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THE MALTESE COMMUNITY IN TORONTO: A PROPOSED ADULT EDUCATION STRATEGY

In this article, we focus on the Maltese community in Toronto, Canada which, we argue, is suffering from a particular kind of oppression that is given little or no consideration in the existing literature. We name this oppression as that of small nation identity. The trivialization of small countries in the minds of ethnocentric individuals, and institutions/ organizations, has a strong bearing on the subjectivity of immigrants from these places of origin. By highlighting aspects of everyday life experienced by members of the Maltese community, the voice of a subordinate group is reclaimed, providing visibility to a community which has hitherto been invisible, its voice having been immersed in the "culture of silence". We also aim to explore the contradictory discourses that characterize the community. In the second half of the paper we propose an adult education strategy intended to affirm the roots of this community and provide the basis for better democratic living within the larger Toronto community.

The marginalization of the Maltese experience is institutionalized. The Council of Europe, for instance, classifies Malta as a "peripheral" country. The obvious connotation, given that the notion of periphery implies the existence of a centre, is that the fulcrum of mainstream European activity would be in Central Europe and Great Britain. The notion of periphery is re-echoed in the physical location of what has come to be regarded as the hub of the Maltese community in Metro Toronto. It is quite remarkable that, even in Toronto, the Maltese community was physically pushed to the margins. It had originally settled close to the downtown but, being largely working class, could not cope with the rising cost of housing there. It eventually opted for, and was granted a parish church, by the Archbishop of Toronto, in what was, in a particular district of Toronto. This was, in 1930, and for several more years, the city's periphery or junction, as it is still known. Bonavia (1988), cited in Sciriha (1988), argues that 8000 of the 100,000 people of Maltese origin, which, according to a rough estimate, are believed to be living in Canada, are concentrated around this area of Metro-Toronto (Sciriha 1988, 34).

We have a good description of the community through a survey that the Bishop of Toronto asked a capuchin friar to do . . . . to give him some information regarding the community. The Maltese were in the downtown area and a few in the Junction area. Remember, beyond Runnymede, there were fields. So this was the end of the city. The people wanted a Maltese priest . . . . It was Fr. Cauchi. They founded a group which is the Maltese-Canadian Society. This was formed in order to bring the Maltese together and to get a Maltese priest here. Then, when the parish was formed in 1930 -- what is now the lower hall -- the people started moving into this area. They had two choices: to find somewhere downtown, but that would have been expensive, or to move to the west end . . . . they were literally pushed to the periphery. This was the end of Toronto.[1]

In Maltese villages and towns, the parish church characteristically constitutes the hub of social life. This is also reflected in the vernacular townscape, where the more important local institutions (cafes, shops, police station, band clubs, soccer clubs, political clubs, etc.) were grouped near the centre of the village, close to the parish church. The Maltese community in Toronto, as equally religious as the Maltese in Malta and Gozo, moved from the downtown area to settle around the new parish at what was then the periphery of the city. The marginalization of the community was therefore given its physical manifestation in the movement from centre to periphery.

The survey to which the interviewee refers is given prominence in Attard's (1989) well-documented account of the first Maltese settlers in Toronto. The priest who carried out the survey was Fr. Fortunatus Mizzi from Valletta, Malta, who stressed the marginalization of a people who spoke only their own tongue and therefore found it very laborious to communicate with the world around them (Attard 1989, 74). This account also confirms the class and gender composition of the early Maltese community. Men outnumbered women; moreover, many of the men were married but were (physically) separated from their wives and children. The Maltese were mostly working class (ibid). Maltese emigrants were mostly unemployed, illiterate and unskilled men who had been either laid off by the Naval Dockyard or who had given up farming for lack of fertile soil (Attard 1983, 38). Most of these men were, in fact, of rural background. Canada preferred Maltese emigrants to be of such background (Casolani 1930, 24) since it needed people to engage in such occupations as logging. The preference was for people who were not city dwellers and who could live close to nature. In fact, Canadian legislation stipulated three classes of undesirables, one of which consisted of people likely to congregate in urban centres (Attard 1989, 67). A serious disadvantage to the Maltese was that they were not the type of immigrant Canada mostly wanted: the full time farmer who had experience of large farms and who had lived all his life dedicated to animal husbandry and agriculture. Maltese workers naturally gravitated towards the city centres, preferably cities situated near the sea. (Attard 1983, 38). The major centre for the adult education of prospective emigrants, set up in the country of origin, was at Ghammieri, well known in Malta for its connections with farming. With respect to adult education in farming methods, Henry Casolani (1930), who was superintendent of emigration in Malta, writes: "Experience having shown that instruction in agricultural pursuits should be given greater attention, the best expert advice has recently been obtained by the Government, and Agricultural Poultry and Dairy Farming are to form important features of the curriculum, in the immediate future" (p.23). There is a strong historical connection between adult education and Maltese emigration.

Marginalization is intensified in a context where people are immersed in a sense of powerlessness. The colonial experience has bequeathed to the Maltese what Parkin (1975) refers to as a subordinate value system (Zammit 1984, 16), into which the predominantly working class immigrants, who came to Toronto in the 1950s and 1960s, had been socialized. Without minimizing the value of covert resistance, we argue that the mentality of adaptation, rather than confrontation, transported to Canada as part of the Maltese complex, contributed heavily to the marginalization of the Maltese voice.

The notion of marginalization is strengthened by the attitudes exhibited by members of the second or third generations of Maltese immigrants in Canada. The Maltese parish priest and

community/cultural worker --Raymond Falzon -- indicated, in a taped interview, that these people see themselves as Canadian and refer only to their parents and grandparents as being Maltese.

I was invited for a celebration outside Toronto. (he would be greeted by second or third generation people) How are you? etc. . . . . (he would hear such statements as) My grandparents were Maltese. My parents were Maltese . . . I'm Canadian . . . This guy was Maltese on both sides.[2]

The sense of Maltese identity, therefore, gets progressively lost within the family across generations. Furthermore, he also emphasized the fact that those who make it, including those who take up a profession, tend to leave the community and move to the suburbs. And research by Sciriha (1988) seems to indicate that intergenerational upward mobility seems to be high in Maltese-Canadian families where 30 percent of the third generation, dealt with in her survey involving 20 three generation families, are university students (pp.35, 36). The tendency to leave the community is also manifested by members of the Maltese middle class who have emigrated to Toronto. While keeping their distance from what is perceived as the Maltese zone, they are quick in renouncing Maltese mannerisms and use their grip on the English language and their British-style education to make a quick entry into Torontonian life -- buying into the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP) hegemony. There are cases of Maltese persons who have changed their last name or have given it an Anglo touch, or who have kept their ethnic identity a secret. While we cannot deny the "subordinated class" factor involved here, it would not be amiss to state that these people consider "being Maltese" as a ticket to nowhere and, consequently, perpetuate the community's marginalization.

There were moments when I renounced my identity. I wanted to be like them (Anglo Canadians) . . . . For example, I used to think that Canadians (read Anglo Canadians) had a particular scent .... that of margarine. So I occasionally spread margerine over my body.[3]

The young generation of Maltese immigrants, with few exceptions, negates the importance of what could easily have been its heritage language. Again, Sciriha (1988) indicates, in her survey, that only 10 percent of third generation Maltese-Canadians speak Maltese and that, at the time of her survey, only 130 students attended the Maltese heritage programme at James Culnam School, a very low percentage of Maltese-Canadians indeed (pp.38, 39). Members of this generation are generally conversant only in the dominant English language. This situation is reinforced by the fact that the Maltese parents either speak to them solely in English, given that they would normally have a smattering of the language prior to coming to Canada, or else, speak the vernacular while receiving responses in English[4]. The former situation can be taken as an indication of how we Maltese are often complicit in our own oppression. The notion that we are "small" and of "negligible importance" is something that we internalize and, therefore, it is easy for us to dessicate our own roots. The latter situation, on the other hand, creates a conflicting juncture of discourse, whereby the rather ghettoized world view (Weltanschauung) of the parents is juxtaposed against the more expansive one resulting from the children's cultural assimilation. We can speak, here, in terms of a conflict between remaining within sharply delineated boundaries and crossing them to the point of negating them.

It would be foolish to regard oppression as something being perpetrated solely from without. The "oppressor consciousness" inside us leads us to collude in oppressive structures. In order to be counted, we totally identify ourselves with the concept of being "European", rather than with being Southern European or Mediterranean. Such an identification has its unsavoury aspects, which include a racism predicated on eurocentrism which is reflected, among other things, in the tendency to construct anybody who does not fit the "European image" as being "other". This is one reason why, for example, the Libyan community in Malta has never been accepted by the rest of the population, despite the existence of historical and economic ties between Maltese and Arabs. These racist attitudes are perpetuated within the Maltese Metro Toronto community. Members of particular races are constructed as "other" and are perceived as sources of danger to the Maltese and their property, if not to the future of Canada![5] And one can possibly construe the Maltese traditional alignment, in metro Toronto, with Southern Italians, as a means of emphasizing this "Europeanness" and therefore a larger and more internationally affirmed identity.

The Maltese identify themselves with people coming from the same region as their country of origin and then are prejudiced against Asians, Blacks . . . . people from the Caribbean, people from the Canadian east coast etc.[6]

We also encounter overt forms of patriarchy in the very processes intended to keep alive the Maltese identity. Those social clubs which have been constructed for the purpose of promoting this identity and strengthening the development of the Maltese community are very exclusionary, even with respect to Maltese persons. With a few notable exceptions, these centres can be considered as exclusively "male" clubs. On each occasion that we have visited one of the most popular clubs in the area, we have rarely seen women around, except for the one or two women who serve behind the counter or in the kitchen. This replicates the machismo to be found in our towns and villages, back home, whereby it is common for Maltese men to spend their evenings away from the family, drinking beer and playing billiards/darts or cards in the kazin (soccer, band or political party club). In addition to serving as sites for patriarchal affirmation, these clubs further exacerbate marginalization by refusing to act as a common front. The Maltese strongly identify themselves with their respective clubs. Consequently, there is very little transfusion between these clubs.

In the Maltese community, we find a reproduction of the divisions that characterize Maltese society . . . . several different organizations, each one claiming to represent Malta. This is of detriment to the very same community. We even know of cases where ministers held back from distributing allocated funds because they did not know exactly to whom they were to be allocated . . . the Maltese did not succeed in creating a power block.[7]

Of course, it would be foolish to associate the presence of racism and patriarchy exclusively with communities characterized by small nation identity. These situations, notably the existence of predominantly men's clubs, are to be found in several other districts inhabited by people of Southern European origin. One has only to enter some of the Italian and Portuguese bars on College Street or St. Clair Avenue to confirm this view. These are Southern European manifestations of that kind of oppression which is after all universal. We emphasize, however,

this aspect of the Maltese community to indicate the multiplicity of subjectivities involved in processes of structural and systemic oppression.

It is important to note that there are attempts to assert aspects of Maltese cultures. Shops specializing in Maltese bakery products can be found on the section of Dundas Street West where many Maltese live. The feasts of patron saints, celebrated nationally or in particular Maltese parishes, are replicated in Toronto. One thing which strikes us though is that, quite often, the sense of Maltese cultures being projected is a stagnant one, which hardly reflects the organic nature of Maltese cultures in the country of origin. There the cultures tend to be dynamic. The view of Maltese cultures projected within the community in Metro Toronto is often one which dates back to the period when the Maltese immigrants left their country of origin for Canada. One of our interviewees describes the Maltese community as:

a stagnant community. Except for parochial matters, there was hardly any pride. There is no sense of identity. For them, identity means going to mass every Sunday, eating pastizzi and bringing over your own village band.[8]

We feel that, once we have named a new kind of oppression which, together with other oppressions (i.e., class location), constitutes part of the Maltese immigrants subjectivity, it is pertinent, at this point, to echo Foucault (1980) in saying, "Where there is power, there is resistance . . . . " (p.95). Resistance is manifest in the way some members of the older generation have entrenched themselves within a static version of what they affirm as Maltese cultures. It is, as we have stressed, cultures as they knew them before leaving Malta for Canada. This entrenchment can be construed as a form of resistance to the sort of situation that they feared, and presumably still fear, namely that of assimilation, which fear is confirmed given, as we have stated earlier, the attitude towards "being Maltese" shown by members of the second and third generations. Yet the above statement from Foucault (1980,95) is incomplete. The rest of the statement reads as follows: "and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power". In our view, this is true of the situation regarding cultural entrenchment. In their entrenchment, members of the Maltese community in Metro Toronto are preventing borders from being crossed, which "border crossings", provided that they consist of a way of working across difference, could revitalize the expatriate Maltese cultures themselves. In remaining entrenched, one is feeding into the power structure of what has been constructed as a multicultural society[9]. An inorganic sense of Maltese cultures is what feeds into the present hegemony in which a dominant group is presented as the invisible norm presupposed by the existence of the "insular" other. As Hazel Carby (1989) states, with regard to the construction of blackness in relation to a normative whiteness, "the process of marginalization itself is central to the formation of the dominant culture" (Giroux 1992, 127)[10].

THE PROGRAMME

Based on interviews we have carried out among members of the Maltese community in Metro Toronto, it is clear that there are very few organized processes of adult education intended to affirm the identity of the community members and to empower them to reclaim their voice. A few connected with the parish church, which is projected by the parish priest as a cultural centre, have been encouraged to and indeed did undergo a programme of leadership skills. This

programme was offered outside the community[11] . Other than this, there seems to be little evidence of work carried out in the area of organized adult education. We feel that a community-based adult education programme would be an important vehicle to keep the community roots alive and, at the same time, serve as a bridge between its cultures and those pertaining to other groups within the larger community. It is for this reason that we argue for the development of a critical citizenship programme, an idea inspired by the writings of Henry Giroux (1980,1992). It is a programme which would enable the Metro Toronto Maltese to "cross borders" (Giroux 1992), but not to the point of negating their own roots. It would be firmly anchored in Maltese cultures, but would also be projected outwards for the purpose of cross-cultural transfer.

The process of accessing the community members' views is vital to the democratization of the process. In the tradition of a learner-would be used to dictate the contents of the curriculum, in the hope that learning, in these cultural sites, becomes a meaningful experience which, in certain cases, can go some way towards making up for years of alienating, ineffective schooling. By expressing faith in the learners and their words and stories as a valid meaningful foundation on which to build the curriculum, rather than using the prescriptive approach, the cultural workers, implementing the learner-centred approach, generate ideas, skills, learning situations and materials from and with the learners within their own social context. The centrality of the social context in the curriculum is indispensable, especially given the main aim of the programme, which is to present a critical approach to living the life of a Maltese immigrant in Toronto. It is envisaged that the learners would also take an active part in the organization and running of the programmes. Such a process would help learners acquire new skills and experience a sense of ownership of the programmes Gaber-Katz and Watson 1991).

It is envisaged that there would be two kinds of cultural circles, one in which basic literacy skills are combined with concepts relating to Maltese and Canadian cultures, and the other dealing exclusively with the latter. Our interviews and interactions with the community members lead us to consider Maltese language teaching as pivotal to the programme. The general concern is that this heritage language, the hallmark of the Maltese identity/ties, and therefore voice/s, is petering out among the second and third generations of Maltese. This is also the conclusion reached by Sciriha (1988) in her survey: "The results of the present study show that Maltese language death in the community studied seems to be inevitable within twenty or thirty years" (p.40). The teaching of the Maltese language within Maltese and Canadian contexts provides participants with an opportunity to interrogate critically aspects of their past and present, and helps generate language that names their experience, consolidates their sense of community, and empowers them to become agents of change. Storytelling constitutes an excellent medium for critical literacy. Storytelling not only serves to undercut the dominant mode of discourse in teaching, but provides participants with an opportunity to experience knowledge as emerging from action. In Martin's (1986) words, stories represent a "mode of explanation necessary for an understanding of life" (p.7). Through stories people capture the complexity, specificity and interconnectedness of life as lived in particular contexts (Carter 1993). Thus, by engaging in story-telling, participants are encouraged to relive their personal and collective experiences as political texts. In this way stories, serve not only as a linguistic source for reading the word, but also as backdrop for a political reading of the world (Cf. Macedo and Freire 1987). In this respect, the recuperation of collective histories becomes an important element in the envisaged process of personal and communal empowerment. The use of past photographs and personal and communal

empowerment. The use of past photographs and other memorabilia, relating to experiences in bygone Malta and Canada, can serve to recuperate personal and, through interaction, collective historical moments that, with judicious prompting by the cultural worker, can shed critical light on the present ("now time") in order to suggest possibilities for a transformative future (that which is "not yet"). Personal recollections, by elderly members of the community, of the war and postwar years in Malta can, with critical input by the facilitator (something akin to Freire's "hinge themes"), lead to a consideration of the situation of the Maltese within the context of eurocentric imperialism. As a result, connections can be made between Malta's long history of colonialism and the situation of Maltese immigrant communities as subaltern groups in industrialized countries characterized by Anglo-white dominance.[12] These connections would, hopefully, highlight the role of Maltese as both oppressors and oppressed and possibly have a transformative effect- a sort of "redemptive memory", in Walter Benjamin's sense of the term -on the learners, enabling them to live critically within and outside the community.

We also feel that the acquisition of language skills in English are necessary in order that members of the community do not remain at the periphery of political life. It is imperative, however, that the language should be taught in a problematizing manner, so that learners become aware of the colonizing role English has played and continues to play in both the country of origin and in the country of settlement. As in Maltese language sessions, the teaching of English should be immersed in Maltese culture/s. In both cases, sessions would involve some degree of instruction, as well as dialogue centering around codifications of Maltese life both in Malta and among Maltese expatriates.

In addition to exposure to basic and critical literacy, it is hoped that circle members would demonstrate an interest in experiencing Maltese cultures aesthetically. Classes in cuisine, crafts, music and dance, history and tradition, literature and theatre, and artistic heritage, have the potential of attracting large numbers of people, as judged by the attendance at festivals[13] that dot the parish's calendar. During our informal meetings with several members of the community, we discovered a wealth of talent that remains untapped. One major task of the cultural workers is to encourage members to share their skills and knowledge with other members of the community.

In the interest of enabling learners to look beyond the boundaries of their cultures and to engage in solidarity and alignment with other subordinated groups, there should be programmes dealing with other cultures in Canada, and involving interactions with other ethnic groups. These programmes would consist of sessions in which learners not only gather and disseminate information about these cultures, but are also helped in the process of interrogating their own previous construction of such cultures[14], and in recognizing their own implication in the subordination of these other cultures. We feel that, in having a programme developed on such lines, the circle members would go some way in being able to work not only within, but also across differences.

The reader will notice that, in advocating programmes of adult learning, we have mentioned the use of "instruction" alongside dialogue. This, we feel, is important. Dialogue on its own, without a certain degree of instruction, could easily take on the form of "shared ignorance". While we see great potential in a dialogical education for the fostering of a sense of voice among previously

silenced community members, we need to stress that a certain degree of instruction would be necessary to render this dialogue an informed one, one which can lead the learners on to greater awareness of their predicament. Echoing Freire (Freire in Shot and Freire 1987, 103; Freire in Horton and Freire 1990, 181), we would argue that the cultural workers should eschew all forms of authoritarianism in their teaching. This does not mean, however, that they should not be vested with authority. Furthermore, it would be amiss to assume that people, who have been in a "culture of silence" for many years, would be willing to partake of a dialogical education overnight (Baldacchino 1990; Mayo 1991; 1992; 1993). As indicated by the experience of the current literacy campaign in Malta, learners often expect their educators to provide them with the literacy skills that they desire and often indicate an impatience with anyone attempting to engage in dialogue. Educators are expected to get on with the task of teaching them how to read and write, even if this meant indulging in "Banking Education" (cf. Gaber-Katz and Watson 1991). As Freire (in Horton and Freire 1990) argues, there are moments when one has to be "50 percent a traditional teacher and 50 percent a progressive teacher"(p.160). The cultural workers/educators should show discretion in alternating between the two. We also echo other writers (i.e., Freire 1985, 1987, 1990; Aronowitz and Giroux 1991; Giroux 1992; Simon 1992; McLaren and Da Silva 1993; Brookfield 1993) in pointing out that one should be careful not to celebrate such voices uncritically. Common sense, according to Gramsci's (1971) definition of the term, has both its positive potential, whereby it can be converted into good sense, and its bad sense. We have indicated, earlier on, how this bad sense is manifest in the racism and patriarchy which characterize aspects of life within the community.

Preoccupations with matters relating to content and process should not obscure what we regard as a very important element in a community-based education programme: the site of practice. Gaber-Katz and Watson (1991) argue that community-based programs ought to be "located in the community at convenient locations" and "open at convenient times" (p.50). The parish church and the band and soccer clubs Therefore, the facilities available at these venues should be used by the cultural circles. We also feel that the sessions for men and women should be kept separate. Our segregationist view is informed by our knowledge, based on experience, of the values of many immigrants who are wary of social situations which bring together married men and women unaccompanied by their spouses. We feel that, if male and female learners are kept segregated, it would make it easier for some prospective learners to participate in the programmes. Our stand on this issue is further supported by the situation experienced in adult education in Malta where, in certain localities, people withdrew from the literacy programme as soon as they turned up for the first time and discovered that their particular class consisted mainly of members of the opposite gender. Segregation, in terms of gender, could prove beneficial in other respects. Groups consisting entirely of women would allow possibility for feminist consciousness raising to take place within the Maltese community. It would also allow for special arrangements to be made with a view to accommodating the specific requirements of those women, within the community, who engage in unwaged labour as homemakers. This point is frequently made with respect to adult education programmes in Malta[15], although the situation regarding the gender division of labour within the family seems to be different in the Maltese community in Metro Toronto, where several married women' engage in waged labour[16].

Furthermore, it is hoped that the cultural centres will eventually develop into sites for political action. As Gaber-Katz and Watson (1991) suggest, part of the responsibility of a community adult education programme "is to link literacy and participation, and to integrate learning with taking action on what has been learned" (p.43). In this way, praxis, defined by Freire (1972) as "the action and reflection of men [sic] upon the world in order to transform it "(p.52), becomes the true expression of liberation. It is through action that the programme concretizes the struggle for voice and democracy, transforming the language of critique into a project of possibility.

NOTES

1 Extract from taped interview with Fr. Raymond Falzon, the parish priest at St. Paul the Apostle Church in Dundas-Runnymede, Toronto.

2 Extract from taped interview with Fr. Raymond Falzon, the parish priest at St. Paul the Apostle Church in Dundas-Runnymede, Toronto.

3 Extract from interview with returned Maltese migrant

4 Taped interviews with members of the Maltese community in the Junction area.

5 We gathered this from informal discussions with members of the community held within different social meeting places within the Junction area.

6 Extract from interview with returned Maltese migrant

7 Extract from interview with are turned Maltese migrant involved in the administration of Maltese affairs in Canada.

8 Extract from interview with are turned Maltese migrant involved in the administration of Maltese affairs in Canada.

9 We are indebted to Toni Xerri for helping us develop this point.

10 For a discussion on this issue, see also Henry Giroux, 1992, pp. 126, 127

11 Taped interview with the Maltese parish priest/cultural worker, Ft. Raymond Falzon

12 On the issue of redemptive remembrance or dangerous memory, see the final chapter in Simon (1992) and McLaren and da Silva (1993).

13 1992 Parish Calendar, St. Paul the Apostle Maltese-Canadian Parish.

14 The inspiration for this idea derived from a presentation, by a teaching/learning team, on the issue of Facilitating Across Difference , in Course 1110, Basic Processes in Adult Learning Facilitation, offered in the Department of Adult Education, The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, in the Fall of 1992.

15 A recent access programme in Malta, organized by the Commission for the Advancement of Women and the Adult Education Unit of the Department of Education, attracted large numbers of women precisely because it is being held during the morning. According to recent OECD figures, Maltahas the lowest rate of female participation in the labour market. It is no surprise therefore that, in Malta, programmes intended for women are likely to attract a large number of participants if they are held during the morning.

16 Taped interviews with members of the Maltese community in the Junction area. Sciriha(1988) confirms this view by indicating, in her survey, that, whereas only 5 percent of the first generation of married women go out to work, 45 percent of the second generation of married women do likewise (p. 36).

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By **CARMEL BORG**, JENNIFER CAMILLERI AND PETER MAYO

Carmel Borg is a Ph.D. candidate in the Curriculum Department at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. As a critical educator, his interests centre around hegemonic discourses in the curriculum. He can be contacted from mid-June at: 397, St. Paul's Street, St. Paul's Bay, Malta

Jennifer Camilleri is Ed.D. student in Counselling Psychology at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. She can be contacted at: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, Department of Applied Psychology, 9th Floor, 252 Bloor Street West, Toronto, Ontario, M5S IV6, Canada e-mail: jcamilleri@oise.on.c

Peter Mayo is a lecturer in the Department of Foundations in Education at the University of Malta. He can be reached at the Department of Foundations in Education, University of Malta, Msida MSD 06, Malta e-mail: pmayo@unimt.mt.