

Long Essay

THE COLOURS OF MALTA

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Juniper Francalanza
(Social Studies)

Brian Gauci
(Personal & Social Development)

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*We all should know that
diversity makes for a rich tapestry,
and we must understand that
all the threads of the tapestry are equal in value
no matter what their colour.*

Maya Angelou

Disclaimer

We, the undersigned, declare that this study and the related website resource tool have not been submitted, in the same or different form, to the University of Malta or any other university for the award of a degree or diploma. It is our own work and creation, carried out under the supervision of Ms. Josephine Vassallo, Assistant Director (Humanities).

Juniper Francalanza

Brian Gauci

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We hope that through this contribution we are acknowledging those people and experiences that helped foster in us an appreciation of diversity and sensitivity to multiculturalism.

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to research the subject of cultural diversity, more specifically to understand what is being done within the education system in Malta to address this significant issue. The second aim was to explore the usefulness of a website as a resource tool and to specifically design such site to provide teachers with information on the topic of cultural diversity in an attempt to assist them in addressing multiculturalism in their classrooms. The objective was to base this study on the understanding of the lived experience of teachers and of key persons in the educational arena.

The approach selected for such research was qualitative in nature. Based on the assumption that collecting diverse types of data provides a better understanding of a research issue, we conducted our study in two forms, namely utilizing semi-structured interviews with key people in our field of study and focus groups with teachers coming from various schools.

Through our research, we became aware of five main themes that emerged and which allow for a better understanding of this reality while providing insight into systems and approaches to address multiculturalism in educational settings. Firstly, the study provided knowledge on models of good practice in addressing the issue of multiculturalism in schools in Malta. On a secondary level, we gained a better grasp of the perceptions, misconceptions and attitudes towards the issue of 'multiculturalism'. The need for a uniform government policy to adequately manage such reality was also recognized. Teacher-training was seen as a prerequisite to any positive change within the educational sector, together with the availability of necessary resources which were also visualized as essential.

Among our recommendations, we assert the importance of a government educational policy to indicate true commitment to address such issues, as well as standardize the approach used in schools across Malta. The importance of teacher-training is reaffirmed with the idea of reaching those who are already practicing professionals as well as students in training. The need for research into curriculum development is also reiterated since it is seen as essential to move away from its largely Eurocentric emphasis to greater appreciation of other cultures.

Recommendations brought forward from this research also include the importance of investment in resources such as language teachers and cultural mediators where human resources are concerned, and access to sufficient teaching material such as multicultural texts.

Ultimately, a broader and more accurate understanding of 'inclusion' was seen as a vital target within the education system in Malta. And it is through an appreciation of the multicultural aspect of diversity, among others, that the human rights of all students are respected. This research reasserts that inclusion is about the establishment of school environments where all children are accepted with their dissimilarities and where differences are celebrated. It is hoped that the website *THE COLOURS OF MALTA*, emanating from this research, will assist teachers in their commitment towards inclusion.

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Introduction

The Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (UNESCO), Article 1, states that:

Culture takes diverse forms across time and space. This diversity is embodied in the uniqueness and plurality of the identities of the groups and societies making up humankind. As a source of exchange, innovation and creativity, cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature. In this sense, it is the common heritage of humanity and should be recognized and affirmed for the benefit of the present and future generations.

Malta, like many other countries in Europe and around the world, is changing due to increased mobility and greater opportunities. Today, Malta is a reality of different cultures, races, languages and religions. Its face is becoming ever more diverse. However, marked by a long history of colonisations and the legacies that such domination has produced in the Maltese people over the years, this 'changing face' has a unique impact on its people. Diversity, in the context of Malta, has invoked on one hand a sense of threat, fear, invasiveness, being overwhelmed, outnumbered, and an assumed religious incompatibility. On the other hand, there is a sense of excitement, sensitivity, reaching out, and cultural enrichment. The hotly debated issue of irregular immigration in Malta has negatively impacted the perception of diversity.

This phenomenon has been unfortunately politicised and the lived experience has been complicated by the media, construing a reality that is based on misrepresentations, myths, and stereotypical assumptions. An important question facing Maltese society today is whether diversity poses a risk to the country or is potentially an asset. This reality is often deemed as having grown rapidly, and as having been unforeseen and unexpected. But is this so? Immigration has been a reality for over a

decade now, and the issue has only been exacerbated by the lack of appropriate education and preparation. So who is to be condemned? What impact is this having on all of us, especially our student population? These are some of the questions that need to be addressed.

Our intentions when embarking on this project was to assess how the educational system in Malta is responding to the rise in cultural diversity found today in classrooms all over the island. Secondly, we intended to design a resource pack that would help educators to create an accepting environment which celebrates diversity. Recognizing diversity as a positive change calls for a heightening of awareness of our own identity as well as an appreciation of differences. In promoting diversity as an enriching educational experience, students as well as teachers can be supported in engaging in a dialogue of exchange which can extend outside the schools walls.

In the end, it is our aim to contribute towards a more inclusive classroom setting, one which reflects a sensitive, respectful and accepting community. SALTO-YOUTH defines inclusion as:

concerned with discovering abilities and the beauty of difference rather than focusing on deficiencies. It is about creating an environment, in this modern world, where the spirit of cooperation and mutual respect can inspire us to have new experiences, discovering ourselves and others, enriching our lives with new perspectives. Inclusion begins in your head, when you start looking at things differently. It is about sensitivity to difference and a desire to appreciate it.

SALTO-YOUTH, 2007, p.28

Inclusion is about having rights, responsibilities, opportunities and being respected as equals. Who decides who is included? Is it dependent on you, others, or both? In the various definitions of inclusion and diversity,

the two main elements which come up are: the condition and degree of being "in" or "out"; and the process of changing that condition.

Literature Review

The Maltese historical context for multiculturalism

For most of Malta's long history, there has been trade and constant contact and exchange with other countries and cultures, especially those countries bordering the Mediterranean (Bradford, 1989). Therefore the modern-day negative response to cultural diversity does seem to stand in contrast to important aspects of Malta's own cultural history. Malta has always had contact with countries to the north, south, east and west. One only has to reflect on the Maltese cuisine, for example, to see that it contains a rich mixture of recipes influenced by other countries: soups like *minestra* and pasta dishes like *ravjul* both originally came from Italy, whereas our *imqaret* clearly have Arabic roots. Even the commonly eaten *pastizzi* can be traced back to Lebanon, and the *kannoli* and *prinjolata* are said to have originated in Sicily (Billiard, 2006).

The influence of different cultures is also very evident when looking at the complexity of the Maltese language, with its unique mixture of Latin and Semitic structures and its relatively recent acquisition of a number of words derived from English. It can be said as well that the main Catholic religion of present-day Malta was brought to the island from outsiders with the arrival of St. Paul. Hence there has been a long history of positive cultural influences gained from the country's contact with other countries and people.

Also very important is the fact that Malta has a long history of being colonized by many different countries and cultures (British, French, Arabic, Italian). Perhaps it is this factor which, to a certain extent has framed the

debate about immigrants and the accompanying fear of losing one's own culture and, most significantly, the perceived threat of a different religion taking hold on Maltese shores.

The image of a sinking life-boat has been suggested to depict the feeling some people have about the situation: that Malta, being so small, cannot possibly cope with the influx of 'helpless' or 'illegal' immigrants arriving on its shores. Due to this view of an overwhelming 'burden' of illegal or irregular immigrants, Malta is seen to be under threat today by many of its inhabitants, soon to be submerged under this 'burden' which would mean a loss of Maltese customs, language, culture and a loss or dilution of our religious identity.

When reflecting on the present-day situation with the rise in arrivals of immigrants, there are a number of important points to consider. Malta not unlike other countries in the region, has had its own history of being an exporter of labour power; during the late 60's and through the 70's many Maltese left for Britain, Canada, Australia, the United States and also North Africa – from where many of today's economic migrants are coming (Borg & Mayo, 2002).

When focusing on the theme of multicultural education, one dimension which is of particular concern is that of the inclusion of immigrant children. The question of how best to integrate immigrant pupils to European educational systems is at the heart of political debate all around Europe (Kanaren, 2009).

Legal Considerations

When discussing immigrant children we are using the definition given by the European Commission in their publication on *Integrating Immigrant Children into Schools in Europe* (2004) and that which is stated in the *European Commission against Racism and Intolerance [ECRI]* (2007). The immigrant child is that child from any other country (inside or outside Europe) whose parents or grandparents may have settled in the host country, or who may be seeking asylum, have refugee status or be an irregular immigrant.

According to the European Commission's survey on *Integrating Immigrant Children into schools in Europe* (2004), there are four main legal provisions which relate to the case of immigrant children in schools. In 1977 the European Convention on the *Legal Status of Migrant Workers* was established, and it came into force in May 1983. This convention relates to migrant workers from member states and gives them the right to:

1. enter the education system under the same conditions as those applicable to the children of workers who are nationals;
2. be provided with facilitation of national language teaching for their migrant children;
3. be granted the same scholarships on the same terms as those applicable to nationals; and,
4. be taught in their mother tongue.

Each of the above four measures ought to be provided by the nation state (Eurydice, 2004).

Based on these four legal provisions came three more recommendations on the education of immigrant children passed by the Council of Europe (between 1983 and 1989); however, the implementations are not binding

on the member states. In essence, the three measures widen the remit to include immigrants from non-member countries. They include children who enter the territory of a member state with their parents and children of immigrant origin who were born in the host country but whose legal status is uncertain. The three measures are:

1. adapting the local education system to the special educational needs of immigrant children;
2. including lessons on language and culture of the country of origin in mainstream school curricula; and,
3. promoting intercultural education for all.

Overview of Measures implemented in Europe

The promotion of intercultural education entails initial and in-service training of teachers, and the development of suitable teaching materials (Eurydice, 2004).

Some of the initiatives described in the Eurydice survey include measures like the availability of multi-lingual brochures describing the rights and obligations of children and parents with respect to pre-primary and primary education; this has been available in Norway and Belgium since 2004. In Hungary and Estonia, a multilingual internet portal providing information on education opportunities was launched in 2004. Multilingual publications aimed at immigrant children and families relating to the local education system are also found in Germany, Luxembourg, Latvia, Portugal, Austria, England, Netherlands and France.

When the Eurydice survey was published in 2004, countries such as Ireland, Netherlands, Finland and the UK all employed a range of strategies and initiatives which included employing counsellors and home-school liaison

officers. Italy and Luxembourg also use what is termed as 'inter-cultural mediators', whose role is flexible but generally relates to being involved in helping students and parents with language issues. Specially trained socio-cultural mediators are used in Portugal to help develop links between home, school and the community.

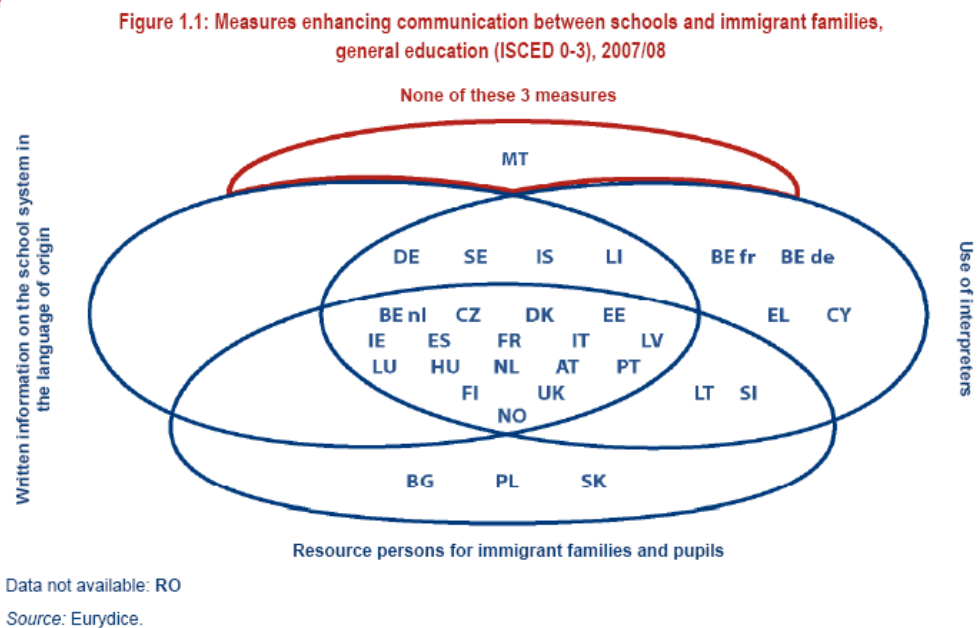
Some other measures such as holding annual meetings specifically for immigrant families take place in Luxembourg in order to inform parents of foreign language children about the different choices available when moving from primary to secondary schooling. Other countries like Spain, Sweden and Finland have similar informational meetings for families to explain the education system and to discuss matters of mutual concern.

Overview of Measures implemented in Malta

Within the Maltese National Minimum Curriculum (NMC), inclusive education is essentially an issue of human rights; it calls for respect of student diversity (Giordmaina, 2000).

According to the Eurydice 2003/4 survey published on the topic of integrating immigrant children in Malta into schools, no special provision had been set up for the children of immigrants. They are integrated into schools and are not considered to be children with special needs. The latest report documents that as regards other measures such as offering school-based support to immigrant children and their families, and the formulation of an educational policy for these children, little has been done in Malta (Eurydice, 2009). This is illustrated in Figure 1 (p.17) which shows the positioning of the various EU countries depending on whether or not they offer one or more of the measures (Eurydice, 2009, Figure 1.1, p.7):

Figure 1



The need for adequate Teacher-Training

In 1997, which was declared the European Year against Racism, Xenophobia and Anti-Semitism, the Director General for Education, Training and Youth within the EU supported different schemes introduced by member states, in order to fight racism. Many of these schemes were not specifically concerned with immigrant children, but were intended for all school children with the aim of teaching them to live in a multicultural society (Eurydice, 2004). Some schemes continue to be funded and they deal mainly with intercultural education, particularly in teacher-training modules and through the use of appropriate books (Eurydice, 2007).

Banks (1994) identifies prejudice reduction as one of the five dimensions of multicultural education. Reducing prejudices through multicultural education, especially when it is targeted on beliefs and behavioural components, can result in negative intergroup prejudices being transformed into positive intergroup relationships. Although children

develop prejudicial beliefs, attitudes and values at young ages, research demonstrates that when multicultural knowledge and values are combined with intergroup contact, prejudice is often reduced (Camicia, 2007).

According to Coballes-Vega (1992) some of the suggestions about how to improve teacher-training programs include at least one course in multicultural education that takes into consideration the needs of students; information about the history and culture of students from a wider number of ethnic, racial, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds; content about contributions made by various groups; field experiences and student teaching opportunities with students from varying backgrounds.

When looking at multicultural teacher-training programmes found within the United States, central issues addressed in the courses include the issues of educational equality, and equity and social justice within a historical, legal and socio political context (Coballes-Vega, 1992).

Thus, it stands to reason that in order for teachers themselves to feel confident and capable of addressing a multicultural class, the notion of diversity with specific reference to different ethnic and religious knowledge needs to be addressed at the teacher-training stage. In some countries such as Germany, Greece and Slovakia teachers are specifically trained at the outset to tackle the educational and linguistic problems of pupils of immigrant origin (Eurydice, 2004).

In the 2007 European Commission's survey of how EU countries were addressing the integration of immigrant pupils, a focus was placed on the

various ways that school-based measures were devised and implemented by the education system of each country, both with regard to the successful integration of immigrants, and also in order to help create a culture of tolerance and respect among students and teachers.

In the case of Malta, due to the increase in the number of immigrants arriving in the years following 2001, the issue of inclusion with a specific focus on other cultures and students of other religions has assumed particular relevance. It was pointed out in the 2007 ECRI Report that a high number of the recommendations made in the first and second report with regard to Malta have not been implemented, or have only been partially carried out. Specifically highlighted was the fact that, since the issuing of the second report, there was an increase in irregular immigrants which the report acknowledges as posing a new range of challenges.

The Maltese response to this phenomenon, the implementation of a policy of systematic detention of all such migrants, is having very negative consequences, not only with regard to the lack of respect for the rights of the persons being detained, but also on the perception of these people as criminals and the ensuing rise in levels of racism and xenophobia among the general population. The report points out that these perceptions have been sustained by a public, and notably a political, debate around irregular immigration in which human rights and human dignity have generally not been the focus (ECRI, 2007).

The need for a systematic Government Education Policy

Since Italy is both geographically and culturally close to Malta, it may be interesting to study how it has gone about addressing the needs of immigrant children. Kananen (2009) describes two recent suggestions

regarding the integration of immigrants into the local educational system. The first concerns areas where the immigrant population makes up the majority of students in a classroom, which was the case in some schools in the neighbourhoods of Rome. The first suggestion by the Northern League was to set up a system of parallel classes or 'bridge classes' for immigrant children whose Italian was not considered adequate, and in these classes the students would learn Italian and take citizenship courses. Immigrant pupils who passed the Italian entrance test could be placed in 'normal' school classes. On the other hand, Italy's centre-right government suggested the introduction of a 30% limit on immigrant children pupils per school class. According to Education Minister Gelmini this initiative should help immigrant children to integrate with Italians, the argument being that immigrant children would learn Italian more if they could mix with local children. This quota will be introduced on an experimental basis starting 2010 (Kananen, 2009).

These two suggestions reflect the change in roles that schools are assuming because of the present era of increased immigration and multicultural societies in Europe. One can see both the emphasis on the schools catering for the students' educational needs, and also their adopting integrative functions. The risk seen in the 'bridge classes', which emphasise only the educational aspect, is that these classes could become 'ghetto classes' filled with immigrant children who do not have any connection to local boys and girls and who therefore withdraw even further away from the mainstream society. More commonly in Europe today, the practice is to offer language courses as a supplement while ensuring that these students are not segregated from the mainstream.

The situation in Malta is not yet at this stage but it may be worth taking into account both the educational and integration needs when addressing the issue of immigrant children in schools. It may be argued that these two aspects, rather than being in conflict with each other, can be mutually supportive and strengthening. It is important to remember that learning within a mixed context also takes place outside the curriculum; by dealing constructively with social, cultural and religious differences on a daily basis, pupils can learn intercultural competencies, which will be extremely important for their futures as citizens of a multicultural Europe.

The Impact of the Media

On 4th June 2009 this headline appeared in The Times of Malta newspaper: *AN Against Multiculturalism*. Azzjoni Nazzjonali Leader Josie Muscat stated that “illegal immigrants are posing a threat to jobs, religion and health.” Research has shown that because the mass media can play a significant role in the construction of prejudicial knowledge, educators should help students learn to examine the manner in which different social groups are portrayed in the mass media (Cortes, 2000).

Text and images in media play a very important role in shaping behaviour and attitudes towards other cultures. Camicia argues that in situations when this is combined with only limited exposure to diverse cultures, a common result can be an *essentializing* or stereotyping of other cultures (Camicia 2007). He points out that this process is intensified in homogeneous communities in which the media is the only source of knowledge students have about different social groups (Camicia, 2007).

Citizenship

Banks highlights the fact that an important aim of citizenship education should be to help students develop global identifications and a deep

understanding of the need to take action as a citizen of a global community (Banks, 2003). This is in line with what Dooly puts forth regarding the need to encourage students to gain a capacity for critical reflection, which she describes as a necessary component of intercultural competence, as well as a key element for responsible citizenship (Dooly, 2006).

The *Intercultural Learning T-kit* (2000) states that education for democratic citizenship must prepare men and women to play an active part in public life and to shape their own destiny and that of their society. Dooly states that in order for people to live in a multicultural society knowledgably, sensibly, tolerantly and responsibly, they must practise critical cultural awareness, both of their own and of other people's practices and values (Dooly, 2006). In brief, citizenship education underlines active engagement in public life and offers intercultural skills for living in a multicultural society which then requires a commitment to social cohesion and solidarity.

Resources

One important and valuable finding for educators, found through the *Longitudinal Immigrant Student Adaptation* study by Todorova *et al.*, is that children's perceptions of absence of adequate support in the classroom can have important long-term ramifications on psychological well-being and academic outcomes (Todorova *et al.*, 2008).

As regards the kinds of resources allocated for immigrant children, a special report was published in April 2009 by Eurydice on *Integrating Immigrant Children into Schools* which specially looked at how European countries were addressing two important measures: the communication

with immigrant families and the heritage language teaching for immigrant children.

As of this latest report, Malta still did not have any strategic policy in place with regard to either measure. Of the 31 countries included in the report, Malta was the only country which did not have a single measure in place for enhancing the communication between schools and immigrant families (Eurydice, 2009). This is somewhat shocking when one takes into account that over half the countries of Europe make use of all three measures of promoting communication (Eurydice, 2009).

When speaking of resources with regard to multiculturalism, the Eurydice 2003/4 report on *Integrating Immigrant Children into Schools in Europe – Malta* points out that, indeed, in the case of Malta this kind of support is currently being developed. However, it appears that in the nearly six years since this report was published no measures of any kind in this regard have been set up.

One of the activities that can be useful to reduce prejudices within the school setting and heightening cultural awareness includes face-to-face contact. The literature regarding research on *inter-groups* shows that prejudices can be greatly reduced between majority and minority groups when they are put in settings where they need to work together for 'a common goal', and that this is increased when these settings are sanctioned by institutional supports (Camicia, 2007).

Methodology

In the previous chapter, an overview of the literature on which this research has been built was provided. This chapter shall provide an outline of the methodology utilized to gather necessary data, and includes the research design, methods of investigation, sampling techniques, data collection and instrumentation. Research is the 'science of finding out' and its methodology provides insight into how underlying philosophical assumptions move to research design and data collection. Limitations to the research and ethical implications must also be considered.

Research Methodology and Design

As explained in the Introduction, through this study we set out to research the subject of cultural diversity, specifically to understand what is being done within the education system in Malta to address this significant issue. Moreover, on a more practical level, the study aims to examine if a specifically designed website would be a useful resource for teachers to provide them with information on the topic of cultural diversity and, if in the affirmative, to elicit from them what they think should be included in such website.

The approach selected for such research was qualitative in nature. Because it is assumed that collecting diverse types of data best provides an understanding of a research problem (Creswell, 2002), we conducted it in two forms, namely semi-structured interviews with key people in our field of study and focus groups with teachers coming from various schools. The interview schedules were designed based on literature and our focus of interest.

Through this research we wanted to obtain an understanding of the lived experience of persons who are among the prime movers in the educational scene, including the challenges they are facing, what needs they perceive, and what plans they have for the future, based on which we aimed to conduct a needs assessment. Qualitative research allows for more detailed information, and in a research study like ours, we deemed it appropriate to have access to the direct experience of people who, despite the varied roles they are assuming in the educational arena, are encountering the reality of cultural diversity and are in direct contact with the scene.

Lofland & Lofland write that the “overall goal is to collect the possible richest data...ideally, you achieve this through direct, face-to-face contact” (as cited in Rubin & Babbie, 2005, p.447). Qualitative methods such as focus groups and individual interviews give more value to the original voices of people in their everyday life, allowing researchers to observe and present a broader view of reality within their study. With the final aim of customizing tools that would meet the needs of teachers in addressing cultural diversity in the classroom, we considered the interviewees and focus group participants as in possession of valid knowledge and that their experience is ‘research’ in itself.

Open-Ended Interviews:

The direct interview method provides a greater chance of obtaining objectivity and achieving valid and reliable results (Breakwell, 2000). Furthermore, it helps establish a close relationship with the interviewee (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975), and therefore it is important that the interviewing atmosphere is set in a comfortable, unstrained, atmosphere. The validity and detail of information is greater when interviewees feel at ease (Coolican, 1999). Kvale (1996) uses the metaphor of ‘miner’ which model

we adopted in our interviews; we considered the interviewees as key people in possession of specific information which we wanted to unearth. As instrumentation we used standardized open-ended interview questioning (Interview Schedules 1 and 2 – Appendices A and B, pp. 63 and 64 respectively). Such tool provides the interviewees with the possibility of elaborating their views (Langdrige, 2004), while ensuring that respondents are asked the same questions in the same sequence to maximize the comparability of responses and ensure that complete information is obtained from each interviewee on all relevant questions. Open-ended questioning was preferred over a more structured instrumentation because the latter “reduces the natural, conversational nature of the interview and the interviewer’s flexibility to follow up on important unanticipated circumstances or responses” (Rubin & Babbie, 2005, p.450). Conscious of this, we considered it essential to permit for flexibility in our probing.

Focus Groups:

The focus group method is a form of group interviewing that permits for questioning several individuals systematically and simultaneously. It is a carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in an accepting, non-threatening environment (Krueger & Casey, 2000). Such forum is often used to assess whether a new program being considered is really needed, and therefore a group of people is brought together to engage in a guided discussion on the matter. Focus groups also help to capture those experiences that cannot be meaningfully expressed in numbers (Berg, 1995).

In our study, we wanted to have a close contact with the hands-on experience of teachers in different settings, gain an awareness of their needs, and check if the tool in question – a website designed to provide

teachers with relevant information and resources on the topic of cultural diversity – would meet these needs and whether the participants had any specific recommendations with regard to the content of such website. Focus groups have the advantage of generating speedy results, and offering flexibility for probing. Furthermore, the group dynamic can stimulate unanticipated aspects of the topic that may not have emerged in one-to-one interviews. On the other hand, controlling the group dynamic is essential in order to ensure that no respondent dominates the group, and that there is no groupthink. The risk in control is that it may lead to over-direction by the interviewers; in order to overcome such obstacle, we ensured that the semi-structured interview questionnaire (Interview Schedule 3 – Appendix C, p.65) is utilized primarily to provide direction and particular attention was given to facilitate a positive atmosphere of discussion which does not stifle the participants.

Sample Selection

The interviewees for the open-ended interviews were selected on the basis that they were people in authority having particular roles in the education sector. This enabled them to give an overview of the situation in Malta related to our field of interest. Thus our sampling was purposive in nature. In fact, the five interviewees were the Head of Department of Educational Studies (University of Malta), the Head of Humanities Studies (National Curriculum Centre), the Executive Officer for Social Studies, and the two Executive Officers for PSD. Interview appointments were set either through verbal contact or via email.

With regard to the focus groups, an email was circulated to teachers on our e-mail contact list, explaining the aim of our research study and inviting them to participate in one of three focus groups scheduled on

stipulated dates and times. The sampling was done through a technique called 'snowballing' (McCall and Simmons, as cited Rubin & Babbie, 2005, p. 444) in which entails that such contacts forward details of the research to their respective colleagues within the teaching profession to invite them to join as participants in the study. Again the sampling was purposive and therefore was not representative; however, representation was not within the scope of such research. It was specifically the respondents' experience in the teaching profession that was relevant for the purpose of our study.

Participants came from different schools in all sectors, namely public, private and church entities. All respondents, but one, were secondary school teachers. The student population being represented by the teachers participating in the focus groups came from different social and cultural backgrounds. We did not limit ourselves to Social Studies and PSD teachers only; in fact, the subjects taught by the participant teachers varied. We convened three focus groups; this was considered important since relying on one group only can be risky because any one group can be atypical (Rubin & Babbie, 2005).

Data Collection and Recordings

Because of the in-depth and open-ended nature of qualitative research, interviews and focus groups were tape-recorded for qualitative data analysis purposes. Before recording, the consent of the interviewees and participants was sought. Such system sped up the interview process and provided a complete verbal record that could be studied much more thoroughly than if note-taking was utilized. Also, tape recording reduced the tendency to selectively record data that favors personal biases.

Since there were two of us carrying out interviews and facilitating the focus groups, one of us had the space to take notes of key terms that emerged during such interviews and focus groups. We looked for the main common themes that emerged which provided core insights, and key words that we considered as similar as well as themes that varied, and compared data with the reviewed literature. Comparative analysis takes place using primary – obtained from the interviews and the focus groups – and secondary data – gathered from readings from books, journals, magazines, newspapers, circulars, long essays, forums, conferences and public talks.

Limitations to the Research

The main limitations of this research may be detailed as relating mainly to subjectivity, representation and generalizability.

As researchers, we recognize that our subjective opinions and experiences may have affected the research results. Qualitative research is often very personal and the findings by one researcher would not necessarily be replicated by another, independent researcher. The fact that this study was conducted by two researchers, however, provided an inbuilt 'checks and balances' mechanism since we could bounce off ideas with each other and address our biases. This was also complemented by the fact that we come from two different countries, and have direct experience of other cultures, thus bringing more than one perspective into the field.

As mentioned previously, the representativeness of focus groups is questionable. Those who agreed to participate could have had their personal agenda, or else felt obliged to participate as colleagues or

friends. Moreover, bringing together people who may not necessarily know one another may create pressures for the respondents to say things that may not accurately reflect their true opinions. Also, the participant generation was relatively young; this could also be due to the level of comfort that younger generations have with regard to group participation when compared to an older age group.

It is often argued that because qualitative research involves less rigorous sampling and standardized measurements, it is less generalizable. Even though the number of focus group participants was low, they were coming from different sectors, thus widening the representation of respondents. It is also a fact that total representation was not within the scope of this research. Furthermore, the interviews with key figures in the educational arena, who all have contact with several public schools in Malta, helped to provide an overview of the Maltese situation and thus confirm or refute the focus groups findings.

Ethical Implications

Any research carried out with human participants requires that subjects' rights are safeguarded and protected. Hence, before starting interviews and focus groups, we carefully explained the purpose of tape recording and specifically asked for consent in this regard. It was also considered important to gain the confidence of interviewees and focus group respondents so as to minimize undesirable effects, for example the inhibiting effect of the knowledge that they were being recorded. In the case of focus groups respondents, confidentiality and anonymity were ensured. Moreover, all participants were given the right to put a stop to their participation at any time should they wish to do so.

Findings

Prof. Mayo, Head of Department of Education Studies at the University of Malta, comments that:

Today in Malta the immigration issue is so big, that it becomes one of the major challenges, if not the major challenge for education in this beginning of the new millennium. So I have no doubt in my mind that something has to be done, has to be done seriously. It cannot be a cosmetic change in the educational system, it should not just be something for people to enjoy going to council of Europe and European Union projects and that's it ...and attend conferences and talk about multiculturalism. There has to be something really planned out seriously...

In conducting our research, five main themes have emerged that we would like to focus on. To begin with, we would like to make note of the models of good practice that we came across in addressing the issue of multiculturalism in education in Malta. Secondly the issue of perceptions, misconceptions and attitudes towards the issue of 'multiculturalism' shall be discussed. The need for a uniform government policy shall then be highlighted, followed by the issue of teacher-training and concluding with a discussion on the necessity of resources.

Models of Good Practice

Through focus groups, interviews and the reading of recent education circulars we have become aware of a number of commendable EU and local projects, exchanges and individual efforts relating to the issue of multiculturalism in Malta today. A few projects were repeatedly mentioned in the process of our research and ought to be recognized for their planning, orientation and impact.

The first is the efforts put forth by the Jesuit Refugee Services (JRS). Over the last five years the JRS organization has been involved in outreach activities in schools as regards the issue of refugees, through music performances, talks, theatre and interactive cultural events. This kind of hands-on exposure to the realities and cultures of the immigrant population has reportedly had a very positive effect on students in the school system, and can be seen also from the fact that more and more schools are now requesting to be involved. Teachers and Education Officers who participated in this research highlighted the increased awareness and knowledge that students gained from having had the chance to see and partake in these projects. Having the chance to speak with refugees in person, hear about other cultures and the kinds of situations people were forced to flee from, gave students a more in-depth, unmediated understanding of diversity and the African cultures. By providing students with an opportunity to have hands-on experiences with refugees, the JRS is helping to combat hostility and prejudice towards refugees and asylum seekers and in fostering understanding and awareness.

Another program, the Inclusion and Diversity In Education (INDIE) project, led by the British Council, is a program aimed at promoting social cohesion and to raise educational standards in culturally sensitive schools. The INDIE project exists in nine European countries in collaboration with national and regional education authorities to help raise the standards of cultural inclusion. Some of the activities organized so far have included events which give voice to students' views on diversity through visual art and poetry, young leader training courses, networking events and a project seminar for policymakers and experts.

In addition to these specific NGO affiliated programmes, multicultural assemblies have been organized within some schools through individual school initiatives. These projects included European cultural exchanges, cultural food sharing celebrations and language awareness assemblies. One particular college has set up the Cultural Club, which promotes diversity and intercultural activities. All of these show an interest and commitment to multiculturalism. However, it is evident that they are largely due to individual initiatives and do not necessarily signify a shared commitment within schools to create a positive attitude towards multiculturalism nor are they indicative of any specific overall government policy. The fact that these initiatives are sporadic and relatively scarce, is limiting the benefits that students can gain from the opportunities inherent in multicultural settings. As one of the Education Officers noted "certain areas are in a certain way more prone to having this opportunity, because it is an opportunity, after all, to have this mixing and learning from others."

Perceptions, Misconceptions and Attitudes towards 'Multiculturalism'

Ms. Josephine Vassallo, Assistant Director (Humanities) within the Curriculum Management and E-Learning Department, says that:

It's becoming obvious because they are coloured, and the fact they are coming from another continent...and being coloured, has created a difference....The reaction of the Maltese people is stunning because all of a sudden the colour issue...brought out certain aspects in the Maltese people which were not evident before...their reactions ..so people say we are not racist BUT...this sort of talking, the sort of groups that formed, has really been affected ...

Ms. Vassallo, interview dated 21st May 2009

Through the course of our focus groups with teachers, one reoccurring perception by teachers that was unforeseen but of particular interest was

that the term 'diversity' was automatically taken to refer to either the level of ability or disability. This was also the case when it came to the term of 'inclusion.' The automatic assumption of respondents, when asked questions about inclusion, was that we were referring to disabled students. Diversity and inclusion in relation to students and within the context of schools was repeatedly assumed to be relating to disability and the perception was that there was no 'problem'. In fact, in many cases, a great deal of praise was given to the efforts invested into meeting the needs of students with disabilities, to the lengths that schools have gone in developing a specialized plan together with parents and to the fact that there is a facilitator assigned to students with special needs to give specific help. The holistic strategy put forth to best assist these students with their particular or unique needs, was considered commendable.

The second striking perception that we did not foresee when designing our questions referred to participants' reaction to multiculturalism and cultural diversity. Repeatedly, when asked about multiculturalism in schools, respondents gave answers such as '*no, we don't have that problem in our school!*' Several different variations of this expression emerged in every one of the three focus groups. When discussing the potential reality of multiculturalism, the issue was constantly being referred to as a 'problem'. Not only was it automatically perceived with negativity, but it was also defined as a 'problem', which leads one to question if the issue of multiculturalism and the contentious reality of illegal immigration are somehow being blended.

This finding made us quite aware that amid teachers there seems to be a lack of appropriate training given as regards attitudes towards diversity, particularly in the ability to see it as something of benefit. In all fairness

quite often the *'no, it's not a problem!'* response was followed by specific examples of how teachers were able to explain things to the foreign students in English, and how this was assumed to be the appropriate and adequate 'solution' to 'the problem'. It appears that among our respondents, the notion of cultural exchange or of celebrating cultural differences has not been taken on board. This is somewhat alarming since the teachers who were willing to speak with us were all young teachers with ten years or less of experience. If new teachers are having such reactions to the term diversity and multiculturalism, one questions what could be the perceptions of the older generation of experienced teachers. Although we were not able to cover this issue of teachers' perceptions and understandings of diversity and multiculturalism in more depth in this essay, it is an area worth looking into in order to better pinpoint how to tackle the issue of teachers' attitudes when relating to race and understanding of difference.

The overwhelming influence of the media with regard to the issue of cultural diversity was repeatedly mentioned in the focus groups. It was also specifically touched upon during interviews with the Education Officers, the Assistant Director (Humanities) and the Head of Educational Studies Department. Our findings show that for many students and teachers alike, their main source of information in relation to the issue of immigrants is from media. This is of major concern because the media may be heavily politicized in Malta and may not necessarily be painting a clear and correctly informed picture of the situation.

As regards integrating foreign students into the Maltese school system the assumption of our respondents was that foreign students would cope best if they adapted to become like the other students; the more 'Maltese'

they became, the better they would be accepted, and the better they would cope. Integrating these students was largely assumed to be an issue of overcoming a language barrier and dependent on the character of the specific child in question. It is the character of the specific student that would largely determine if he or she would successfully integrate into the school. There was no mention of trying to create awareness with the rest of the class of the foreign student's background or culture or religion if different or of using such multicultural experience for mutual learning and growth. Prof. Mayo contests that:

If we are really going to accept the whole idea of a democratic society which is really inclusive then of course this whole idea of inverting them into becoming what we consider to be Maltese. ...but they could be Maltese with a difference. They could be Somali-Maltese if they want to stay here. Then basically we have to respect their culture.

Prof. Mayo, interview dated 19th May 2009

In the case of religion classes and Catholic celebrations in school, non-Catholic students are largely left on their own during this period, sometimes without a teacher being present at all. With regard to Social Studies, students who were not able to follow in the Maltese language would be placed at the back of the classroom and expected to follow along as much as they could manage. When considering that topics such as citizenship, issues of identity, and social and community values are being discussed within such subject, the consequences is that students are missing out on aspects of their learning which do have relevance in their own lives.

The relevance of such subject matters to foreign students cannot be overstated. Some of this knowledge and understanding of the social systems found in Malta, such as the structure of its education, is surely of great importance to these students because they may be different to

those structures they are used to in their country of origin. In addition to this, some foreign students may not necessarily be able to rely on parental guidance at home for assistance and when they do not get adequate support from the school setting, they may be missing out on critical information.

The question of a Government Education Policy on Cultural Diversity

Prof. Mayo states that “first of all Malta has changed a lot over the years, no doubt about it, it is becoming multiethnic whether we like it or not. It is moving in that direction” (interview dated 19th May 2009). Respondents as well as Educations Officers confirmed that, to the best of their knowledge, there is no school policy being implemented regarding cultural diversity.

Although there has been a steady rise in the number of immigrants living in Malta since 2001, there has yet to be a specific government-endorsed policy put in place to address these new arising needs within the Maltese education system. As evident in recent statistics collated by the Ministry of Education (see Table 1, p.38), the numbers of foreign students attending schools in Malta are rapidly increasing. For instance, the total number of foreign students receiving primary education in Maltese state schools, has gone up from 216 in the scholastic year starting 2004 to 350 in that starting in 2008. Similarly, the total number of foreign students in state Secondary Schools has increased from 53 to 285 over the same period of time. Therefore, there is tremendous need for an educational policy to ensure that the needs of such students are catered for. Such has been recommended both by the European Commission (Eurydice, 2003/4) and strongly recommended in the ECRI report of 2007; yet, thus far no initiative seems to have been taken.

Table 1:

Summary of Foreign Students as a Percentage of Total Student Population in State Schools

Year	State Schools			
	Primary Education		Secondary Education	
	No. of Students	Percentage of Student Population	No. of Students	Percentage of Student Population
2004	216	1.17%	53	0.57%
2005	259	1.47%	167	0.94%
2006	294	1.75%	193	1.13%
2007	323	2.01%	257	1.57%
2008	350	2.29%	285	1.82%

From our findings through focus groups and interviews with Education Officers, it has been pointed out that any initiatives to address cultural diversity have been left to individual education establishments and it is up to the school to decide to contact local NGO's such as JRS to implement projects which support diversity. According to one Education Officer:

I have seen this year some schools taking initiatives on an irregular basis I would say to address this particular issue. I have seen schools developing induction programs for pupils especially for the non English speaking...to give them the necessary skills so that in a year they can communicate in Maltese and English.

These are personal initiatives. They are taking place on a very irregular basis, just a few schools, less than ten I would say.

In our interviews, a justification that came up repetitively was the reference to a 'sudden rise' in numbers of immigrants with the consequence that Malta was caught unaware and has not had the time to respond appropriately. One of the Education Officers said:

However one has to admit that this issue of foreigners in Malta, the ever increasing presence of foreigners in Malta, has come to us

almost abruptly, and there was no time for planning...educational programs for these children. Besides, there is the financial aspect and the human resources aspect.

One cannot help but question if, in 2009, the argument of being unprepared is a valid one considering that European reports on the issue, such as the Racism Report, date back to 2003. The fact is that now there are far higher numbers of immigrant children attending primary schools in Malta and in schools such as that of St. Paul's Bay and Hamrun Primaries, where there are over 27 different languages represented and over 25 different ethnic groups.

This leads one to conclude that at this point, the issue of multiculturalism has to be tackled with urgency and in a structured manner across educational institutions. Now is the time to prepare for the best approach to cope with this rise in diversity before the numbers, such as those represented above, are reflected at the secondary school level. In order to help students cultivate a positive and informed attitude to multiculturalism, specific educational goals need to be established which, for example, lead students to an understanding not only of the correct meanings behind such terms as illegal immigrant, asylum seeker, refugee, and their counterparts in Maltese such as the commonly used term '*klandestini*', but also to have the critical skills to challenge the information they come across outside their school walls and be able to shape their own informed views. One Education Officer stated that "There is awareness of foreigners in our schools. But there is nothing addressed on a national scale."

A well-researched educational policy is essential in confronting racism in schools, especially in order to decrease the already rising levels of

misinformation in relation to the issues of immigrants. The media should not be the channel that people rely upon to construct their views on this subject; different media have their own specific agendas which may not necessarily portray the true realities of persons who may be voiceless or underrepresented, such as immigrants. As described by Prof. Mayo:

We need to develop an anti-racist agenda in education, which means more than just having a multicultural curriculum. I think we have to face the issue of racism...

That is for me central.... And therefore we need an anti-racist agenda in education but not just education of schools but at all levels...schools, people who work with migrants, the police, the armed forces, for example, as well as the mass media, the people who are involved in the mass media because they create perceptions, they create representations or misrepresentations, they construct reality for a lot of people....

Prof. Mayo, interview dated 19th May 2009

There seems to be no single policy regarding how best to incorporate non-Maltese students into the school system. Integration is not just an issue of language, as some teachers may perceive, and it takes far more than simply switching the lesson to English to create an atmosphere of acceptance on foreign students in their class. Such is described as the 'soft form' by Mehedi (1999) which "consists simply in promoting bilingual education of social groups in a position of inferiority, essentially refugees and immigrants". As regards to intercultural education, Mehedi goes on to say that being inclusive "consists in highlighting the cultural character and stressing the purposes of education, notably the creation and / or preservation of each individual's identity and the establishment of the society in which diversity is regarded as an asset" (Mehedi as cited in Caruana, 2008, p.66). It may be one small initial step but is very remote from the true acknowledgement of the others' culture and history.

The issue of Teacher-Training

In response to the question 'do you think teachers are adequately equipped to deal with the changing cultural demography of Malta?' one Education Officer answered:

Definitely not! It is also a question of culture. I still note many teachers who are resistant to helping foreign pupils to understand Social Studies (which is taught in Maltese). I have observed foreign students who, because they neither can communicate in Maltese nor in English, they just sit in the back of the classroom doing nothing and without participating.

The above response corresponded with what teachers in focus groups have mentioned that they witnessed, and what the current literature on the situation in schools in Malta has shown (ECRI, 2007).

Nowadays, people's attitude towards the issue of race is quite intertwined with perceptions about religion and with the issue of who should be taking responsibility for so-called illegal immigrants arriving by boat onto Maltese shores. These views are being continually ignited by political discussions and the sensational media coverage in particular. So it is no surprise that these will have an effect on what we see happening inside schools. The fact that a new 'white' student from England, for example, would be treated very differently by the rest of the students in a class than a new dark-skinned student from an African country was explicitly commented on by more than a few of the focus group respondents. One such participant said that "(t)here are issues with regard to race; it is not so much if the student is a foreigner but it is the colour of his or her skin which counts the most."

The teachers in our focus groups reiterated that they do not feel equipped or prepared enough to address the race issue when it arises in class. This was also touched upon in our interview with Ms. Vassallo:

Sometimes teachers avoid the issue of immigrants because they don't know how to tackle it...Sometimes they avoid it because it is a controversial issue and they don't know how to deal with a discussion, even the way how you discuss it, to tackle it, so they avoid it because they are not confident enough to deal with it.

Ms. Vassallo, interview dated 21st May 2009

With regard to teacher-training, the participants in focus groups listed the following suggestions of how they could be better prepared: more hands-on experience working with diverse students, such as exchange programs, access to firsthand anecdotes and more multicultural exposure during teaching practice. Another point made was the need for a wider definition of inclusion when tackling the class management topic at university and during professional development.

The lack of adequate preparedness was also noted by Prof. Mayo when pointing out that qualitative research carried out recently has shown that even among the teaching profession in Malta there are many individuals with deeply entrenched prejudices and attitudes. This is a concerning reality which merits assertive input at teacher-training level.

Resources

Teachers in our focus groups did make note of the lack of availability of textbooks which portray an ethnically diverse environment. Due to the fact that both PSD and Social Studies teachers are responsible for their own teaching material, the restrictions posed by financial and time pressures, and the limited funds allocated to each subject area, may all result in insufficiently culturally-sensitive classroom material. The situation of multicultural resources is particularly significant when one considers historical texts utilised, since Malta, like other post-colonial countries, tends to have very Eurocentric curricula which largely neglect the positive

historical achievements and impacts of the Arab and African world (Borg & Mayo, 2002).

An approach that could be considered is the critical re-evaluation of the written material students encounter in the school setting so that this reflects some of the positive aspects of other cultures outside of Europe in relation to philosophy, science, literature, arts and significant historical events. This would be one step that would increase the awareness and knowledge of students towards other cultures particularly those traditionally neglected in the educational spheres in Malta.

There is an issue of language when it comes to resources and their use by foreign students. Many teachers do not have the time or willingness to translate lessons from Maltese to English, both when addressing students and in the material used in class. The lack of resources is one issue that needs to be addressed, such as in having extra language teachers who could teach Maltese to the new foreign students. It was noted that in at least one school, individual teachers were volunteering to do this which indicates that there is a definite need for such input on a more structured level. Translators for class-material could also assist to ensure that students receive information in a language they understand. Moreover, it is essential to have specifically trained 'cultural mediators' in schools, as discussed in the literature review. It is interesting to note that none of the teachers in our focus groups made any reference to 'cultural mediators.' This resource did, however, come up in our interviews both with Prof. Mayo and Ms. Vassallo. In fact it was pointed out by Ms. Vassallo that recently a cultural mediator from Italy visited Malta and spoke to teachers of PSD regarding the issue. Cultural Mediators are widely used in Italy and throughout the rest of Europe (Eurydice, 2004 and 2009).

Recommendations

The following is a brief overview of areas of potential improvement identified through our qualitative research and review of the relevant literature.

One of the main aims of the education system should be that of helping students to develop reflective cultural, national and global identifications by acquiring the knowledge, attitudes and skills needed to function within and across diverse racial, ethnic, cultural, language and religious groups. There is a danger that when one finds prejudice in schools, the repercussions may be especially troubling because schools are public places in which students learn to negotiate and construct knowledge of differences (Camicia, 2007).

Recommendations for action on a Government level

In considering the changes that have occurred within the last eight years in Malta, particularly with regard to the visible increase of students from different cultures in schools, there ought to be a concerted effort to try and reduce intolerance and promote cultural and religious understanding. Leaving the formation of attitudes and perceptions of difference within student populations up to the current piecemeal efforts of select NGOs and sporadic individual and school initiatives could be seen as putting the mindset of Malta's future generations at risk.

Today's attitudes will be tomorrow's standards both in the work place, within local politics and in relation to Malta's place in a globalized world. One can argue that with the increase in global mobility in relation to modes of production, migration and investments, preparing tomorrows

Maltese generations by supporting positive dialogue with regards to cultural and religious diversity will help open their doors in the future rather than close them. There is the risk that as a response to the present predominantly negative climate such as towards immigration, there could be a rise in a somewhat blind nationalism which could result in curtailing students' ability to develop reflective and positive global identifications. With regard to this aspect, in the latest recommendations on education found in the third report on Malta by the European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), points 27, 28 and 29 are particularly relevant:

27. ECRI recommends that the Maltese Authorities strengthen their efforts to provide students with education that promotes an appreciation for diversity and an understanding of the other cultures and backgrounds, including immigrant and refugee issues. ECRI draws the attention of the Maltese authorities to its General Policy Recommendation no 10 on combating racism and racial discrimination in and through school education, which provides guidance on the provision of this type of education.

28. ECRI recommends that the Maltese authorities strengthen their efforts to educate students in human rights. It strongly encourages the Maltese authorities to continue and reinforce its cooperation with the non-government sector, as concerns both teacher training and actual provision of education to children. In the long term however ECRI considers that the Maltese authorities should consider making human rights a compulsory subject at both primary and secondary level.

29. ECRI strongly recommends that the Maltese authorities carry out a wide campaign to raise the awareness of racism and racial discrimination among as broad a range of civil society sectors as possible.

Part of a coordinated educational policy regarding racism should include a component which allows students to critically analyze media representations and the role of media in the construction of individual and social prejudices. This can give students an opportunity to counter the

effects of the media and to reduce the risk of increased levels of racism and intolerance to cultural diversity.

There needs to be a balance made between diversity and unity; this is a delicate balance to achieve but it should be the goal of all democratic nation-states (Banks, 2008). Within a democratic nation state there should be a shared ideal that the state has an obligation to protect human rights and promote equality and the inclusion of diverse groups into the mainstream society. Hence, through its national education policies, the government must show immediate commitment to increased awareness on and celebration of cultural diversity as necessary groundwork for a truly democratic future society.

Regarding Teacher-Training

Teacher-training should be a combination of both theoretical and empirical exploration; according to the research carried out by Dooly (2006), student teachers gained the most in terms of change in perceptions when they were placed in a multicultural situation. Teachers need to have field experiences in their training ensuring that they are exposed to teaching opportunities with diverse students. Such multi-level input relating to diversity is important because prospective teachers can greatly benefit through critically analytical dialogue with teacher educators and teachers in the field during this period before entering the field.

Having the kind of critical awareness described by Dooly (2006) helps in being conscious and sensitive to teachers' own preconceptions and biases, and to plan better for a cultural diverse class in a way that is sensitive to all the students' needs. Teachers who were able to have this

kind of hands-on experience in Dooly's research became more critically aware of their general perspectives of social issues. It also helped increase their intercultural competence and learn teaching strategies which could eventually be transferred to their teaching of citizenship. An important aspect of teacher-training, especially in relation to the ability to teach effectively within a diverse classroom, is the aptitude to be reflective. Banks (2003) states that "today's teachers need to develop reflective cultural, national and global identifications so to best help their students to acquire knowledge, attitudes and skills needed to function within and across diverse racial, ethnic, cultural, language and religious groups" (p.7).

Teachers already in the field need to be prepared and trained; their level of awareness cannot remain dependent on their voluntary individual motivation to learn more about this reality. It is a matter that concerns everyone and that directly corresponds to the issue of racism and tolerance in our schools.

Research

Prof. Mayo says that "we need serious research. We need to bring in expertise from abroad and, of course, we need to apply it....reinvent it to the situation in Malta" (interview dated 19th May 2009). More research needs to be done in relation to the perceptions of teachers and students towards cultural diversity in Malta. Further research also needs to be done with regard to appropriate curriculum development, particularly corresponding to the imparting of knowledge of the impact on the modern world of some of the major achievements of civilizations found in Africa, Asia and the Arab world.

Other countries in Europe and around the globe have already been tackling some of these same issues of diversity, and rampant misconceptions about race and religion. Hence, rather than reinventing the wheel, Malta should develop a well-planned intense effort by reviewing what has been done in other countries, particularly those with similar situations to Malta.

The Rights of Immigrant Children and their Families

When considering the rights of immigrant children and families, thought needs to be given to how these students and their families are going to be better included. Planning needs to go into how best to tackle this issue, such as, through the organisation of relevant meetings for these families as has been done in other countries, as has been highlighted in the literature review, or through written multi-lingual literature explaining the Maltese educational system.

As mentioned by Coballes-Vega (1992) communication between the school and parents can be increased by using the home language for conferences and providing written notices in both languages for those parents with difficulty in Maltese and / or English. To help in such meetings, it is suggested that community liaisons, aids, translators or volunteers who are bilingual could be called in to assist. Teachers can solicit more participation and cooperation from parents if the message is communicated appropriately (Coballes-Vega, 1992).

Today, it is undeniable that Malta, like the rest of Europe, is facing an increase in the number of foreigners in its school system. This is in part because of Malta's membership in the EU and the greater mobility of a workforce within these borders. It is also due to the rise in numbers of

immigrants coming to Malta. As educators, it is particularly important that teachers take into consideration that amongst the latter group of children, some have had to escape their countries due to political, religious, economic and / or racial repression. For many of these students, the journey to reach a “safer” destination was a long, difficult and life-threatening one characterized by malnutrition, disease, torture and fear (Salend, 2001). Once arriving in Malta many have had to cope with post-traumatic stress disorder as a result of witnessing atrocities, experiencing losses and attempting to adjust to a new society. It is therefore essential that teachers are informed and aware of the kinds of situations these children are coming from and facing in Malta. For example, teachers need to be sensitive to the fact that for some children there may be fear of authority due to the fact that the child or a family member may have an undocumented status. This factor can affect the child being willing to make friends with others, to seek help from and interact with professionals, or to attempt to gain recognition or excel in programmes, or to draw attention to themselves.

Students who are immigrants face a myriad of problems such as the fact that they need to learn a new language, adapt to a new culture that values and interprets behaviour differently. They may also be experiencing guilt as a result of their survival and concern for those left behind and may struggle with developing a positive identity and self concept. Teachers ought to have some kind of training in order to help these children cope, as well as encourage local students to respond positively to the different culture and language these foreign students bring into the classroom with them. Fostering an inclusive atmosphere within the classroom is something which benefits all students, for it raises

awareness, appreciation, sensitivity and openness to things that are new and different.

Resources

More funding needs to be allocated to schools to specifically support the procurement of multicultural materials, training opportunities and expertise. There is clearly also a need for particular human resources to be placed within schools, such as more language teachers and cultural mediators. Teachers need appropriate resources and experience to be competent in intercultural education.

The need is felt for more historical texts which are not so Eurocentric. Moreover, information regarding the significant historical contributions of cultures outside Europe, and the impact on today's world needs to be made available at teacher training level and through obligatory in-service training for teachers who are already in the field.

Citizenships Educations/Human Rights

The goals of both intercultural competence and education for citizenship require the ability to examine beliefs and behaviours about social identities, to be able to be sensitive to different identities and values and to be capable of interacting effectively with people of diverse social and cultural groups (Dooly, 2006).

In an increasingly globalised world, the future of Maltese children, as well as immigrant children will possibly imply greater job mobility through work opportunities in different countries or with multi-national companies. Exposure to people from other countries and cultures throughout their education will allow Maltese students better groundwork to enter a more

diverse, flexible workforce in the future. In order to adequately prepare students for the challenges and opportunities of the future, they need have a solid base in understanding what it means to be a citizen not just of the country of Malta, but to have an understanding of the rights and responsibilities they have as citizens of Europe and of the world.

Banks (2008) puts forth the argument that through a transformative citizenship education, students can better interact and deliberate with their peers from diverse racial and ethnic groups. Diversity can help students to acquire the knowledge, skills and values needed to function effectively within their cultural community, nation state and region and in the global community.

With regard to integrating foreign students into Maltese schools, Prof. Mayo claims that:

One of the major challenges we face is that children are placed in schools physically as if we are doing them a favour but nothing is done to mediate the language factor. So we need to work around the whole issue of mediation ...we have to learn from other countries which are tackling this issue like for example Italy...They have cultural mediators, like facilitators.

Prof. Mayo, interview dated 19th May 2009

As pointed through the research carried out by Todorova *et al.* (2008), the absence of adequate support in the classroom for immigrant children can have important long term ramifications for psychological well being and academic outcomes. In neglecting these students the education system in Malta is depriving them of their basic right to an equal education and the chance to achieve academically.

With regard to the argument that immigrant children should be the ones to adapt to the Maltese culture, Kananen (2009) writes that "(i)ntegration

should not be perceived as a one-way street where immigrants adopt the mainstream culture and forget their identity of origin. Therefore schools have an important role in encouraging interaction between different cultures and developing values of diversity, mutual respect and tolerance” (NewEuropeans Online Magazine, 26th March 2009). Salend (2001) states that inclusion “seeks to establish collaborative, supportive, and nurturing communities of learners that are based on giving all students the services and accommodations they need to learn, as well as respecting and learning from each other’s individual differences” (p. 5).

Truly inclusive communities, therefore, should be seen as being of benefit to all students, those who are part of the ‘norm’ and those who are ‘different’, be they culturally, ethnically or physically diverse or dissimilar in their ability. Effective inclusion is therefore sensitive to, and accepts, individual needs and differences. Stainback & Stainback (1990) stress on the creation of school communities whereby all children are accepted with their dissimilarities and where they feel comfortable with their individual unique differences. This attitude will help such students develop their abilities more and grow as contributing members of society.

The National Minimum Curriculum (NMC) emphasizes the importance of inclusive education. It calls for respect for student diversity. All children, therefore, have a right of entitlement towards its content. Principle 8 states that our society “believes in the broadening of democratic boundaries, in the fostering of a participatory culture, in the defence of the basic rights of children, in the constant struggle against all those factors that prevent the students’ different abilities from being brought to fruition and in the safeguarding and strengthening of our country’s achievements in the social and cultural fields” (NMC, p.36).

Through our research findings we have learned that schools in Malta, by in large, tend to be fairly autonomous and function each as a separate entity. With regard to tackling the issue of multicultural diversity and tolerance, it would be helpful if schools could take on a more collaborative approach, not only through the coming together at the student level but through the interaction of teachers as well. The school can be seen as being a reflection of the education system in Malta, one which traditionally has been highly individualized and competitive. In taking on a holistic whole-school approach to the issue of diversity, across all the subject areas, there is the potential to bring teachers and students together. This can help in looking at the issue creatively and from a range of angles. If one can extend this effort to more collaboration and cooperation between different schools, creative ideas for projects, assemblies, clubs, foreign exchanges and performances, amongst others, can all be multiplied which would then benefit the greater student body in Malta. Exposing teachers, Heads of schools and students alike to examples of good practice and true inclusive education could greatly help in the effort to curb the current rise in reported intolerance and racism found in Maltese society today (ECRI, 2007).

Website Resource Tool

As an integral part of this long essay we intended to design an online tool that could be freely accessed by educators. Our intent was to provide a resource pack that assists teachers in the promotion of cultural diversity as an enriching opportunity, and to raise awareness and sensitivity amongst students with the objective of creating accepting classrooms that celebrate diversity. In the process of the designing the tool we gathered recommendations and suggestions from the participants and set out to develop a resource pack that contains easily accessible material and useful links to be utilized in lessons tackling different themes which fall under the heading of multicultural diversity.

The tool we have created, which is a website, attempts to address the subject of cultural diversity and provides teachers with a repertoire of varied resource material that is stimulating, creative, accessible and interactive to be utilized in the classroom along with links to useful websites and multimedia.

As title for the website we chose: *THE COLOURS OF MALTA – a multicultural resource website for educators*. Colours define reality and, like people, they come in endless shades, hues and depths. Likewise diversity can be seen as a mosaic of individuals and groups with varying backgrounds, experiences, styles, perceptions, values and beliefs. It is our hope that Malta, with its long and culturally rich history, should continue to grow and adapt to the present demographic changes with grace, pride and a spirit of community.

What follows is a brief outline of the website.

Outline

The url for the website is: www.thecoloursofmalta.com

The website opens with a welcome note on the Home page (see Home Page View, p.57). The main page takes viewers to five other pages found in the website, namely:

- Lesson Plans
 - Lesson Plans, classified by theme (downloadable)
 - Related Material, if and where applicable (downloadable)
- Activities
 - Games and Group Activities, key-worded by theme (downloadable)
 - Related Material, if and where applicable (downloadable)
- Audio/Visuals
 - Music of the World, classified according to continent of origin
 - Video Clips, key-worded by theme (downloadable)
- Suggestibles
 - Suggested Films, key-worded according to themes
- Useful Links
 - Suggested Websites, classified by topics
 - Links to Official Educational Websites in Malta

There are three other sections accessed from the Home page:

- About the Authors
 - Brief Introduction of the Authors
 - Contact Us
 - Research Study by the authors (downloadable)
- Diversity Quotes

- Blog
 - Link to *thecoloursofmalta_blog*

Downloadable material is accessed by clicking on titles or icons.

Content Samples

A specimen of a lesson plan together with the related material is enclosed (Specimen Lesson Plan and Related Material – Appendices D, E and F, pp. 66, 68 and 69 respectively).

Intended Future Additions

Our aim is that the website resource tool remains to be a useful educational source of information and material for teachers, and it is therefore our intention to continue adding different sections to the website that extend the repertoire of resources. Intended future additions include:

- Foods of the World
- Traditions of the World
- Religions of the World
- Games of the World
- Suggested Readings
- Interviews
- Photo Library
- Whole School Events

Home Page View



The screenshot shows a Windows Internet Explorer browser window. The address bar displays the URL 'C:\Users\Brian\Desktop\Website\index.html'. The browser's search bar contains the word 'index'. The main content area features a large graphic on the left with overlapping yellow, orange, and green shapes. To the right of this graphic, the title 'THE COLOURS OF MALTA' is displayed in a large, teal, sans-serif font. Below the title is the subtitle 'a multicultural resource website for educators'. A horizontal navigation bar contains six buttons: 'Home' (red), 'Lesson Plans' (orange), 'Activities' (green), 'Audio/Visuals' (purple), 'Suggestibles' (dark red), and 'Links' (olive green). Below the navigation bar is a light purple section containing a poster of a woman's face with the word 'Diversity' written across it. To the right of the poster is a quote from the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (UNESCO), Article 1. Below the quote is the text 'Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (UNESCO), Article 1'. A dark red sidebar on the left contains the text 'About the authors...'. The main content area below the poster features the word 'Welcome' in a large, multi-colored font. Below 'Welcome' is a paragraph of text: 'THE COLOURS OF MALTA is designed as a resource tool for teachers in their attempt to address the aspect of multicultural diversity in the classroom.' This is followed by another paragraph: 'This site contains lesson plans, power point presentation, worksheets and links which can be used to help cultivate, educate and inspire students about the positive potential of cultural diversity.' and a final paragraph: 'We hope you find it useful and we appreciate any feedback!'. At the bottom of the page, there are six sets of social media icons (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, etc.) and a footer bar with the text 'thecoloursofmalta_blog' on the left and 'designed by Juniper Francalanza Brian Gauci' on the right.

index - Windows Internet Explorer
C:\Users\Brian\Desktop\Website\index.html
Google
Search
Bookmarks
Check
AutoFill
index

THE COLOURS OF MALTA

a multicultural resource website for educators

Home Lesson Plans Activities Audio/Visuals Suggestibles Links



poster designed by Megan Stampfl, 2004

'Culture takes diverse forms across time and space. This diversity is embodied in the uniqueness and plurality of the identities of the groups and societies making up humankind. As a source of exchange, innovation and creativity, cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature. In this sense, it is the common heritage of humanity and should be recognised and affirmed for the benefit of the present and future generations.'

Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (UNESCO), Article 1

About the authors...

Welcome

THE COLOURS OF MALTA is designed as a resource tool for teachers in their attempt to address the aspect of multicultural diversity in the classroom.

This site contains lesson plans, power point presentation, worksheets and links which can be used to help cultivate, educate and inspire students about the positive potential of cultural diversity.

We hope you find it useful and we appreciate any feedback!

thecoloursofmalta_blog

designed by Juniper Francalanza
Brian Gauci

Conclusion

Although there are various NGOs, whole-school and individually initiated projects, activities and exchanges with regard to cultural diversity, there needs to be more of a coordinated effort. This effort ought to begin with government policies which are not suggestions but requirements for all schools in Malta. This of course would demand regular monitoring of school plans and increased funding towards research, implementation and adequate training. There ought to be more collaboration between schools in order to better share and learn from one another.

The integration of immigrant children into the Maltese school system is a particularly urgent issue which needs to be addressed. Tackling the race issue within the education system today should be of high concern to not only government authorities but local communities and parents. Multicultural skills and competencies should be given the kind of importance as that of Maths and Science skills, for in today's ever shrinking interconnected and global world setting they are essentials to have for success.

We as educators should help increase student's awareness of Malta within the context of Europe and the world. We should be encouraging and supporting tomorrow's students to have positive attitudes towards diversity, and to see not only its potential richness but also as a source of strength and national unity. As Maya Angelou clearly phrases it "(i)t is time...to teach young people early on that in diversity there is beauty and there is strength."

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Appendices

Appendix A – Interview Schedule 1

Designed for: *Head of Department of Education Studies*
 Assistant Director (Humanities)

1. What changes have you observed as regards multiculturalism in Malta and how do you see schools in Malta coping with the rise in cultural diversity?
2. What do you see needing to be done at the national level as regards education?
3. Are there examples of good practice that you have witnessed here and abroad?
4. Do you think teachers are adequately prepared to deal with the changing cultural demography of Malta?
5. In your capacity as [*specify position*] do you see any role that teacher-training can play in responding to the new needs?
6. What resources do you think would best assist teachers in being able to create a culturally inclusive school environment?

Appendix B – Interview Schedule 2

Designed for: *Education Officers*


1. How have you observed schools in Malta coping with the rise in cultural diversity?
2. What is being done to address this challenge?
3. What specific role do you see PSD/ Social Studies as a subject has in addressing this challenge?
4. Have you witnessed examples of good practice in this regard?
5. Do you think teachers are adequately equipped to deal with the changing cultural demography of Malta?
6. What is being planned to support these new teacher needs?
7. What kinds of materials, information or trainings do you think would best assist teachers in being able to create a culturally inclusive school environment?
8. Do you have any other thoughts, experiences to share?

Appendix C – Interview Schedule 3

Designed for: *Focus Groups*

1. How would you define inclusion within the context of your school with particular emphasis on the cultural aspect?
2. In which ways is it being addressed or not addressed by your school?
3. How do you yourself experience cultural diversity in your classroom?
4. What is the impact of cultural diversity amongst your students?
5. How do you address cultural diversity in your classroom?
6. Have you witnessed examples of successful cultural inclusion? If so can you describe it?
7. What resources are you lacking to better address this need? What trainings would you find useful?

Appendix D – Specimen Lesson Plan

LESSON PLAN		
Form	Form 4	
Topic	Prejudice	
Duration	40 minutes	
Aims	✱ to raise awareness about the effect/s of prejudice	
Tool	Although the Six Thinking Hats Tool is being used, it is not required that students are knowledgeable about the different Hats in use	
Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Possible Guests Worksheet ✓ Possible Guests PowerPoint Presentation ✓ laptop and projector 	

Lesson

Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✱ describe briefly the lesson plan
Activity Dinner-for-Two	<p>Blue Hat</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✱ introduce the Activity and set out the scene by relating the following: You have just won a dinner for two at one of Malta's fanciest restaurants, and you are asked to choose one of the people shown in the photos to take with you for dinner. You do not know anything about them! ✱ hand out the Possible Guests Worksheet <p>Red Hat</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✱ ask the students to write down their feelings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>how do they feel after seeing the pictures?</i> <p>Yellow Hat</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✱ assist the students in highlighting what would be positive: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>what would you like about having a conversation with</i>

	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>each of the persons?</i></p> <p>Black Hat</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✘ ask the students what could be problematic in each situation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>what could be problematic in each situation?</i> <p>Blue Hat</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✘ ask the students to take a decision: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>whom would the students choose and why?</i> ✘ have students share their decisions <p>White Hat</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✘ using the, display the information about each of the Possible Guests by projecting the PowerPoint Presentation <p>Red Hat</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✘ ask the students once again for their feelings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>how do they feel after reading the information?</i> <p>Blue Hat</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✘ using the, conclude the lesson by asking students to share what might have led them to choose one person over the other <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>what made students choose one particular peson over the other?</i> ▪ <i>what are the effects of prejudice on the way we act, choose, behave?</i>
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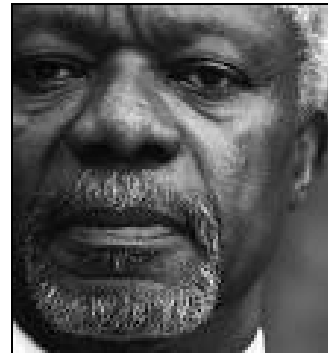
Closure and Homework

Closure	✘ ask students what they are taking with them from today's lesson.
Homework	<i>For homework I would like you to think of a prejudice that you may have and reflect on where you think this prejudice is coming from, how does it affect you, and what would be the outcome were you to change it?</i>

Possible Guests














Possible Guests

PowerPoint Presentation



prejudices
Form 4

Juniper Francalanza and Brian Gauci




The first woman to win the Pritzker Prize for Architecture, ZAHA HADID has defined a radically new approach to architecture.

Born in 1950 in Baghdad. After convent school in Baghdad and Switzerland, and a degree in mathematics at the American University in Beirut, Hadid enrolled at the Architectural Association in London in 1972.

Zaha Hadid
1950 -

Juniper Francalanza and Brian Gauci



Blue-eyed, curly-haired Cyril Jacquet was the perfect reality show participant. Young, attractive, outgoing and ambitious, he and his girlfriend, Paola Alberdi, were determined to win a new Spanish TV show called Around the World.

Jacquet did not seem to realise, however, that fans of the show would inevitably start putting his name into their internet search engines and finding out a little bit more about him.

In 1994, Jacquet killed his mother and his father. He eventually confessed to the double killing and served three years in a youth detention centre. Under Spanish law he has no criminal record since he was a minor at the time of the double killing.

Cyril Jacquet
1979 -

Juniper Francalanza and Brian Gauci



Mathangi "Maya" Arulpragasam (Tamil: மாதங்கி 'மாயா' அருள்பிரகாசம்), better known by her stage name M.I.A., is a British songwriter, record producer, singer, fashion designer, and artist of Sri Lankan Tamil origin.

She released her Mercury-Prize-nominated debut album Arular in 2005. Her second album, Kala, was released in 2007 and gained her mainstream chart success. She has been nominated for two Grammy awards and an Academy Award.

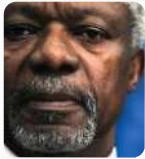
In 2009, the TIME magazine placed M.I.A in the Time 100 list of "World's Most Influential people" for having "global influence across many genres".

M.I.A.
1975 -

Juniper Francalanza and Brian Gauci

Possible Guests

PowerPoint Presentation contd.



Kofi Atta Annan, is a Ghanaian diplomat who served as the seventh Secretary-General of the United Nations from 1 January 1997 to 1 January 2007.

Annan and the United Nations were the co-recipients of the 2001 Nobel Peace Prize.

Kofi Annan was born in the Kofandros section of Kumasi, Ghana. The Secretary-General is fluent in English, French and several African languages.

Kofi Annan
1938 -

Juniper Francalanza and Brian Gauci



Rigoberta Menchú Tum is an indigenous Guatemalan. Menchú has dedicated her life to publicizing the plight of Guatemala's indigenous peoples during and after the Guatemalan Civil War (1960-1996), and to promoting indigenous rights in the country.

She was the recipient of the 1992 Nobel Peace Prize and Prince of Asturias Award in 1998. Menchú is a UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador.

In 2006, Menchú was one of the founders of The Nobel Women's Initiative. It is the goal of the Nobel Women's Initiative to help strengthen work being done in support of women's rights around the world.

Rigoberta Menchú
1959 -

Juniper Francalanza and Brian Gauci



During WWII, Irena, got permission to work in the Warsaw Ghetto, as a Plumbing/Sewer specialist. She had an ulterior motive....

She KNEW what the Nazi's plans were for the Jews, (being German).

Irena smuggled infants out in the bottom of her tool box.

During her time and course of doing this, she managed to smuggle out and save 2500 kids/infants.

Irena kept a record of the names of all the kids she smuggled out and kept them in a glass jar, buried under a tree in her back yard.

After the war, she tried to locate any parents that may have survived it, and reunited the family.

Irena Sendler
1910 - 2008

Juniper Francalanza and Brian Gauci



prejudices

WHAT HAVE
YOU LEARNT?

Juniper Francalanza and Brian Gauci