Educational Reform in the Maltese Islands

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Abstract:

The political change in 1964, when the Maltese Islands became an Independent Archipelago, initiated a number of revolutionary reforms that the Maltese Education sector has been going through ever since. These last ten years have been extremely significant for Maltese Education, because of the several major measures and reforms that have been introduced. Their aim was to augment the country's intellectual capital and provide improved quality education that will help all Maltese children to succeed. Replacing the questionable dichotomy of 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' has been, for the past decade, part of an extensive drive by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment and the Education Division to reform the education system in Malta. This paper will present a historical overview of the educational reforms aimed at devolving greater responsibilities to the schools and in particular the establishment of school networks. It will also treat the kind of leadership that has helped to sustain this transition in Maltese Education, so that schools will 'provide improved quality education in Malta' (Galea, 2005: xii), and the implications of educational reform in the Maltese Islands.

Introduction

An overview of factual and historical information about the Maltese educational system together with how the Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment, with its innovative reform on school Networks and restructuring the Education Division, is translating theory into practice would help the reader place the content of this paper in its proper perspective.

A review of the historical development of Maltese Education shows that the ultimate objective of the implementation of Maltese educational reforms was to augment the country's intellectual capital and this has always been a priority of the Maltese Government.   The main educational landmarks, in the history of Maltese Education are:

- ❖ The Compulsory Attendance Act of 1924

- ❖ The Compulsory Education Ordinance of 1946 that made school attendance compulsory until the age of 14.

- ❖ Secondary education for all in 1970.

- ❖ Reviewing the school leaving age in 1974.[i]

- ❖ The introduction of a National Minimum Curriculum in 1999.

- ❖ The Setting up of School Networks in 2006, commonly known as Colleges.

The several major Educational Reforms that have been implemented throughout the years, especially those after September 1964,[ii] continue to underline the mission of the Minister of Education as an agent of change.

Maltese Educational Institutions

The Maltese education system (from Kindergarten to University) together with its examination system followed very closely (because of Malta's Colonial past) the British model (Sultana *et al.,* 1997; Zammit Ciantar, 1993; Zammit Mangion, 1992). Three different organisations[iii] offer Maltese students the opportunity to receive an education. While about thirty percent of the student population attends non-state schools, seventy percent attends State Schools. The Maltese Mainstream Education System today, is presented in Table 1 (p4). Education in the Maltese educational institutions[iv] (except those attending one of the Church Schools or one of the Independent Schools) is free of charge.   Those students who attend a Church School may be asked for annual contributions to fund school projects (Sultana *et al.,* 1997). On the other hand, those students attending one of the few Independent Schools are charged an annual fee.   Parents of these students are now receiving a tax relief when they submit their annual income tax returns.

The Maltese Educational System (Past, Present and Future)

The Maltese educational system had been and, in certain areas, still is, a centralised one, in that the Government has the right to establish the National Minimum Curriculum of study for the Schools (Ministry of Education, 1998). Studies (e.g. Farrugia, 1992; Wain, 1991; Zammit Mangion, 1992) give evidence of the highly centralised and bureaucratic characteristics of the Maltese state educational system. The Education Division, the principal sector of the Ministry, is responsible in terms of the Education Act (Act XXIV of 1988), for the provision of an efficient and effective system of schools which, whilst ensuring education and training in areas relevant to the needs of Maltese society, affords the individual without any distinction of age, gender, belief or economic means, the opportunity to develop his/her full cognitive, affective and operative potential to prepare students for life, including their working life.

The 1988 Education Act states that it is the duty and right of the State to:

❖ ensure the existence of a system of schools and institutions accessible to all
   Maltese citizens for the full development of the whole personality including
   the ability of every person to work;

❖ establish the national minimum curriculum of studies for all schools.[v]

However, embarking on a review of the education system by transforming it into a new framework that will make it more relevant and effective for the needs of the Maltese children and Malta, for the past decade or so, the Ministry of Education has been promoting decentralisation in the educational system so that decisions are taken at school level and action becomes more effective (Zammit Ciantar, 1996).

This policy of decentralisation, which carries

> '…with it the promise of igniting dynamic processes and proactive
> behaviour that could make the school more responsive to its
> community of learners.' (Sultana, R.G. in Sultana *et al.*, 1997: 103)

never looked back ever since it was set in motion. It was outlined again in the Government's Programme when elected to power in 2003:

> '…the Education Division will move away from its role as the
> operator of government schools, and evolve into a regulator of the
> entire sector…'[6]

Table 1:

The Maltese Mainstream Education System – School Year 2005/2006
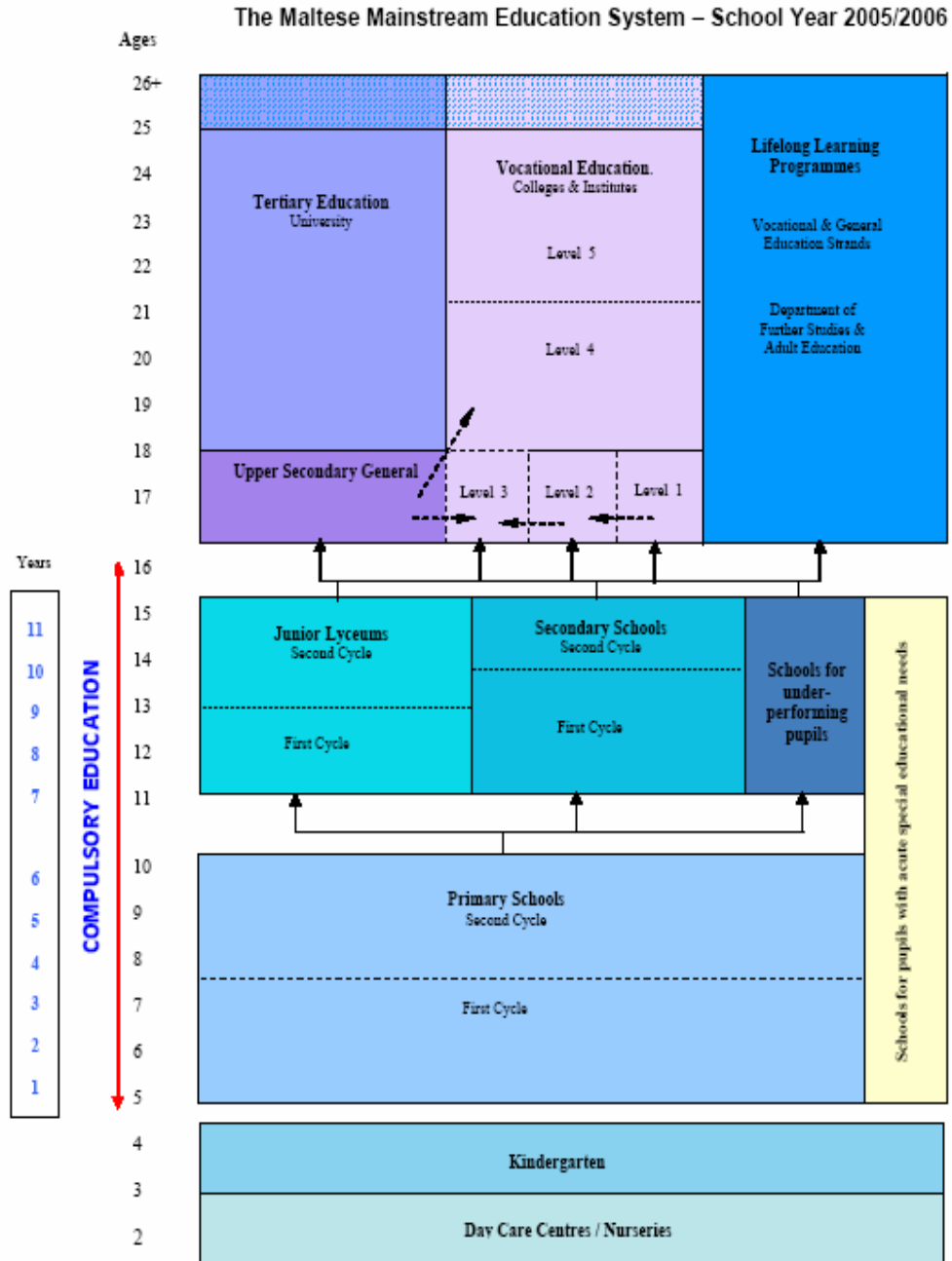
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> In the same vein, decentralistion in the public sector will proceed
> with added impetus. Aided by administrative support and the
> development of managerial skills, State schools will acquire greater
> autonomy and will be in a position to nurture their own identities…'[7]

The Honourable Dr Louis Galea[8] continued in the footsteps of his predecessors, and on behalf of the Government, has been encouraging and providing for a decentralisation process of the education system involving educational administrators, teachers, parents and School Councils in order to increase the autonomy of educational institutions, in consonance with the wider context of decentralisation and devolution of authority and power at the national level. 'The Committee also must recommend a strategy for the decentralisation and the management of schools.' (Galea, 2000: 490). As a strategic leader, he has been setting direction for Maltese Education.

> 'Strategic leaders are concerned with not just managing the now but
> setting up a framework of where the organisation needs to be in the future,
> setting a direction for the organisation.' (Davies & Davies, 2006: 123)

This process of decentralisation, which underlines the Minister's policy to act and move from theory to praxis and translates vision into action, underpins that quality of educational leadership that provides opportunities for educators to engage in continuing professional development. In line with the process of implementation delineated in the Strategic Plan 'National Curriculum on its Way', the National Curriculum Council (NCC) set up fifteen Focus Groups. This practice of consultation and collaboration has been a suitable background to the first task undertaken by the Focus Groups in which they created an Action Plan. All educational stakeholders; such as educators, researchers and policy makers, in their own way, contribute different facets of knowledge needed to nurture student learning. 'Each kind of knowledge is critical to creating conditions to improve learning for students.' (Halverson, 2004).

The Ministry of Education Youth and Employment has been striving to empower school authorities and cultivate a culture of participation at school level. The NCC, a year into its inception, invited schools to take every opportunity offered to them to participate in projects that answer their needs, that mirror the priorities in their Development Plans and that help them implement the National Minimum Curriculum (NMC). The interest, consultation, and collaboration that characterized the designing of the NMC will now be permanent features of its implementation.

Research (Kaplan and Norton, 1996, 2001; Grundy, 1998; Gratton; 2000, Hirschhorn, 1997; van der Heijden, 1996) has shown that creating an arena for dialogue and participation is one of the qualities of good leadership. Davies and Davies contend that good leadership '…involves awakening the people…' and nurturing the right atmosphere so as '… to create through dialogue a shared conceptual or mental map of the future.'
(Davies & Davies; 2006:125). As Bezzina rightly wrote:

> 'Leadership is the act of identifying important goals and then
> motivating and enabling others to devote themselves and all necessary
> resources to achievement.' (Bezzina, 2006: 27).

This 'belief' in this form of leadership has been clearly articulated by the Minister of Education Youth and Employment. It has been the Maltese Government's intention to sustain the pace of reform in education so as to further increase existing participation rates in line with the nation's socio-economic development needs. In the Minister of Education Youth and Employment's words, the future of Malta's education system lies in '…widespread discussion and dialogue, with all stakeholders particularly and the general public.' (Galea, 2005: xii).

Prudence, contribution and involvement in the implementation of the proposed reforms that will transform the education system into a new framework, which will enhance the teaching and learning process, and eventually help all Maltese children to succeed, are basis of the Minister's criterion. 'Precautions will be taken to phase-in the reforms and the widest possible consensus will be sought.' (Galea, 2005: xii).

Richard Halverson cites Aristotle's description of political phronesis through which political leaders strive and work for the good of the community.

> 'Political phronesis is the ability to "deliberate well about what is
> good and expedient" and to act accordingly for the good of a community
> or state' (Aristotle 1941, p.1026 cited in Halverson, 2004).

The Minister of Education, Youth and Employment's political phronesis highlights his qualities of leadership that continue to be reflected in performance, because school administrative personnel and teaching members of staff, have been asked to contribute towards curriculum development and implementation[10]. However, the Education Division is still responsible for curriculum development, implementation and review.[11]
Although, until the recent past the Maltese educational system has been largely centralised, 'State schools have enjoyed freedom of action in a number of areas…' (Attard, 1996: 11). In fact, Maltese State schools produce their own source materials to complement the textbooks, select and purchase equipment and teaching and learning materials from centrally allocated funds. Half-yearly examinations are school based and although annual examinations are designed and co-ordinated by the central authorities, nominated teachers are involved in the setting of these annual papers. Each Head of School formulates a three-year business plan in consultation with his/her staff and in accordance with overall national objectives, priorities and programmes. Several administrative decisions are now taken at school level or by the School Council. Only the recruitment, deployment, discipline and promotion of staff, remains the onus of the Education Division.

The Ministry's vision of decentralisation underlines the concept that education is a continuous process. Reform and innovation are an essential element of the process to satisfy both the developing economy and national aspirations. The top management structure of the Education Division[12] had been reformed in order to decentralise the

system. The senior management of the previous Education Department with a Director, a Deputy Director and three Assistant Directors, had, by 1995, become an Education Division with six Departments[13] (Attard, 1996). The executive head of the State system of Education is the Director General of the Education Division who is appointed from within the teaching profession. Each Directorate (except the Director of Corporate Services) was to have a number of Education Officers covering specific subjects, geographical areas, services, units, or the administration of an educational sector.

The Ministry did not rest on its laurels, but continued to nurture the new policy of dialogue and participation. On the 2nd May 1997, a conference was held for head teachers, which set the first steps towards translating the concept of "Quality Education" from theory into practice. The conference initiated the idea of School Development Planning in Maltese Schools, which inspired a series of inter-related projects over the next eight years (Ministry of Education Youth and Employment, 2005).

This brings the author to May 2006. The Government, represented by the Minister of Education Youth and Employment, believes that restructuring the Education Division should continue to strengthen local education. _The Education (Amendment) Act, 2006,_ introduced in Parliament in May 2006, addresses the existing senior management of the Education Division. Two Directorates,[14] lead by two distinct Directors General, each with a separate and different mission from the other, will substitute the existing only Director General. The Ministry is proposing the creation of a new directorate that will focus on quality standards throughout the Education System and it should make Maltese Education relevant to the 21st Century needs of Maltese children, and a second directorate for Educational Services. This structural evolution of the Education Division, that is to be entrenched in the Education Act, is a further statement that the Ministry of Education is not only applying theory, but is perpetuating other qualities of good leadership. Bezzina's quote of Brian Caldwell that, 'Leadership is about creating new realities.' (Bezzina, 2005:27) continues to underline the qualities of good leadership exemplified by the Ministry. In giving legal status to the future two Directorates, that will replace the existing Director General, the Ministry is taking the offensive and establishing future directions in creating a more approachable and receptive support structures. A restructured education authority that will help school leaders and educators dialogue and participate in establishing future policies and methods that will enhance the teaching and learning process where it matters – within school in general and networks in particular. This renewed process will continue to replace '…the dichotomy of 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' approaches to educational change.' (Galea, 2005: xi) and make the education system more effective and relevant to the needs of Maltese children and Maltese society.

The mission of the new Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education, as stipulated in the Bill[15], shall be

'…to regulate, establish, monitor and assure standards and quality
in the programmes and educational services in the compulsory
educational levels provided by schools, whether State schools or not,
as provided for in this Act.' (Education Act, Cap.327, Paragraph 8).

The second Directorate for Educational Services will

'…ensure the effective and efficient operation of and delivery of
services to the Colleges and State schools within an established
framework of decentralisation and autonomy.'
(Education Act, Cap.327, Paragraph 10).

The Maltese National Examination System

The gift of political leadership of the Minister of Education Youth and Employment was not limited only to the structural reform of the Education Division. It incorporated also the Maltese National Examination system[16]. In 2004 the Minister of Education Youth and Employment commissioned a committee to review the existing MATSEC National Examination System. Their terms of reference was

'…to carry out a review of the current national MATSEC examinations
at SEC and Matriculation levels and to advise on the future of the
external certification in Malta at secondary and post-secondary stages.'
(Grima *et al.,* 2005).

Informative and consultation talks were held with the major stakeholders (Examination Boards; Heads of State, Church and Independent Schools; educators; students and parents) to collect data that will help the committee draw-up a report. Their brief also required them to put forward recommendations about potential decisions addressing the MATSEC examinations.

The 11+ Examination: An overview

Until 1970 Maltese students had to sit for an 11+ Examination[17] to gain access to secondary education while those who could afford to pay enrolled their children in the existing Independent and Church Schools.   Between 1972 and 1981, 11+ examinations were abolished and students in state schools could proceed from primary to secondary education.   Church schools still continued to hold competitive 11+ examinations for new entrants into their secondary schools.   This was mainly done for prospective candidates into Boys' Church Schools, as those attending a Primary Girls' Church School could proceed to the secondary level without any form of competitive exam.

In 1974 the Government set up Trade Schools and students, after the third year of Secondary education could opt to go to one of the trade schools as an alternative secondary education of the vocational type.   The students who normally attend these schools are the non-academically motivated and children with limited abilities (Buhagiar, 1998).

The Comprehensive system in state schools came to an end in 1981 when selective practices were re-introduced. Two 11+ exams are held for all interested students who are in their sixth year of primary education. One exam distributes students into Junior Lyceums and area Secondary schools while another exam distributes the few gifted hundreds into the various Church schools. In the opening of the debate on a Bill amending the Education Act[18], Dr Louis Galea implied that state schools had to follow the model of some of their counterparts in the non-state sector. A number of church and independent schools offer a shock-free process from kindergarten to secondary. Students who attend these schools do not have to sit for an 11+ exam to proceed from the Primary to the Secondary level. Because the 11+ exam is considered by many a source of stress for many a child and parents, and has been the topic of long and interesting debates, the Minister has earmarked this Exam for review; [this review is underway and a report is to be submitted in June 2007] to see whether it should be removed or improved.

The 16+ and 18+ External Examinations: An overview

The Secondary course prepares the students for the 16+ Secondary Education Certificate (SEC) examinations of the University of Malta or foreign exams (G.C.E[19]) such as those set by the University of London. One local Boys' Independent School prepares its students for the IGCSE[20] run by the University of Cambridge.

The successful candidates can proceed to a two-year post-secondary course, at the end of which they sit for the 18+ Matriculation Certificate Exams. Success gives the candidates the option to move on to tertiary education at the University or one of the many of specialised vocational schools. Those students who are more inclined towards technical education attend technical courses at MCAST[21] and at the end of the course sit either for the UK-based City and Guilds or local 16+ technical exams. The successful candidates can continue to follow technical courses, at a more specialized level at MCAST.

For over forty years, the 16+ and 18+ testing system of Maltese secondary and post-secondary school students depended almost entirely on foreign exams, which were considered not to match the needs of the Maltese educational objectives. The local students had to sit for exam papers set by English examination boards. During the seventies the Maltese Government worked on a policy that would eventually change the Maltese education system from one based on the English system to one designed to meet Malta's need (Sultana, 1997; Zammit Ciantar, 1993; Zammit Mangion, 1992). In 1988, the Maltese education authorities decided to begin the phasing out of the traditional (G.C.E.) Ordinary and Advanced level system[22] and replace it gradually by a locally based system of external examinations for both 16+ and 18+ students. The new system, which became known as Matriculation and Secondary Education Certificate [MATSEC], was to be built on the foundations of the then existing Matriculation system of examinations run by the University of Malta. The philosophy of this new system of exams compliments the second principle of the National Minimum Curriculum[23] in that the state will guarantee the best education experience for all the students irrespective of their abilities (*Creating the Future Together* – National Minimum Curriculum, 1999).

The Minister of Education Youth and Employment's philosophy in that the focus of the restructuring and renewal process in the educational sector should be the child, has motivated him to nurture in policy makers the reason to embark on a comprehensive process of educational review. One of the areas that have gone under review is the 16+ and 18+ National External Examination. Reviewing the MATSEC should improve the quality of education in Malta and the direction this takes.

After much consultation and dialogue, the core review committee concluded that different stakeholders perceive the MATSEC examination differently and that '…these different voices' (Grima et al., 2005:75) must be heard. Considering that the 16+ and 18+ National external exams are a crucial part of the child's educational process, '…a sound examination system needs to ascertain a level of quality…' (Grima *et al.,* 2005: 75).

> 'MATSEC must either seriously consider a restructuring of the present time frames, or else recruit more personnel who would be responsible for tasks related to quality assurance.' (Grima *et al.,* 2005: 83).

The review presented by the core committee, under the leadership of the chairperson Dr. Grima, augurs well for the future of the MATSEC Examinations System and Maltese education, and to ultimately succeed in providing the right environment for all children to succeed.

Conclusions

This historical overview of Educational Reform in the Maltese Islands has highlighted mainly the achievements in the last two decades or so. Educational Reform has continued to stress the overall mission of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment throughout the years, to ultimately achieve its goal in seeking to prepare students for life, including their working life. The Minister of Education, Youth and Employment himself, in the forward of the publication *'For All Children to Succeed'*, admits that the Maltese Education system needs a renewal to remain relevant in the 21st Century. (Galea, 2005:xi). The major reforms[24] in the educational sector, in the last decade, brought with them changes, which were intended to offer new challenges and opportunities. These changes are contributing to more democracy and managerial freedom in Maltese state schools.

Decentralisation, Restructuring and School Networks

The Education (Amendment) Act, 2006, Part II Section 10[25] (introduced in Parliament by the Honourable Dr Louis Galea, M.P., Minister of Education, Youth and Employment on the 29th May, 2006) addresses directly decentralisation and autonomy of the new Colleges and State Schools. The provision for the creation of new networks at Maltese State primary and secondary education levels, and the restructuring of the Education Division in the Bill that was read the First time at the Parliamentary Sitting of the 29th May, 2006 is the end result of the implementation of the Educational Reforms.

Maltese Education has come a long way in these past forty-three years.[26] The Ministry of Education Youth and Employment has slowly, but surely moved away from centralisation, from a top-down philosophy and practice. In the process, both the Ministry and the Education Division have translated vision into action by providing autonomy to school units and other educational establishments. Attard (1996: 14) underlines this when he states that:

> 'In conformity with the ongoing decentralisation process at government level, both the education system and educational institutions are being gradually but steadily decentralised so that decisions are made and taken at the lowest possible level and action becomes more effective.'

Decentralisation is said to strengthen development and improvements in schools as learning communities because it underpins the transfer of decision-making to individual schools. The historical milestones of Maltese Education in the last decade have shown that decentralisation has affected Maltese education positively. There has been a proactive reaction and has made 'schools more responsive to its community of learners.' (Sultana *et al.,* 1997:103)

The process of autonomy and democracy has brought about changes that were to be forbearers of future changes with one goal in mind, making the child the centre of learning. 'Our focus in this restructuring and renewal process is the child who will benefit from enhanced teaching-learning process.' (Galea, 2005: xiii).

The top educational management of the Ministry has continued to strive in its journey to translate the concept of quality education from theory into practice. May 2003 saw the launch of the EXCEL Network[27] because local leaders in education have systematically looked beyond Maltese shores to ensure that what was taking place in Maltese schools was comparable with the latest happenings and trends internationally. This experience was intended to help in making the implementation of reforms successful and improve the quality of Maltese education wherein every child will succeed. Further implementation of the Reforms continues to deepen the commitment of Maltese educators to make our educational system more child-centred.

The Minister of Education, Youth and Employment has been receiving the reports and accompanying recommendations in a number of areas in which reforms have been implemented or will be implemented. Each report is intended to form part of the ongoing comprehensive educational review, and provide a backdrop for the vision to strengthen and improve the quality of education in Malta and the direction this takes. This, according to the Ministry will help leaders and educators nurture new ways on how to deliver improved and better managed education services.

Recommendations

The Minister of Education, Youth and Employment speaking at the opening of the debate on a Bill amending the Education Act stated: 'The Bill creates the legislative framework for state schools to be grouped into colleges….' (Galea, 2006).

The Minister believes that in this new phase of educational reforms networks will play a central role. They will improve Maltese education because they will offer the opportunity for teachers to share and draw on the knowledge of other stakeholders, such as other teachers, parents and professionals. Bezzina's definition of networking: 'Networking means cooperation and solidarity' (Bezzina, 2006: 81) underlines collaborative working and like other studies (Hill and Lynn, 2003; Huxham, C., ed. 1996; Lieberman, A. 1990) stresses the importance of team work. Collaboration helps the teachers address, not only their problems but also the problems of the students. It can inspire teachers to design 'strategies to ensure that struggling students receive additional time and support, no matter who their teacher is.' (Bezzina, 2006: 89). Furthermore, networks will

> '…mediate between centralised and decentralised structures, and assist
> in the process of re-structuring and re-culturing educational organisations
> and systems.' (Hopkins, 2000).

Research has shown (Anderson & Thomas, 2004; Hannon, 2004; Wohlstetter *et al.,* 2003) that networks not only do they challenge our notions of leadership, but that they underline the importance of good leadership and co-leadership. Shared leadership provides space for dialogue and debate. When people share in shaping the changes around them, they will be able to empower others to do the same.

I believe that the past and present reforms were all planned with positive objectives and that the ultimate goal is to add significantly to teachers' professional development and children's learning in order to raise standards. However, introducing a new system or an innovative reform is not enough. This has to be complemented and managed by the right kind of leadership and governance that manage to unite all the school communities around a purpose that is relevant, whatever the contexts or current circumstances. Leaders and policy makers need to remember that implementing innovative reforms is not enough but that attention should be given to careful preparation, piloting, gradual implementation, periodic evaluation, research, training and effective dialogue with stakeholders, including proper campaigns.

Author's Research

School networking is still in its embryo stage and (as with all forms of innovations) needs to be monitored and, when the need arises, fine tuned so that Maltese society would continue to benefit and reap the best results for all Maltese children to succeed. The author's Doctorate research, which he started in October 2006 at Bath University, is on Educational Leadership vis-à-vis School Networks in Malta. The title of this research which is '*An Analysis of Educational Leadership in an Inter-School Networking context in the Maltese* Islands' has one underlying overall aim: To analyse the nature of educational leadership in the context of interschool networks in the Maltese Islands.

The creation of inter-school networks is part of the Maltese Government's drive to implement educational reform in the Maltese Islands. The inter-school networks and the whole educational reform have significant implications for educational leadership

and present an excellent research opportunity which has considerable potential to develop understandings of educational leadership.

In October 2005 the Maltese Government piloted four Colleges that were to introduce the concept of school networks in the Maltese Islands. In October 2006 another four Colleges were established. The Maltese Government believes that with the right leadership and governance, the formation of networks that are driven by collaborative and competitive endeavour can play a significant role in creating a first class system of education and of schools (Galea, 2005: xi).

In educational settings, networks have been characterised as *'purposeful social entities characterized by a commitment to quality, rigour, and a focus on standards and student learning.'* (Ministry of Education Youth and Employment, 2005: 37). School networks are seen as having the potential to stimulate teamwork and motivate key players to work together in a collegial atmosphere that will lead to the improvement of both student and teacher learning. Arguably, these outcomes can only be achieved with the right leadership and thus leadership of networks is critical to their success. The leadership of the Colleges is therefore not only of considerable importance but of research interest.

The interpretation of the collected data will be categorised according to four key themes:
- The nature of Educational Leadership
- Collaboration
- Accountability
- Management boundaries.

The research questions will be as follows:

1. What is the nature of inter-school networks in the Maltese Islands?
2. What is the nature of and influences on inter-school networking?
3. How do Heads of institutions in a network foster inter-school networking?
4. How do Heads influence teachers to work professionally with other teachers in school-networks in the Maltese Islands?
5. How do Heads foster dignity, respect and humanity amongst teachers in their leadership work in a networking context?
6. How has collaboration through inter-school networks in the Maltese Islands changed teaching practices?

The research will be carried out in two phases. The first will be a case study of the school network on the sister island of Gozo. The author intends to interview the Heads of the two Secondary and eleven Primary schools that make up the Gozo College. He will interview a sample of teachers, both individually and in groups, from schools. He will identify the sample of teachers to be interviewed during the interviews with the Heads. He will also collect relevant documents. During this phase, the author will also interview the Minister of Education, Youth and Employment for Malta, the Coordinator of the Gozo College and other high officials in the Ministry and Education Division. The author also intends to undertake a review of the relevant literature and to develop an appropriate analytical framework.

In the second stage, the author intends to undertake similar case studies of three Colleges in Malta. The data collection will focus on particular issues to emerge from the first case study. He then intends to undertake a cross case analysis of all four cases.

The author intends to work according to the ethical guidelines of the British Educational Research Association. Full confidentiality will be assured to all respondents. He will make it clear that all the answers will be kept confidential and that respondents will not be named. In this research there will be no mention of the name of any school where the respondents work. The author will not be collecting data from amongst students.

Future Research

Other research studies in this area and others should help unravel new realities about the comprehensive process of educational review that the Ministry of Education has embarked on. Educational research, as a process, is necessary and should be considered as an essential component within the brief of the directorates' portfolios because it can perform different functions in Education:

- It can help us determine if objectives had been achieved.
- As the complete study will be presented to all stakeholders, it will help educators improve the quality of educational life for the students, and enhance their own perception of school realities.

Future research and evaluation of the reforms, especially those that address the creation of new networks or Colleges, and the restructuring of the Education Division, should be embarked upon, so that the discoveries of new truths will empower and offer beneficial directions to all stakeholders who have one common goal, the enhancement of the teaching-learning process.

Concluding Note

Reforms have shown that improvements in key areas are possible. They continue to strengthen Malta's Educational System whose core principle is the importance and centrality of clear focus on student learning. Providing for students' needs and understanding the real meaning of child-centred education, should help us understand that reviewing educational policies should be an ongoing process because there is always room for improvement. Although Education in Malta has made progress, we cannot stop there. The leaders, officials and persons concerned should strive to continue on this road of progress so that Maltese Education will continue to provide an improved quality education in Malta where the child truly becomes and remains at the core of our educational discourse.

Notes

1. The compulsory school leaving age was raised to 16 in 1974.

2. The Maltese Archipelago became an Independent one on the 21st September 1964.

3. State, Church and Independent Schools

4. Kindergarten, Primary, Secondary state schools, University Junior College, MCAST and University

5. The Honourable Minister of Education, Youth and Employment, in March 1996, initiated a consultative exercise aimed at presenting a draft curriculum document to the Minister of Education; and in 1999 set up a National Steering Committee for the Implementation of the National Curriculum chaired by Professor Kenneth Wain

6. From the Government's Programme as outlined in the Address by the HE Prof. Guido de Marco, President of Malta on the occasion of the opening of the Tenth Parliament, 24th May 2003.

7. From the Government's Programme as outlined in the Address by the H.E. Profs. Guido de Marco, President of Malta on the occasion of the opening of the Tenth Parliament, 24th May 2003

8. Minister of Education, Youth and Employment since 1998

9. The Steering Committee on the Implementation of the National Curriculum set up in 1999

10. "The insights came from the contribution of all those who were motivated to actively participate in the process of developing the National Curriculum,…'(Galea, 2000: ix)

11. 'As a result of the 1994 new organisational structure of the Education Division, a new Department was created, i.e. the Department of Curriculum Development, Implementation and Review.' (Sammut, (Ed.) 1996:3)

12. Prior to the 1995 reform the Education Division had the nomenclature of the Education Department

13. Director (Planning and Development) with three Assistant Directors
    Director (Operations) with four Assistant Directors
    Director (Further Studies and Adult Education) with three Assistant Directors
    Director (Student Services and International Relations) with three Assistant Directors
    Director (Curriculum Development, Implementation and Review) with three

Assistant Directors
Director of Corporate Services

14. Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education
Directorate for Educational Services

15. *An Act to amend the Education Act, Cap.327*, also known by its short title *Education (Amendment) Act, 2006*

16. The Maltese National External Examination system is made up of three forms of exams:
    a) The 11+ Junior Lyseum Exam.
    b) The 16+ Secondary Education Certificate (SEC) introduced in 1994.
    c) The 18+ Matriculation Certificate (MC) introduced in 1997.

17. The Local 11+ National Exam is known as the Junior Lyceum Exam

18. The Bill amending the Education Act was presented in Parliament by the Honourable Minister of Education Youth and Employment, Dr. Louis Galea on the 29th May, 2006

19. A General Certificate of Education certificate is awarded to all Maltese students who are successful in the exams set by the University of London Board

20. International General Certificate of Secondary Education

21. The Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology was reopened in August 2000 and incorporated into the law by the <u>*The Education (Amendment) Act, 2006*</u>.

22. Today Maltese students can still sit for exams run by the Universities of London and Cambridge.

23. National Minimum Curriculum, 1999. *Creating the Future Together* - An English translation of the publication in Maltese – <u>Inwelldu l-{ejjieni Flimkien</u> – Kurrikulu Minimu Nazzjonali.

24. The major reforms that brought about improvements in schools incorporated the following areas and subjects:
The National Minimum Curriculum
School Development Plans
Inclusion and Literacy Programmes
ICT in Schools
Standards and Quality
Level Descriptors
Teachers and School Accountability

25. Part II of <u>*The Education (Amendment) Act, 2006*</u> addresses the 'Constitution and Functions of Directorates of Education.'

26. The Maltese Islands received their Independence from British rule forty-two years ago, 21st September, 1964.

27. EXCEL Network: A forum, which networks Maltese school leaders with their counterparts in the UK, in order to share ideas and good practice.

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