence to observe the process of learning and growth. It shows *what* the student is capable of producing and *not how* the student went about producing the work (adapted from Seely, 1994).

The process portfolio

The purpose of the process or working portfolio is to document the learning process as the student engages in a number of activities throughout the year:

> A typical process portfolio contains initial plans, drafts, early self evaluations, feedback on the part of peers, teachers, and other experts, collections of works which students like or dislike, together with comments on reasons for the reaction, a record of final work, together with any relevant comments, and plans for subsequent projects whether or not these are ever carried out (Gardner, 1999, p.112).

Whereas in the presentation portfolio students reflected on the selection process, in the process portfolio, students reflect upon their own learning processes. The reflection is focused on what was gained in the learning process, what steps were accomplished, what would be changed in the future and what would be the next steps in the process (adapted from Seely, 1994).

The major limitation of the process portfolio is that it is very difficult to establish criteria and standards with which to assess the portfolio. The process of growth is different for each student and it is very difficult to place a value for this growth.

In summary, the portfolio is an assessment tool which involves students, teachers and parents collaborating towards a common goal – learning. It involves the preparation of a document that shows the process of learning, the strengths of each individual student and the critical self-reflection that allows the student to evaluate her or his learning and set targets for future development. Depending on its purpose and the type of portfolio prepared it can be used to provide information to future teachers, teachers in different schools, parents, and prospective employers. The portfolio tells the story of one's growth and development as a learner and takes the reader on a journey through the successes and achievements of each individual student.

How can portfolios be successfully implemented?

Based on the literature review of portfolio assessment, Chetcuti & Grima (2001) suggest that the successful implementation of portfolio assessment in our schools is dependent on the following:

- Teachers need to have ownership and commitment to portfolio assessment if it is to become the mode of assessment that it theoretically promises to be. Teachers also need training in the development and interpretation of a portfolio system.

- Students also need to be prepared. They need to be aware of what portfolios are and the purpose for which they are keeping one. They need to be helped to develop skills of critical thinking and self-evaluation and they also need to be taught how to select and reflect on their work.

- In addition, the curriculum design and development needs to take into consideration that more time is made available for interactive tasks to be carried out with students. These will require more resources and more funding for the schools. Time and space also needs to be set aside for dialogue and conferencing between students and teachers leading to a constructive evaluation of their work.

Once these issues are worked out, then the portfolio can really become part and parcel of the learning and teaching process and provide 'a multifaceted method of assessing the growth and development of learning' (Seely, 1994, p.73).

Conclusion

In secondary schools, assessment is indeed a powerful tool that impacts directly on life at school in numerous ways, by shaping the curriculum, influencing modes of teaching and characterising the learning that takes place. This chapter has attempted to give an overview of the current situation in Maltese secondary schools and to give some understanding of a number of the changes advocated in our national minimum curriculum. In my view, this is necessary because as Torrance (1996, p.115) points out 'the quality of these changes will depend on teacher perceptions of their purposes and understandings of their broader curricular intentions'.

Notes:

[1] The results of these examinations are used for making important decisions.

[2] A record of achievement is a cumulative and summative record of the work done by the student.

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BECOMING A REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONER

DEBORAH CHETCUTI

Introduction

In recent years, one of the most influential ideas in education has been the idea of reflection and the reflective practitioner. Research has shown (Barnes, 1991; Schön, 1983, 1987) that a reflective teacher is more likely to be an effective teacher. Student teachers and practicing teachers are therefore encouraged to reflect upon their teaching and upon other aspects of teaching and learning. The questions you may be asking however are: What is reflection? Why is reflection important? How can I become a reflective practitioner? and How can reflection help my professional development as a teacher? This chapter will try and answer these questions by providing some background information on reflection and some ideas about the tools which can be used for reflection. The purpose of this chapter is to introduce you to reflection and to start you on the path of reflective practice which will help you to grow and develop as a professional teacher.

What is reflection ?

One of the first educators to talk about reflective teaching was Dewey who defines it as the 'active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in light of the grounds that support it' (1933, p. 7). According to Dewey, reflection involves a way of meeting and responding to problems. Reflective teachers actively reflect upon their teaching and upon the educational, social and political contexts in which their teaching is embedded. According to Dewey, there are three prerequisites for reflective action. These are:

- Open-mindedness: this is an active desire to listen to more sides than one, to give full attention to alternate possibilities, and to recognise the possibility of error even in the beliefs that are dearest to us. Being a reflective teacher means that you keep an open mind about the content, methods and procedures used in your classroom. You constantly re-evaluate your worth in relation to the students currently enrolled and to the circumstances. You not only ask why things are the way they are, but also how they can be made better.
- Responsibility: this involves careful consideration of the consequences to which an action leads. Reflective teachers ask themselves why they are doing what they

are doing in a way that transcends questions of immediate utility and in the light of educational purposes of which they are aware.

- Wholeheartedness: a reflective teacher is not open-minded and responsible merely when it is convenient. Open-mindedness and responsibility are integral, vital dimensions of one's teaching philosophy. The reflective teacher is wholehearted in accepting all students and is willing to learn about and affirm the uniqueness of each student for whom she or he is responsible. If you are a reflective teacher, your teaching behaviour is a manifestation of your teaching philosophy and you are unswerving in your desire to make certain that the two become one and the same.

The term 'reflective practitioner' became even more popular in educational circles when Schön (1983) began writing about reflective practice in education and other professions. He describes two main kinds of reflection, 'reflecting-in-action' and 'reflecting on action'. His ideas are based on the assumption that when we go about doing the everyday actions of our lives we know what we are doing. However, this knowledge is tacit, implicit and often cannot be explained; 'our knowing is in our actions' (Schön, 1983, p. 49). Sometimes we think about these actions even when we are doing them and this is 'reflecting-in-action' which occurs when practitioners:

> …think about what they are doing, sometimes even while doing it. There is some puzzling or troubling, or interesting phenomenon with which the practitioner is trying to deal. As (s)he tries to make sense of it, (s)he also reflects on the understandings which have been implicit in his action, understandings which (s)he surfaces, criticises, restructures, and embodies in further action (Schön, 1983, p. 50)

In the classroom 'reflection-in-action' may take place for example when the teacher is trying to sort out a particular mis-behaviour at the very instant that it occurs. 'Because teaching is complex and unpredictable, teachers cannot rely entirely on routine ways of coping with situations…(the teacher) needs to constantly adapt one's behaviour to the situation and purposes at hand' (Professional Development Portfolio, 2000, p. 6).

A teacher may also reflect on her or his actions in retrospect, 'reflecting-on-action'. This places emphasis on the event after it has actually happened. 'Teachers, after a lesson or after the day is over may reflect back on particular events, analysing where difficulties arose, considering how they might be surmounted and deciding on the future directions their teaching might take' (Professional Development Portfolio, 2000, p. 6). This is important since it allows teachers to critically evaluate their own actions and make new sense and meaning of their philosophy of teaching and learning. This is an important aspect of the professional development of any teacher.

Why is reflection important ?

Reflecting on the teaching and learning which takes place in any classroom is helpful both in terms of personal growth as a teacher as well as in the development of a philosophy of teaching, learning, and curriculum. It can be a useful tool in self-evaluation as well as a means of evaluating situations which occur in the classroom. As stated by Connelly & Clandinin:

For each of us, the more we understand ourselves and can articulate reasons why we are what we are, do what we do and are headed where we have chosen, the more meaningful will the teaching and learning experience in our classrooms be. The process of making sense and meaning of the teaching and learning taking place in classrooms is both difficult and rewarding. Much personal knowledge is tacit, unnamed and because it is embodied in practice, difficult for us to make explicit. One way of coming to know ourselves is to think back and reflect on our personal and practical knowledge. This is helpful in understanding ourselves as teachers and provides us with a means of playing a more active role in curriculum development and practice (1988, p. 11).

Reflection therefore helps us in three ways:

(1) *It helps us to grow as teachers* because it allows us to critically analyse the events which are taking place in our classrooms. This allows us to clarify our own ideas about education and to critically examine our teaching methods and materials. According to Smyth (1989) as teachers describe, analyse and make inferences about classroom events, they are creating their own pedagogical principles which help them to make sense of what is going on and guide further action. It also helps us to develop our own philosophy of teaching and learning based on educational research and also on our own experiences.

(2) *It helps us change classroom practice* because it allows us to construct new ideas about the teaching and learning taking place in our classrooms. Cochran-Smith & Lytle write: 'what is missing from the knowledge base of teaching, therefore, are the voices of the teachers themselves, the questions teachers ask, the ways teachers use writing and the interpretive frames teachers use to understand and improve their own classroom practice' (1990, p. 2). These narratives based on reflection can form the basis of new educational theory.

(3) *It helps us form the basis of our profession* because it allows us to share with colleagues any new ideas which are developing in our own individual classroom practice. Bringing together of many of these ideas will allow us to develop common practice and new educational theory.

As stated by Schön (1987) while teachers acquire some professional knowledge from packaged educational principles and skills, the bulk of the learning comes through continuous action and reflection on everyday problems. When someone reflects, they become a researcher in the practice context. They are not dependent on the categories of established theory and technique, but construct new theory of the unique case. Reflection enables teachers to become owners of their own knowledge which they can use to instigate change and assume an active role in both their classroom practice as well as in curricular decisions.

How can I become a reflective practitioner ?

Until now we have looked at what reflection is all about and why it is important to us as professional teachers, but the next question which needs to be asked is how can you actually carry out reflection and become a reflective practitioner. Reflection is a

process rather than something we can read about and learn how to do, it is something which we have to practice and go through. As stated in the Professional Development Portfolio 'reflection is not something that you engage in every now and then, but rather it is a whole way of being' (2000, p. 7). There are several tools which you can use for reflection and these can be used either individually or with colleagues.

Journal Writing

The most common tool which is used for reflection when working by oneself is writing in a journal. Connelly & Clandinin describe journal keeping as an 'account of our daily actions and our thoughts about those actions. The journals are ongoing records of practices and reflections on those practices' (1988, p. 34).

I began to keep a journal during my first teaching practice as a student teacher and I found it to be a useful tool for self evaluation. I could write down all that occurred during a particular lesson, what I liked and did not like about the lesson, and make suggestions about how I could do it better the next time. Gradually as my journal developed I started to write down feelings and ideas which I had. Several times these would include my frustrations as a teacher such as grumbles about lack of apparatus, or anger about streaming and labeling students. All these ideas helped me to develop my own philosophy of teaching and when I looked back at my writings I could see clearly the evolution of my ideas. Later on I also began to include student comments and ideas in my journals as these student evaluations of my teaching helped to open my eyes on several occasions and allowed me to change and improve whatever I was doing. Here is an example from my journal.

> *Journal Entry, October 25th 1989.*
>
> Today I had a strange experience in my Form I (age 11) science class. I had prepared a unit on measurement and to make the lesson more interesting I wanted the students to measure their own height and weight. I put out meter rulers and raided my home and friends' houses to come up with five bathroom scales which the students would use to measure their weight. I put up a chart on the wall with all the students' names with boxes where they could fill in their height and weight. Everyone was having fun and busy taking measurements when all of a sudden the classroom went haywire. A group of students had gathered at the front of the room and were shouting and jeering. I ran to the front of the class and asked them what had happened. 'Tanya's broken the balance, the balance couldn't take her weight…Look how fat she is, she's like an elephant', yelled half a dozen voices. Tanya burst into tears and rushed out of the classroom saying that she never wanted to do science again.
>
> I felt terrible about this; I tried to explain to the students how cruel they had been but the damage had already been done. Perhaps next time I should give this explanation beforehand and try to explain that everyone is special and that no-one should laugh at anyone else. I could also make the activity optional, so that students would have the choice of measuring their weights. Anyway it is a good lesson to learn and I

hope that next time I will be able to handle the situation much better than I did this time.

This journal entry includes a description of a particular classroom incident. I noted the behaviour of the students, my own behaviour, and what was taking place. I also tried to think of how I could have handled the situation differently. Writing this down helped me to clarify my ideas and reason out what I could do better in the future.

When teachers first start to use journals they may have a number of questions, such as where to write, when to write, and what to write. Everyone usually develops their own system but I like to write my entries in a hard-bound notebook as it makes me feel as if I am writing my own book. I usually write down anything that comes to my mind, descriptions of actions, students and reactions. I also write down my feelings about what happened, reactions to books or articles I had read and how they influence my teaching. I also like to include student sayings and ideas as I find that they help me to understand the learning process. I try to write as regularly as I can, sometimes every day, sometimes every two or three days as I know that to be helpful a journal has to be an ongoing process. I also find that it is useful to go back and reread entries from time to time to make sense of the kinds of things that are important to me. This helps me to evaluate myself and build up my own personal philosophy of teaching and learning.

Writing in a journal helps you to critically question your own practice. It helps you to question how you might have done things in a different way, how you might improve your lessons, what you could have avoided, how you can solve particular problems and how to move on to your next lessons. It is an effective and worthwhile exercise and helps you to grow and develop as a professional teacher. What is important is that the reflective writing does not remain solely on the level of description. It should help you to:

(1) analyse and reason through dilemmas;

(2) develop an awareness of the links between theory and practice;

(3) link your understanding with classroom practice;

(4) develop your own philosophy of teaching and learning.

Here is an example of how Sarah, a student-teacher, reflects on her first experiences in the classroom:

20th February 1997
Teaching is not an eight-hour-a-day job: you don't stop being a teacher when you go home from school. The demands on a good teacher are I feel endless. In the classroom, you need energy, patience, confidence and all your wits. At home, you face hours of painstaking preparation – planning and organising activities, trying to vary techniques, keeping in mind the demands made on you by the brightest as well as the dullest in the class, trying to concoct attractive and instructive worksheets – it seems never ending….

Well thinking things through, I realised two things: first you don't become an effective teacher overnight. Preparation and dedication are not enough – you need experience. Second, teaching just like any other job has its pains and pleasures. I may find myself in muddy waters one day and feel that I had attained none of the objectives I laid out in my lesson plan, only to exult the next day because a boy walks up to me at the end of the lesson with extra work which he carried out on his own initiative telling me, "that was a very interesting lesson miss…I really learned a lot and I am really glad that you are teaching us science". That really made my day and helped me to realise that in the end it is not my own satisfaction which is the most important but that of my students.

Dialogue between professionals

Another way in which you can reflect about your practice is through working with a colleague or a group of colleagues. This can be done in a number of ways (a) letter writing or email; (b) interviewing colleagues; and (c) observing colleagues.

(a) *Letter writing*: An important tool for reflection is an ongoing dialogue between two teachers or colleagues. Letter writing is similar to journal writing in that it sets out descriptions of events, feelings and reactions only in this case it involves a written dialogue with another practitioner. Nowadays by means of email, letter writing can become a very easy way of communicating thoughts with a colleague. Letter writing is useful because if helps us to focus our own thoughts and ideas and point out things which we do not consider important. It is also a means of support and a way through which we can start to think about things in a different way. It is useful to have colleagues point things out and challenge us to develop new ideas. This is an excerpt from an exchange of ideas between me and a colleague.

Dear Mo,
I have not been able to find any relationship between my own self-esteem and my achievement. While I have always been a high achiever at school, I did not have a high self-esteem. I believed that I was loved and valued not for who I really was but for the grades and high marks which I obtained in examinations. I strove to excel because that brought showers of praise from my parents and my teachers (though not necessarily from my class mates) and success in examinations became my driving force. This however did not increase my self-esteem because I was striving to belong not on the basis of something authentic but on the basis of an external standard established by another.

Dear Debbie,
My experiences are very different! Was it because my mother was a teacher? All I can say is that in my academically successful family that academic achievement was expected but absolutely not a matter for giving or withholding approval. I remember my parents' unconcerned

laughter about my much loved brother's attempts to pass Latin. My father gave me a pair of mountain boots for 'passing my O'levels'. When I pointed out he didn't know yet whether I had passed, he said if I hadn't they would do as a consolation prize. At school the popular girls (with staff or students) were not necessarily the high academic achievers either.

So was everything fine? Well no. I had a lot of problems with my view of myself as a girl doing reasonably well academically, especially at science.

This exchange of ideas is part of an ongoing dialogue between myself and a colleague regarding issues of self-esteem and achievement. Through our own critical review of our experiences, and through sharing of different experiences we are trying to deconstruct our understandings of self esteem and construct new meanings and understanding.

Letter writing can also be used to share ideas when out on teaching practice. It can provide support, enable you to realise that someone else is going to the same problems and help you come to an understanding of what it is that you would really like to be doing. Here is an example from an exchange between two student teachers:

Dear Maria,
The first week of teaching practice is finally over! I've been dreading having to spend six weeks in the school since I started school observation. Surprisingly enough though, I'm having quite a good time. I think the students quite like me! I was quite anxious to find out how they would react. This place is so different from the other school I was in. Before everyone used to shut up and stand up when a teacher walks into the room. Over here the pupils walk in the classroom if they feel like it, they bang each chair to the respective bench, and if you're lucky they decide to have a seat…

Dear Jackie,
I really understand what you are talking about as I had a similar experience in my first teaching practice. But in the end I would not have changed the experience for anything in the world. Although as you say from the outside the pupils are very rough and appear to disobey you at every instant, they have hearts of gold. If you manage to gain their interest and their respect, the satisfaction and fulfilment you will get out of interacting with them is amazing. Teaching such students has been one of the most valuable experiences of my life. I hope you will have a similar experience and that we can continue to share our thoughts throughout this teaching practice…

(b) Teacher interviews: Yonemura (1982) describes teacher-teacher conversations as 'serious examinations of and reflections upon the practices and underlying theories of one teacher to which another gives undivided and supportive attention at times set apart for this'. Teachers are given the following opportunities in their conversations: to reflect on and appreciate teaching as a practical art; to gain some

release from the isolation and tensions of teaching; and to attain a higher level of congruence between espoused theories and beliefs about teaching and actual practice. Talking to another teacher in the school, especially to your co-operating teacher can help you to learn more about the students you are teaching, about the classroom situation and about teaching methodology and practice.

The following interview with a teacher taught me a great deal about gender issues in science teaching, how to try and interest girls in science and about the problems which girls encounter when learning science. This helped me to develop my own ideas and ways in which I could perhaps help girls acquire a better understanding of science.

> Debbie: What do you think about the girls' attitudes towards physics ?
>
> Mrs. Borg: The general attitude is that it is meant for boys…they think that physics is difficult for girls…and this mainly comes from the parents…
>
> Debbie: So how do you manage to get them interested in physics ?
>
> Mrs. Borg: One way is through the practicals…they enjoy these and it helps them to understand concepts much better…it doesn't mean that it helps them when it comes to expressing themselves …that is one of the problems…their difficulty in communicating in English…

The interview can contain rich and important data about teaching and the learners in the school. It can help you to think about ways in which you can handle the different situations in your classroom. It also helps you to think about the theory you are reading about with actual classroom practice. It helps you to question whether the research being carried out internationally and nationally can be applied to your own classroom and to your students. It teaches you new lessons about classroom practice.

(c) Classroom observation: One other useful tool for reflection is actually sitting in the classroom of a colleague or a teacher while she is carrying out a lesson. This involves making observations about the students' and teacher's activities, conversations, resources used, events and so on. Here is an excerpt from an observation which I carried out in the classroom of a colleague:

> Teacher: Today…we're going to talk about magnets and their uses…
> Do stainless steel scissors and knives become magnets…what if I have
> a stainless steel sink…does it become magnetised…how can I check ?
>
> Pupil: …because it doesn't rust…
>
> Teacher: For example what if you're a housewife and the sales   person comes and tells you that your kitchen sink is guaranteed stainless steel…how could you check if this was true ?
>
> Pupil: …you stick a magnet to it and it doesn't stick…

> Teacher: …why doesn't it stick ?…if the magnet sticks to the sink it means that it has too much iron in it and it's going to rust…that's another use for a magnet…

This observation helped me learn a number of things about teaching methodology and questioning, about how to relate the theory to things which were relevant for the students and how to involve most of the students in the class discussion. It opened up a whole new set of ideas for me.

All of these tools are very easy to use, and if used continuously they can form the basis of constructing one's own personal knowledge. Reflection has played an important role in my own growth and development as a teacher.

How can reflection help my professional development?

Reflection is about developing self-knowledge, the ability to understand the meaning of what is happening in the classroom and in the school. It is a creative and complex process. It is much more than simply thinking about what you do in the classroom. When you reflect, you are dealing with the concepts of thinking, analysing and planning as a consequence of your teaching. It is through reflection that you become a teacher (Professional Development Portfolio, 2000, p. 7).

As stated by Kevin, a student teacher:

> …At first I did not like the idea of reflection and I thought that it would be a waste of time. But when I was asked to link the sessions we were covering in methodology with my own experience in teaching practice…it started to become interesting. Through reflection I learnt to learn from my mistakes and to make sure not to repeat them again in the future. I now agree that reflection is a very important step to success in teaching…

Reflection has become an integral part of my own personal evaluation. Reflection has helped me to see and hear things around me and to think about them. Every day in school and every day with my student teachers teaches me something new. After a number of years teaching, I sometimes feel that I know all there is to know about how I would like to teach but every time I sit down and reflect on a new teaching experience, on a new conversation with a colleague or on a new classroom observation I realise that there is much that I can learn.

As I reflect on my experiences and those of my students I sometimes turn to books and articles which I have read and think about what research tells me about particular issues I am interested in. I try and relate this with my own experiences and this helps me to construct new meaning and understanding. I discuss my new ideas with colleagues and again this helps me to focus and to further reflection. At first it was scary to admit that I did not have all the answers and that reflection was leading to even more questions. I was encouraged by the fact that I was not alone and that many of my colleagues were questioning and reflecting too.

Reflection has helped me to look to my students for new information and ideas, to talk to them about what they want and what they think about teaching and learning. It has helped me to share this information with student teachers and colleagues. This has helped me to learn more about myself and my students in the process.

For me reflection is an ongoing process. It does not give me any answers, it simply helps me to become more aware of the issues at hand, it enables me to critically question and to try and improve the situation for my students. It has led me to even more questions. Reflection has opened up a whole new horizon for me; it is an exciting adventure. It does not begin or end with teaching but has become a whole new way of knowing which has helped me to grow both in my personal as well as in my professional life. As don Juan says:

> For me there is only the travelling on paths that have heart, on any path that may have heart. There I travel, and the only worthwhile challenge is to traverse its full length. And there I travel, looking, looking, breathlessly (Castaneda, 1968).

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