Rethinking Teachers' Professional Development in Malta: agenda for the twenty-first century

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ABSTRACT The Maltese Government, being concerned about the quality of school education, is attempting to increase teacher effectiveness and student learning. To achieve these goals, it is argued that current in-service programmes need to be improved and focused for all school leaders and teachers. Whilst emphasising the need to focus on school-based development initiatives, it is also emphasised that the school head needs to start promoting teacher development from within. Heads can do much to improve teaching and learning by using professional formative evaluation of their staff. For this to be achieved heads require specific training. Organisations such as the Faculty of Education need to be more involved in providing up-to-date staff development for all educational leaders and other educators.

Introduction

The quality of education has slowly, but surely become a major issue in Malta (Giordmaina, 2000; Ministry of Education, 2001). Thanks to some recent initiatives, such as the introduction of decentralised practices and the introduction of a new National Minimum Curriculum (NMC), we are witnessing the need to clearly understand the important role that teachers have to play if quality improvement is to be achieved (Bezzina, 2001). More so, it is becoming obvious that teachers' ongoing professional development has to be taken seriously and addressed strategically, rather than left as a haphazard exercise (Bezzina, 1999a). The quality of education is heavily dependent on the quality of staff, their motivation, and the leadership they experience (Bezzina, 2000). In this regard, Walter et al (1996, p. 41) noted that 'the quality of teaching depends on the quality of the teachers which, in turn, depends to some extent on the quality of their professional development'.

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The Maltese government, in an attempt to ensure the necessary quality leaps that the NMC calls for, is investing substantial amounts of financial and human resources directed towards in-service training programmes for teachers. However, as I have argued elsewhere (e.g. Bezzina, 1988; Bezzina & Camilleri, 1998), whilst the present model caters for particular aspects of the professional development of teachers, there are serious lacunaes that need to be addressed if we are going to take current initiatives to improve the quality of our education seriously.

This article provides an overview of the current professional development practices and procedures in Malta. It is argued that teachers and educators in general need development opportunities that current in-service training programmes cannot address. Five sections are developed in the discussion:

A definition of PD in the Maltese context.
The need for school-based staff development practices.
The role of the head of school in the promotion of staff development.
The main barriers to staff development.
An agenda for the twenty-first century.

Professional Development in the Maltese Context

The literature provides various definitions of professional development (PD).[1] Sparks & Loucks-Horsley (1989) see PD as those processes that improve the job-related knowledge, skills or attitudes of teachers. Similarly, Parker (1990) regarded PD as a process designed to influence positively the knowledge, skills or attitudes of educators so as to enable them to design instructional programmes to improve student learning. Oliva & Pawlas (1997) see PD as a programme of activities planned and carried out to promote the personal and professional growth of teachers.

On the other hand, Wideen (1987) stated that PD is needed for three main reasons:

It offers better understanding and use of the expanded knowledge base in teaching.
It provides insight in addressing continuing social complexities in schoolwork.
It is a means of self-renewal.

Whilst the author fully agrees that in-service training is vital for professional growth to take place, it should not be offered in a vacuum without creating the appropriate structures and processes within schools, without developing a culture within schools that nurtures and supports ongoing professional development. This is the main argument that this article will put forward.

Let us start by exploring the local context.

The PD of teachers is usually divided into three phases – the pre-service phase, the induction phase and the ongoing professional development phase. A study of the Maltese context shows that the pre-service education of prospective teachers is the sole responsibility of the Faculty of Education. The Faculty runs a 4-year Bachelor's degree in Education [BEd (Hons)] and a 1-year PGCE course. On the other hand, the ongoing PD of teachers is of two kinds:

Professional education: this entails the widening and deepening of a teacher's theoretical perspectives by undertaking advanced studies (e.g. diploma or Masters degree). The Faculty, through its varied evening programmes, provides participants with opportunities to enhance their professional career.

Professional training: this is aimed at the development of teachers' knowledge and skills relating to daily work (e.g. INSET courses, seminars). The Education Division is here the main agent as it provides teachers varied opportunities to extend their skills and knowledge base in specific areas (Bezzina & Camilleri, 1998). The Malta University Services also offers training opportunities in specific areas throughout the school year.

Whilst these initiatives are indeed laudable, and reflect interest and concern for the ongoing PD of teachers, it is also obvious that there are serious lacunaes that need to be addressed if we are going to take the PD of educators seriously.

The existing model therefore caters for two important phases in teacher PD. However, it has particular weaknesses that need to be addressed. These can be presented in point form:

There is no link between the pre-service and ongoing PD of teachers. 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 opportunities.

This means that teachers are not provided with:

Support mechanisms at the school site to help them settle down and thus be induced gradually into the teaching profession. This phase, known as the induction period, is currently non-existent in Malta.
Organisational structures so that teachers can meet on a regular basis in order to discuss educational issues.
All teachers are 'bundled' together and asked to work in isolation for most of the time.
Schools are not sites of professional inquiry and reflective practice (e.g. Goodlad, 1994; Pollard, 1998).

Hence, the current provision lacks a rationale and philosophical framework which clearly spells out the learning continuum that teachers can follow to develop personally and professionally at the school site.

The philosophy that this article proposes, is one which:

links the three phases (i.e. pre-service, induction and ongoing professional development) together;
emphasises the professional growth of teachers within the school as a learning community;
proposes a structure at the school level which encourages teacher empowerment/leadership, and one where teachers are encouraged to meet on a regular basis to enhance content knowledge, pedagogical skills, leadership skills and tackle educational issues of a whole-school concern.

The Need for School-based Staff Development Practices

This model is therefore based on the school being viewed as a learning organisation (e.g. Francis & Mazany, 1998). This visionary view of educational institutions points to an entirely new way of looking and understanding teacher professionality, staff development and the management of teachers.

Meaningful PD programmes may begin to evolve when several principles are recognised. The following are being proposed:

Teachers are professional educators who seek meaningful opportunities for their own growth.
PD is best nurtured in an atmosphere where teachers seek the support from their colleagues in a structured manner.
PD takes place once it is recognised that teacher growth is a journey, not an event.
PD is best achieved in an atmosphere characterised by mutual trust and respect between members of staff.
Professional growth, not evaluation, is a priority.
The 'reflective practitioner' working in the context of the 'extended professional' is essential.
Introspective reflection and self-analysis are critical ingredients of an effective PD programme.
Opportunities for professional growth must be tailored to meet the needs and interests of teachers.

These principles will require new modes of thinking. First and foremost it helps to challenge existing modes of practice and encourages teachers to embrace the new approach as a meaningful opportunity for intensive and sustained improvement. Naturally, a model is fully embraced when it emanates from the teachers' interests. Teachers themselves are acutely aware of their professional needs and any new model must consider these needs.

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What is comforting to note is that there is a growing body of literature, gained from research into practice, that has documented the importance of teachers' growth and development when they work together in communities teaching each other, learning together, and focusing on the success and challenges of educating their students (e.g. Darling-Hammond, 1997; Little, 1996; McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993; Shaps et al, 1996; Wenger, 1998).

People in a group are united by more than membership; they are involved in practices that bind them together. If people are a valid part of the policy-making process, they become committed in a way that allows others to make claims on them (Farley, in Drath & Palus, 1994). They become a community with practices that reinforce what they share. This concept, which reflects the wisdom of many writers, has recently been crystallised into a conceptual framework called a 'community of practice' (Wenger, 1998).

This idea of belonging to a community changes the way we think about teacher learning. Its importance lies in the fact that it changes the relationship of teachers to their peers, breaking the isolation that most teachers have found so devastating. In supportive communities, teachers reinforce each other in a climate that encourages observing students, sharing teaching strategies, trying out new ways of teaching, getting feedback, and redesigning curriculum and methods of instruction. Teachers' professional communities serve as important mediators for teachers' interpretations and analyses of student learning. In communities where reform, restructuring and school transformation are the vision, teachers learn to make public their challenges as well as their successes. Teachers receive support, learn from one another, and gain confidence for changing their practice to better meet their students' needs (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995; Lieberman, 1995).

Within such a context empowerment is taking place and empowerment of teachers and all educational leaders, for that matter, is essential if schools are to improve. As long as teachers are not adequately valued by themselves and by others, they are not apt to perform with the necessary assurance and authority to do the job as well as they can (Reynolds & Cuttance, 1992; Goodlad, 1994; Adelman & Walking-Eagle, 1997).

In recent decades there has been a growing trend towards decentralisation and hence school-site management (Herman and Herman, 1993; Mohrman et al, 1994; David, 1995-1996). One of the major implications behind decentralisation and devolution of authority to schools is teacher empowerment (Weiss, 1993; Steyn & Squelch, 1996). As Gabor & Meunier (1993) and Schmoker (1997), among others, have pointed out, teacher empowerment is the way forward and the only way the organisation can truly learn and improve.

The most important point this article will try to make is that development plans for the improvement of education can arise within each individual school – by those who work and live in them each day. Such school restructuring will also need the support of effective and efficient support services. Therefore, a productive tension between inner- and outer-directed efforts to improve is needed.

The article will be directed at presenting a process of how schools, and hence the members of the institutions can develop the capacity to reflect on the nature and purpose of their work together. Schools, which are a personification of the people who comprise them, must become more responsive to their own particular problems and needs.

Research evidence (e.g. Hargreaves & Hopkins, 1991; Hopkins & Sebba, 1995) has shown that the quality of education in schools is highly dependent on:

> the professional competence of the educators within the school;
> an efficient supportive infrastructure;
> a more decentralised governance structure.

If we believe that educators are to have any effect on change, and that educational change depends largely on the quality of the teaching force, then we need to critically analyse the present education system, the goals it is trying to achieve and how it is going about it (Chapman, 1993; Fullan, 1995; Hargreaves et al, 1996).

It is recognised that the transformation of education requires a transformation of education staff of all kinds and at all levels. The quality of such staff depends not merely on their knowledge and skill, but also on the degree of their motivation to utilise this knowledge and skill, and on the extent of the opportunity available to them to do so. Consequently, qualitative improvement demands consideration of a wide range of education staff, the provision of adequate incentives, and the creation of genuine opportunity through the provision of support services, adequate resources and opportunities to participate in the decision-making affecting their work.

The Role of the Head of School in
the Promotion of Staff Development

Within this context the head is called to play a pivotal role. School headship is vital for successful implementation of staff development and in ensuring that staff development programmes meet the needs of both individual teachers and the school (e.g. Ehrich et al, 1995). The head of school plays a major role in promoting staff development and in providing appropriate leadership for school improvement (e.g. Blasé & Blasé, 2000; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000; Wildy & Louden, 2000). In Leithwood & Montgomery's (1982) view, active involvement and support

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of the head of school are of crucial importance in enhancing successful implementation of in-service training programmes at the school site.

These are, indeed, not easy times for school leaders. The NMC is undermining old assumptions about learning. Public expectations keep rising. School leaders are finding that the principle of 'business as usual' is no longer an option. Neither can we accept the praxis that actions are governed by chaos theory and that school leaders end up reacting to day-to-day demands, rather than developing a proactive approach to change and development.

There are two main dominant metaphors that describe the role that heads of school have been asked to take on over the years. Up to the late eighties and early nineties heads have been asked to function as administrators and a channel for directives by central education authorities (Bezzina, 1995). The role started to change with school heads being given some management responsibilities especially of a financial nature. By the mid-nineties schools were given more 'autonomy' by being asked to start developing school development plans. A new era was in the making. Now, the NMC calls for even greater developments, even more demands on the head. In fact, the Strategic Plan (Ministry of Education, 2001, p. 114) sees or, rather, encourages the following developments:

Decentralisation means also greater responsibility for the Head of School as the leader of the school community. In this context, the managerial competencies and leadership skills of the Head of School come into play. No amount of goodwill from the central agency will redress weakness in management at school level. As the process of decentralisation gathers momentum, the Head of School, together with the management team, will be called to make higher order and higher quality decisions. The Head must also create a social milieu that facilitates the management of change and attenuates the anxieties that may develop among the various members of the school community. The Head is the linchpin for successful school-based management. She/He must be able to forge the school's stakeholders into a community driven by a core ideal. The whole decentralisation process must be underscored by the values of authenticity, collegiality, leadership, interest, belonging, trust, empowerment, participation, risk taking, pride, sharing and respect.

A consultative style of management should be cultivated to ensure the nurturing of decentralisation. Decision-making processes have to ensure whole staff involvement based on effective top-down and bottom-up lines of communication. Within the school community a culture of self-assessment has to be cultivated and developed to ensure continuous improvement ...

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I do believe that the focus is on having what Lashway (1997) has described as transformational and facilitative leadership. We need leaders who use transformational strategies that are aimed at moving the organisation by engaging the beliefs, values and aspirations of all its members (Leithwood, 1993; Sergiovanni, 1992). Transformational leaders are highly self-confident; they know what they want and are convinced that they can get it. Their insights into human nature makes them skilful motivators. They are also good at creating hope for the future, generating commitment, enthusiasm and energy. At the same time, they need to adopt facilitative strategies that helps to broaden the power base by empowering teachers to take on a more active role in school decisions. The leader's role is not so much to make good decisions as to see that good decisions are made.

Such a drive is also supported by a number of local studies. A recent study (Abdilla & Spiteri, 1999) brought out that school heads want to take on a more professional leadership role, and a majority of respondents want to support teachers' professional development, help them address curriculum concerns and involve them in whole school development planning. In another study (Quintano, 1999, p. 56), secondary school heads identified a number of areas that they felt they should receive training in. These included:

staff development of teachers, including induction, motivating, supporting and evaluating;
team building;
communication;
monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning.

What these results show is that heads are realising that they are having to spend more time working with and through people and they lack the skills to do so effectively. These developments/findings also help to highlight the management development opportunities that educational leaders and school leaders in particular, need to receive in order to be adequately prepared for their evolving role (Bezzina, 2001).

Barriers to Staff Development

In-service training activities for teachers face several constraints, as listed below:

Inadequate funds are available to support the courses.
In-service training opportunities are frequently available to only a small number of teachers.
Heads and teachers have very little input into the selection and design of the course content organised by the various agencies involved in in-service training programmes. Consequently, the courses do not fully address the needs of most participants.

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Insufficient and inappropriate follow-up procedures are used to determine the relevance and productivity of the in-service training programmes.

Little emphasis is placed on school-based professional development. Currently, in-service training activities are far removed from the schools.

Insufficient research specifically focusing on in-service training for teachers is conducted.

A lack of continuity exists in the planning and execution of in-service training activities for teachers.

Poor to limited collaboration occurs between institutions involved in in-service training programmes.

Most of these points had been raised by the author years ago (Bezzina, 1988, pp. 15-17). Whilst today there is a clear government policy focused on in-service training (Ministry of Education, 2001) what is still lacking is the need for policies that encourage school-based development to take place. The documents that have been recently published seem to imply that such a climate for turning our schools into sites of professional inquiry and reflective practice (Bezzina, 1999a) is essential, but the underlying feeling one gets is that the authorities may be assuming that it can just happen!

An Agenda for the Twenty-first Century

Staff development for the twenty-first century should give teachers an opportunity to develop the standards required by their profession. An agenda for the future should address the following major areas.

Teacher Empowerment

Various local Ministerial documents emphasise the importance behind empowerment. According to Berry (1992, p. 53), 'empowerment' means 'the acquisition of knowledge that will enable more autonomy, responsibility and self-direction for all those personnel involved in the educational process'. Also, Melenyzer (1990, cited in Blasé & Blasé, 1994, p. 3), defined teacher empowerment as 'the opportunity and confidence to act upon one's ideas and to influence the way one performs one's profession. True empowerment leads to increased professionalism as teachers assume responsibility for an involvement in the decision-making process'.

Within such a context heads and teachers become the main actors in decisions that affect school life and school development in particular. Access to decision-making implies that teachers' ideas and contributions are important and fundamental if the school is to move forward. Hence,

heads of school need to create opportunities for teachers to exercise decision-making that goes beyond what takes place in the classroom.

Teachers experience empowerment when they have opportunities to improve their instructional techniques; when they deepen their knowledge and understanding of the areas they teach; when they adopt a holistic perspective to school life; when teachers start involving themselves in different school matters beyond their subject matter. Such involvement means having a greater say in decisions that affect their roles at school both directly and indirectly. Fessler (1990) concluded that, because teachers are in a position to provide leadership in areas such as mentoring, staff development and in-service, peer coaching and curriculum development, empowering them for such leadership roles will provide them with opportunities for higher levels of need satisfaction and bring valuable expertise to school improvement.

Therefore, as Koll et al (1988-89, p. 30) stated, staff developers need to plan in-service education programmes that will tap teacher motivation and self-esteem, autonomy and self-actualisation levels: 'Approaches that enable teachers to feel good about themselves, enhance feelings of competence and empowerment, and push them to peak performance are those most likely to make a difference in classroom performance'. According to Heidenman (1990), the key elements to empowerment of teachers include decentralising decision-making, delegating authority, and giving teachers a voice in their own professional development.

On this point, French (1997, p. 9) cautioned that:

Professional development programs cannot succeed if they are something done to teachers, if teachers are passive recipients instead of active participants. Teachers need to be able to see that what they learn procures results in their classroom and that it enables them to improve the lives of students.

Unfortunately, the current state of affairs in Malta sees teaching still very much practised in isolation, and collegiality is non-existent for many teachers. As a result, the teacher's own knowledge and attitude towards professional development has been allowed to atrophy. Moreover, some research on teacher empowerment reveal that some teachers do not understand empowerment, others do not want to accept the responsibility that accompanies empowerment, and others want to avoid the leadership and power it offers (Herman & Herman, 1993; Midgley & Wood, 1993).

However, if we are optimistic that teachers possess leadership qualities, or are willing to learn and commit themselves towards the improvement of the school, and, like Maeroff (1988, p. 476), feel confident that 'teachers are hungry for stimulating educational experiences' then we will do our utmost to create opportunities where teacher empowerment can take place. If we accept the premise that the ultimate

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power to change is the 'heads, hands and heart' of the educators who work in schools (Sirotnik & Clark, 1988, p. 660), and that the school staff is the key to improvement (Goodlad, 1984; Hopkins, 1987; Clift et al, 1989; Hargreaves, 1997) then future school reform policies and practices will need to reflect such an orientation.

This, in my opinion, is one of the major challenges facing educators worldwide: that of shifting from a bureaucratic, top-down model to one which emphasises school-site management, that is, one in which educators at school level are encouraged to take decision-making more seriously and endorse the responsibilities that such devolution entails (Holly & Southworth, 1989; West-Burnham, 1992; West, 1995). If teacher empowerment is utilised properly, members of staff will slowly begin to feel that they are respected and valued as individuals who can contribute in meaningful ways to school improvement. It is a slow process that can be gruelling at times, with its ups and downs; however, it is the road worth taking.

Instructional Supervision and Evaluation

For effective and lasting development to take place instructional support and supervisory systems need to be established. The main objective behind such systems would be to promote the professional growth of teachers. Instructional support and supervision embraces all activities directed specifically towards the establishment, maintenance and improvement of the teaching-learning process in schools. Furthermore, it includes the improvement of teaching and learning strategies and provision of an atmosphere conducive to effective teaching and learning.

The need for instructional supervision in schools has been identified as crucial for quality improvements to take place. Schain (1988, p. 4) argued that:

> While colleges can do basic training in the arts and skills of teaching, the actual training of teachers must take place in schools where they teach. That's the real world and that's where teachers will spend most of their working lives. Accordingly, the question becomes, 'Who will train our teachers in the schools?' The answer is quite clear ...

Or is it, I would hasten to add? A lot will depend on the cultural context one is working in. With current developments in Malta, this will become a central issue, and definitely success or failure will be determined, in most cases, in the classroom. Given our current practices it will entail a lot of work, what I have described as adaptive challenges (Bezzina, 1999c, p. 55). Change requires that we clarify our values, develop new ways of thinking and learning. Adaptive work is required when our deeply held beliefs are challenged, when ingrained attitudes have to be contested,

when particular ways of doing things are questioned. There will be a lot of this taking place in the months and years to come in our schools, and throughout the education system.

Pfeiffer & Dunlap (1982) had noted through their research that instructional supervision is needed to help teachers improve their instructional performance, motivate their professional growth and implement their curricular development. They concluded that the ultimate goal of instructional supervision is to improve student development that may be achieved through changing teacher behaviour, modifying the curriculum or restructuring the learning environment.

As Danielson & McGreal (2000) stated, supervision is needed for all teachers in schools – the new, the inexperienced, and the able. According to Glanz & Neville (1997), staff development programmes would be more effective when tied to a systematic programme of in-class supervision to assess what in-service activities might be needed and when such activities are likely to be productive. The focus is on job-embedded learning. The type of instructional support/supervision that is most likely to yield productive professional development is one of collaboration. I concur with the view of Harris & Ovando (1992, p. 13) who view collaboration as implying collegiality, co-operation, teaming and networking. It refers to a process by which people with diverse expertise (teachers, heads, supervisors and others) work jointly with equal status and shared commitment in order to achieve mutually beneficial instructional goals.

The major characteristics of collaboration, in their view, include mutual respect, tolerance, acceptance, commitment, courage, sharing of ideas and information, adherence to laws, regulations and rules, a philosophy of shared decision-making, teaming as the central mode of organisation for action, and a 'we' paradigm as opposed to an 'I' or 'you' paradigm.

Whilst we may agree with the argument put forward by Harris & Ovando (1992) regarding the importance behind equal status, shared commitment and mutually beneficial goals, I am also of the opinion that that can only be sustained within a supportive role. The real challenge will be when teachers or whoever, do not want to address the challenges facing educational reform. This is where reality and theoretical paradigms come into play.

The NMC believes in the principles that Harris & Ovando (1992) put forward and, in fact, are to be found in quite a number of the documents referred to in this article. Yet, what the NMC documents fail to address is what will happen if and when some educators do not want to collaborate or else do not see the need for particular changes in the way they teach.

An important and desirable component of instructional supervision is evaluation, which is described as 'the process of determining goodness or badness of something' (Daresh & Playko, 1992, p. 284). Poston &

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Manatt (1993) argue that evaluation improves teaching, enhances productivity in student learning, and provides the means for professional growth of the teachers evaluated. Goldsberry (1997) also suggested that self-evaluation, in particular, is necessary for continued professional development, that good and thorough self-evaluation should include seeking the perceptions of other colleagues, and that formal teacher evaluation procedures should be designed to evoke and abet teacher self-evaluation. French (1997) added that a sound model of continuous professional growth is one that allows teachers to examine critically their own classroom performance and to discover alternative ways of doing things.

Schools will need to put in a great deal of emphasis specifically on formative evaluation, which, as explained by Cousins (1995), Danielson (2001) and Iwanicki (2001), amongst others, is conducted primarily to enhance professional development of teachers.

This form of professional development will become a crucial component in the years to come. It is one way that teachers not only look at their own practice and gather evidence of its effect, but also build 'teacher knowledge' to put alongside 'researcher knowledge' (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Zeichner, 1998). Within this context we see schools developing what Wenger (1998) has defined as 'communities of practice' as teachers think, learn and work together.

Therefore, Maltese schools need to develop supervision and evaluation systems as part of the culture of the schools in order to promote professional growth experiences of teachers. As Marsh (1999, p. 195) argues, effectiveness happens only when practice is changed. Communities of practice within a school only come into being when they build from their histories of doing things together to respond to the needs of the school.

Internal Support

Schools are the most immediate sources of internal support for teacher professional growth. According to Duke (1990, p. 135), teachers' success in growing professionally is 'a function not only of their own innovation, awareness and imagination but of the nature of the schools … in which they teach'.

Therefore, Maltese schools need to develop and maintain support structures that will enhance the professional growth of teachers. Ultimately, what is needed is a paradigm shift that begins with unlocking schools' existing cultures, of rethinking, reconceptualising and reassessing the nature of schooling. Weller (1998) talks of the importance of introducing a reengineering conceptual framework in order to bring school reform about. Maxwell (1993) identified a number of mechanisms that can help to sustain the work of the school:

Establishing effective interpersonal relationships (Poston & Manatt, 1993)

Establishing developmental priorities by school leaders that cater for individual and group needs (Maxwell, 1993)

Developing plans that incorporate both formal and informal professional development opportunities into the professional culture of the school (Maxwell, 1993)

Facilitating teachers' action learning in schools (Yuen & Cheng, 2000)

Providing teachers with opportunities for peer coaching to take place; to visit teachers in other schools; to observe colleagues teaching (Duke, 1990)

Providing professional literature (e.g. books and journals) that supports teacher reflection and growth (Good & Brophy, 1987)

Devising alternative ways to generate funds to support in-service training programme (Licklider, 1997)

What is here being recommended are various forms that staff development practices can take. In fact, no one approach to professional development works for all teachers. School leaders need to provide a combination of approaches that will help them and their staff to adequately address the growing societal demands.

Induction

Staff development strategies for the twenty-first century in Malta should include continuous, well-planned, school-based induction programmes for beginning teachers (Bezzina & Camilleri, 1998). As yet, this important phase within the professional development continuum for teachers is lacking. Schools need to devise appropriate professional induction seminars and workshops for new teachers to extend their professional knowledge and skills acquired during the pre-service stage. The school leader, or a specific member of the school leadership team, needs to be responsible for the continuing professional development of teachers in their schools.

External Support

The support given by external agencies such as the University and private institutions (e.g. Malta University Services, Malta Institute of Management, Chamber of Commerce) will need to be more focused and intensified at all levels of education. At the moment, the Strategic Plan (Ministry of Education, 2001) talks of the traditional form of training – the 'sit and get' type. We will need to move away from a strategy that sees teachers being passive recipients to what is being delivered to situations which are more individualised, more focused on the needs of specific groups, of specific schools. We need strategies that help to combine

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efforts from various institutions, whether these are the traditional short courses (e.g. 3-5-day courses), to degree-awarding courses that allow participants to directly address immediate and long-term needs at the school site.

At a time when educational reform in Malta is in the making, the role of the Ministry of Education is especially important. Whilst it is spearheading all the initiatives currently underway, I personally see the need for a greater effort to develop mechanisms that promote networks that provide opportunities for continued professional growth on a systematic basis. Rather than condition (and as a result restrict) teachers to follow mandatory courses, teachers, schools ought to be encouraged to pursue different forms of learning opportunities wherever these can be sought and be of relevance to an institution.

Within such a scenario, schools will need to strengthen their links with the community. Schools, in clusters, can work at the identification of needs, research or training that they might need, and thus benefit not only from the sharing that such an opportunity gives, but also help minimise costs. And, as the Faculty aims to establish stronger relationships with schools (Bezzina, 1999b), this could be an opportunity that helps teachers to become leaders in areas such as mentoring, in-service education and action research (Fessler, 1990; Sagor, 2000; Dyer, 2001). Reward systems should be created so as to accredit teachers who pursue varied training programmes. Such a possibility can be the accreditation of varied courses that teachers attend for the reading of a diploma/Masters degree. In this way, teachers are encouraged to keep abreast of changes and developments taking place and get acknowledgement for doing so.

What this article has recommended is a commitment, a personal, collective and strategic commitment to develop policies that promote professional development and facilitate teacher growth in schools. Figure 1 depicts a recommended staff development framework for schoolteachers in Malta.

Conclusions

This article has proposed a professional development agenda for Malta to face the education reform challenges of the twenty-first century. The key to more productive staff development for Maltese teachers lies in maximum involvement and participation of the teachers themselves. Traditionally, training was an activity that was mainly *done* to teachers. The new systems proposed here place teachers in more active and professional roles as they learn to create and use the services of outside agencies in order to undergo professional experiences that are relevant to their needs and those of the school. Such an approach to professional development will require the total support of heads of school, the school

leadership teams, school councils, etc., working in collaboration with central education officials, the Ministry of Education and other agencies.
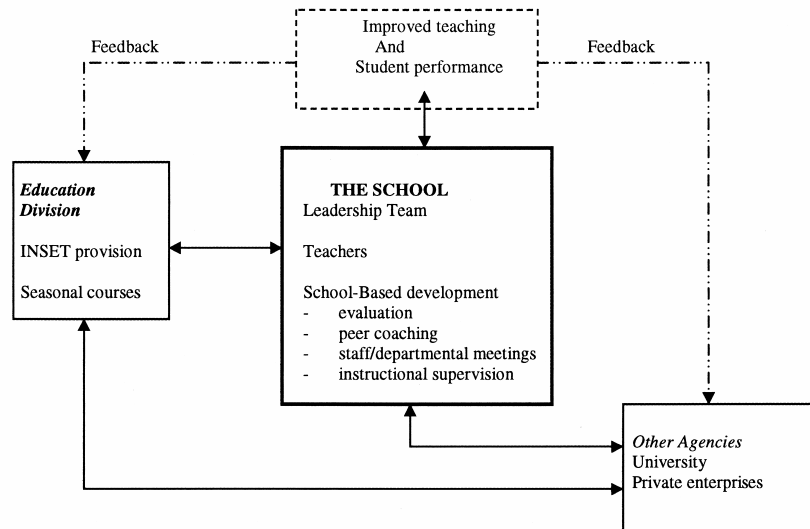

Figure 1. A model of in-service education in Malta.

The head of school, in particular, will need to be more active and creative in encouraging teachers to participate in school-based development initiatives. In this regard, heads must ensure that their own knowledge in matters relating to professional development is comprehensive and up-to-date. They will need to demonstrate a commitment to continuing in-service professional growth of teachers, to promote a healthy professional growth climate in their schools, and to evaluate and monitor the progress in professional development of teachers.

Those organisations involved in developing in-service education programmes will need to address teachers' concerns related to their professional growth and create incentives for teachers as they pursue their career path.

In designing staff development programmes, the Ministry of Education should endeavour to provide adequate resources and support, and to put more emphasis on school-based professional programmes as part of a school improvement culture, as opposed to isolated activities organised during the school holidays.

The shifts described in this article are significant and powerful. Whilst acknowledging that a lot is already being done, the focus is on the need to see the school as the focal point that education authorities should direct their energies in order to really bring about improved

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learning. The proposals aim to turn the school into a learning community. All the things that have been described will serve to unleash the most powerful source of success for all students – the daily presence of adults who are passionately committed to their own lifelong learning within organisations that are continually renewing themselves.

Note

[1] It is to be noted that authors have used the terms 'staff development', 'teacher development', 'professional development' and 'in-service education' interchangeably to refer to any experience designed to enhance teacher performance with the ultimate aim of promoting student learning.

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