

Partnership of Universities and Schools A Model of Systematic Professional Induction of Teachers

Valerie Sollars¹, Mario Camilleri²

¹ Department of Primary Education

² Department of Mathematics, Science & Technical Education
Faculty of Education, University of Malta

In the following paper, background information about the education system as well as detailed information about the B.Ed. (Hons.) degree programmes is given. Since there are differences between primary and secondary schooling, the paper is broadly divided into two sections for ease of presentation.

National system of education

Education in Malta is regulated by the Education Act of 1988⁴, and is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education.

In Malta, children enter compulsory schooling at the age of 5. This makes Malta one of the four EU countries with such an early start to formal education. Primary schooling lasts for six years. This is followed by compulsory secondary schooling which lasts for five years. Apart from the eleven years of formal education, about 98% of children start attending school at the age of 3. Kindergarten facilities are available and attached to all state primary schools in every town and village on the island. State KG provision for 4-year olds was introduced in 1975 and extended to 3-year-olds in 1988.

There are three forms of education provision parents can choose from. Children can be educated through the State schools, Church schools or Independent private schools. State schools are free of charge, Church schools accept parents' donations whereas Independent schools charge fees. The language of instruction is Maltese in state schools whereas Church and Independent schools tend to use English. However, a bilingual education is offered in all schools.

⁴ Available online from
http://docs.justice.gov.mt/lom/legislation/english/leg/vol_7/chapt327.pdf

A National Minimum Curriculum (1999) guides the syllabi and programme of activities which are adopted in schools.

Teacher education

There are two primary qualifications which lead⁵ into the teaching profession in Malta - a four-year B.Ed.(Hons.) degree in either primary or secondary teaching specialization, and a 1-year PGCE (Post Graduate Certificate in Education) which is currently only offered to prospective secondary school teachers. Both qualifications are offered by the Faculty of Education at the University of Malta. Courses are full-time day courses – at present there is no provision for part-time or evening teacher-training courses in Malta.

Pre-school education and staff

To date, staff working with 3 and 4-year-olds do not receive any formal training or qualification at tertiary level. For many years, kindergarten assistants who were employed to work with 3 and 4 year-olds received about six weeks of training just before starting their work with the children. Since these employees do not have the same status or training as teachers in compulsory education, they are called kindergarten assistants. However, this is a misnomer since each KG assistant is solely responsible for her own group of children⁶.

Between 1993 and 2003, the Education Division organized a two-year full-time course leading to a Certificate in Pre-school education. This was the recognized qualification for employment in the sector. The course consisted of a theoretical and a practical component. Since 2003, a different institution has taken responsibility for a child-care course. The Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST), geared towards vocational education, offers the BTEC National Diploma in Child Care. This is a two-year full-time course, which prepares students to work with newborns to five-year-olds. Apart from the theoretical aspect of the course, students have work placements with babies as well as under three-year-olds in child-care centers. Students who are planning to

⁵ In Malta, only persons in possession of a teachers' warrant may exercise the teaching profession. Warrants are issued by the Council of the Teaching Profession. Besides persons in possession of a B.Ed.(Hons.) degree, a PGCE or other professional qualification, the Education Act entitles anyone in possession of a Master's degree or a Doctorate to a permanent warrant provided they follow a pedagogy course organised by the Directorate for Educational Services.

⁶ The maximum number of three-year-olds with one KG assistant is 15; the maximum number of four-year-olds is 20.

seek employment as Kindergarten assistants are being offered a further 12 weeks of training with 3 and 4-year-old children.

Teacher training for compulsory education

Having a B.Ed.(Hons.) qualification is compulsory for individuals who are interested in working with 5 to 11-year-old children. The Department of Primary Education, within the Faculty of Education is responsible for this teacher training degree programme.

The four-year full-time programme is divided into a number of components including: core content modules; professional studies; research methods and a dissertation; field placements; education studies and a number of optional and elective modules.

The core content modules prepare students for teaching the eight compulsory subjects in the children's curriculum including Maltese, English, Religion, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, Physical Education and Expressive Arts. Professional studies focus on general issues of interest to teachers working with young children, such as assessment, psycho-social issues and their implications for classrooms, disability issues, bilingualism, literacy, ICT and environmental studies. Many areas are not dealt with exclusively from a theoretical perspective but often, students are requested to undertake and complete assignments which are closely linked to classrooms and children.

Training Secondary School teachers

Secondary school teachers in Malta are trained to teach specific subjects within the secondary school curriculum. There are two principle routes into the teaching profession for secondary school teachers – either a 4-year B.Ed.(Hons.) degree in either 1 or 2 teaching areas (i.e. subjects), or a 1st degree followed by a 1-year PGCE. Both B.Ed.(Hons.) and PGCE courses are offered by the two secondary departments within the Faculty of Education – the Department of Arts and Languages in Education (DALE) and the Department of Mathematics, Science and Technical Education (DMSTE). The department of Psychology also offers these courses for teachers specializing in Personal and Social Development (PSD).

The B.Ed. (Hons.) route

Students taking languages, history, geography, art, music, and religious education are required to choose two teaching areas to specialize in, while students taking science, computing, home economics, mathematics, physical education, and technical design and technology specialize in only one teaching area.

Over half the course is dedicated to the chosen teaching area or areas – including both subject content and methodology – while the rest consists of credits in educational studies (sociology, philosophy and educational psychology) and field placement. Students also have to complete a dissertation in an area of education of the student's choice usually, but not necessarily, related to the teaching area of specialisation.

During the first two years of the course students concentrate almost exclusively on the content of their chosen area or areas, in many cases taking units with other Faculties from the relevant B.A. and B.Sc. programs. During this part of the course, students' contact with the teaching profession is minimal, being limited to one morning's visit to a school once a week to carry out observation tasks (school experience) and, at the end of the second year, delivering a few lessons.

The 3rd and 4th years of the course are almost exclusively dedicated to credits in the area of education – subject methodology (including general credits in educational resources and ICT), educational studies, and two 6-week teaching practice periods (one in each year), together with the dissertation.

The PGCE route

Students reading for a PGCE specialize in only one teaching area, which is normally expected to have been a major component of their first degree. The 1-year course is very tightly packed, with credits in subject methodology and educational studies, three periods of school observation, and two 6-week teaching practice sessions. Students must also complete a long essay in education typically related to their chosen teaching area.

Teacher Induction

The professional development of teachers consists of three main phases forming a continuum – the pre-service phase, the induction phase, and the in-service

phase. Although pre-service teacher education in Malta is well-developed and has a long and honorable history, and ongoing in-service professional development is reasonably well catered for, as yet there is no support mechanism in the school itself to help new teachers gradually acclimatise to the teaching profession.

Once students graduate and are entrusted with a full teaching load at primary or secondary level they are left entirely on their own to pursue PD (professional development) opportunities.

Bezzina, C. (2002 p.59)

Thus the only form of monitored and supported teaching experience prospective teachers get is during the field placement components of their pre-service training course – School Experience and Teaching Practice. Schools normally appoint a senior member of staff (usually an assistant head or a subject coordinator) to oversee students on field placement, and the student is paired with one or more class teachers who help the student acclimatize to the teaching situation. Such arrangements however are informal and non-systematic, and as yet there is no special training which the members of staff concerned need to undergo to fulfill their mentoring role.

School Experience

School experience in both the B.Ed. and PGCE programmes serves as an induction into schools. Both the primary and secondary specializations require students to attend weekly observation visits to schools coupled with tutorials focusing on topics relevant to the classroom contexts in which students are specializing. This serves to introduce students and help them acquire familiarization with life in schools and classrooms. This experience enables students to learn about school routines and procedures, how to get to know learners, the basics of classroom practice, different learning styles, motivation, communication, classroom management and lesson structures, including planning, explanations and questioning, reflections and evaluations.

Students are in schools every Wednesday for classroom observations linked to the topics which would have been discussed during the tutorials.

School Experience in the Primary B.Ed. course

In the Primary course, school experience is done exclusively in the first year of the course. Students are divided into groups of about five students and assigned to tutors. With their respective tutor, each group of students has two hours

tutorials each week. During these tutorials, students discuss, observe, research and report about particular topics.

Students are given a school experience handbook. For each of the topics under review, there are specific aims and objectives which students are expected to achieve; issues to consider and discuss; tasks and activities to be done in the classrooms. They are assigned to a particular classroom for the entire year with some opportunities to see other classrooms periodically. Towards the end of the academic year, on five consecutive Wednesdays, students start taking over the classroom gradually. They would have prepared lessons according to recommendations made by the class teacher as well as following advice from the tutors.

In the last two weeks of the School Experience module, students take over the classroom entirely. They have to prepare lesson plans, schemes of work and resources as well as deliver the lessons with the children they have been monitoring and following over the year. During this two-week block teaching practice, the students are supervised by their university tutor.

School Experience in the Secondary Specialisation courses

In the Secondary B.Ed. course, students have school experience in the first two years of the course. The model is identical to that adopted in the Primary course, except that the 1st year school experience component focuses on general topics related to teaching in a secondary school context and does not include any teaching.

The second year School Experience component concentrates on topics directly related to the students' chosen teaching area or areas and requires students to take charge of the classes they have been assigned during the last 5 Wednesdays of the school experience period (usually in February and March). During this teaching practice period, two separate tutors visit the student on 4 occasions – although the students' performance in class is assessed, the primary objective of the tutors' visits is to help the student develop basic class management and pedagogic skills.

The PGCE School Experience component aims to give the student a crash course in how to survive in the secondary classroom. It is divided into 3 distinct phases – in November, in February and in April. Between these phases the student is out on 6-week Teaching Practice placements.

Teaching practice

During the TP placements, students are given a minimum of four visits by university-appointed tutors. To date, schools do not have much input through mentoring, although where necessary and possible, schools are asked to support the students. At the end of each visit, students are given a report which highlights their strengths and weaknesses together with areas which they are expected to improve upon in subsequent visits.

According to the existing regulations, students can fail one teaching practice with the opportunity of repeating this failed component in an extra year of the course.

Teaching Practice in the Primary B.Ed. course

During the second, third and fourth year of the B.Ed. (Hons.) course for primary school students, a compulsory component of the programme is a six-week teaching practice placement. In the second year of the course, this occurs before Easter whereas in the third and fourth years, students are on teaching practice in the first term, prior to Christmas. Across the TP placements, efforts are made to ensure students get diverse experiences and this is partially achieved by sending students to state, church and independent schools.

A detailed list of criteria are available against which tutors advise and assess students. The criteria consider skills and competencies which students are expected to demonstrate in their professional work with the children in their class as well as other members of staff. These skills and competences are of a formative nature and from one TP session to the next, new ones are added. Students are assessed on their *professional knowledge*, including how well they know the National Curriculum and the two official languages – Maltese and English. They are also assessed on the content and developmental stages of their *schemes of work*; their *lesson planning and preparation* including clarity of objectives, well-sequenced stages in the plan, appropriate key questions which are balanced between open-ended and closed ones, modifications to plans according to the needs of the children; the *learning environment* they are working towards achieving in the classrooms: the variety of resources they are planning to use, the availability of specific resources in class, how they have arranged resources, whether ICT is being incorporated; the *lesson delivery*, with specific criteria focusing on the introduction, development and conclusion of the lesson together with *classroom management issues*: ability to motivate and maintain pupils interest, pace of the lesson, voice projection, skills in managing the class or groups of children and *pupil profiles*: work. accomplished with

children; correction/marking of student's work, the class profile and individual pupil profiles. In this documentation, students are invited to observe and write about the strengths and weaknesses of a number of pupils, think about possible intervention strategies to support these children and work towards achieving a target.

Teaching Practice in the Secondary Specialisation courses

The B.Ed. secondary specialisation programme follows the same Teaching practice model as the primary programme except that there are only two Teaching Practice periods – in the 3rd and 4th years of the course.

In the PGCE course there are two Teaching Practice periods – one in November/December and one in February/March. However, in reality only the second teaching period is assessed – the first teaching practice fulfils an advisory role.

Course completion

On successful completion of their course, students are awarded a B.Ed.(Hons.) degree or PGCE certificate by the University of Malta. To date, new graduates are then given their teacher's warrant after one teaching year. However, with recent changes in the Education Act, the warrant will be given after two years of teaching experience. It is also worth noting that the Faculty of Education has absolutely no say in students' employment placements after graduation.

References

Bezzina, Christopher (2002), 'Rethinking teachers' professional development in Malta: agenda for the twenty-first century', *Journal of In-Service Education*, 28:1, 57 – 78

Ministry of Education (1999). *Creating the future together. National Minimum Curriculum*. Malta: Ministry of Education. Available: http://www.curriculum.gov.mt/docs/nmc_english.pdf

1. Affective stimulation and the regulated expression of positive and, what is more difficult, negative feelings (anger, envy, jealousy, etc.);
2. The creation of environments (school work, teamwork dynamics, etc.) for the development of socio-emotional skills and for the solving of interpersonal conflicts;
3. Exposure to experiences that can be solved using emotional strategies;
4. Teaching empathy skills by showing students how to pay attention and how to listen to and understand the points of view of others.

Moreover, emotional intelligence skills are advantageous for teachers at the preventive level. In other words, the capacity to reason about our feelings, to perceive them and understand them, as an intrinsic human skill, at the end of the day implies developing processes to regulate our feelings, helping to moderate and prevent the negative effects of teaching stress to which teachers are exposed daily (Extremera & Fernández-Berrocal, 2004).

As Abraham (1999) and Hein (2001) pointed out, emotional intelligence helps teachers to identify the feelings and fears of students, recognising their feelings and seeing to their unmet emotional needs. Much research has connected emotional intelligence with achievement, productivity, leadership, and personal health (Goleman, 1995, 1998; Epstein, 1998; Sternberg, 1996; Gardner, 1993; Weisenger, 1998; Low, 2000; Nelson and Low, 1999, 2005), identifying the need to provide emotional intelligence instruction as part of the curriculum, in order to improve academic and professional success. Goad (2005) and Justice (2005) have indicated the importance and value of emotional intelligence in teacher preparation programs. Emotional intelligence skills were linked to both classroom management performance and teacher retention factors for new and novice teachers.

Effective teaching requires emotional and empathic skills (O'Connor, in press)

Teaching and learning are socially situated practices that are deeply embedded in emotional experiences (Hargreaves, 1998). In fact, reason and emotion are interdependent because our reasoning depends on emotional choices (Zembylas, 2003).

Emotionally more intelligent teachers, i.e., teachers with a greater capacity to perceive, understand and regulate their feelings and those of others, will have the necessary resources to better face up to stressful events in their work life and to deal more effectively with the negative emotional responses that often arise in their interactions with work colleagues, parents and the students themselves.

Emotional intelligence offers many benefits for both teachers and students (Fer, 2004). Using emotional intelligence helps students to learn emotional

When there is only one discriminant function, the classification of cases into groups is based on the values for the single function. Table 5 shows the classification results as a confusion matrix. This table gives the number of correct and incorrect classifications for each group. The overall percentage of cases classified correctly is 70.6% (89 out of 126).

Table 5
Abstract of the classification results

Actual Group	Number of cases		Predicted group membership		Total
			Trainee teachers	Practising teachers	
Trainee Teacher	63	Trainee teachers	44	19	63
		Practising teachers	18	45	63
Practising Teacher	63	Trainee teachers	69.8	30.2	100.0
		Practising teachers	28.6	71.4	100.0
		%			

a. Percent of grouped cases correctly classified: 70.6%.

Discussion

Taken as a whole, the results show significant differences in socio-emotional skills between practising teachers and trainee teachers. Practising teachers display greater interpersonal skills, greater stress-management capacity and greater overall emotional intelligence, due mainly to their higher scores in the two former aspects. The two aspects where the least difference can be appreciated are adaptability and general mood.

Accordingly, these results show the need for trainee teachers to improve their interpersonal skills and tolerance of stress, for two main reasons. On the one hand, these skills are part of the professional capacities required for effective professional development in the Spanish educational system, as mentioned above. Interpersonal skills are part of an effective teacher's tools, along with group work, coordinating teams, interaction with other teachers and with students and the treatment of individual, social and cultural diversity, among others.