Professional Development of Teachers at Malta's Giovanni Curmi Higher Secondary School: Contributions from a Stake-Holding Think Tank

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Abstract: This paper synthesises a group of educators' engagement with an action research project endorsed by the Council of Europe's Pestalozzi Programme's Action Research Group 2013 – 2014. Educators fulfilling duties at Giovanni Curmi Higher Secondary School (GCHSS) collaborated within the context of a think-tank by engaging in action research on professional development for teachers at Giovanni Curmi Higher Secondary School (PDGCHSS). Data that emerged from the foregoing research indicate that professional development (PD) should be grounded in, and not disconnected from, the school-context, and must be relevant to the teachers' everyday teaching. In addition, knowledge gained from PD training should not be sporadic or disconnected, but transferable to everyday practice. A highly bureaucratized system and lack of resources, such as time, financial resources and technological skills, are detrimental to teachers' motivation for PD

Keywords: professional development, post-secondary, action research

Introduction

This paper synthesises and reflects on a group of educators' involvement in an action research project endorsed by the Council of Europe's Pestalozzi Programme's Action Research Group 2013 – 2014 and approved by the Directorate of Quality and Standards in Education (DQSE, Malta). The project entails collaboration between a number of educators at Giovanni Curmi Higher Secondary School (GCHSS). These educators collaborate within the context of a think-tank by engaging in action research on professional development for teachers at Giovanni Curmi Higher Secondary School.

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As a concept, professional development in the context of this project is understood as the need for ongoing learning for educators (Beck & Kosnik, 2014) underpinned by "the great potential for stimulation and satisfaction in the profession" (p. xxv). In this sense, professional development is approached from a positive stance despite the "complex and demanding nature of teaching" (p. xxv).

In practice, PD within PDGCHSS included the establishment of and the engagement with a professional development community (Brody & Hadar, 2011) that fosters sustained engagement (Wang, Kim, Lee & Kim, 2014) with PD[1].PDGCHSS' grassroots' approach challenges approaches that impose PD "from above in the belief that teachers – left to themselves – would not seek it" (Beck & Kosnik, 2014, p. xxvi); as well as possible limitations experienced by teachers with respect managing their own professional development and consequently abide to suggested initiatives (Borg Castillo & Calleja, 2008).

The Pestalozzi Programme and its Action Research Group 2013-4

The Pestalozzi Programme is the Council of Europe's programme for training and capacity building of education professionals[2] from the fifty countries of the European Cultural Convention; as well as education professionals from neighbouring regions (Pestalozzi Proramme, n.d.). Primary objectives of the Programme include: to carry the message of the Council of Europe and its values – democracy, respect for human rights and dignity and the rule of law - into the practice of education (formal, non-formal and informal) and to support member states in the move from education policy to education practice in line with these values.

Activities and projects include the organisation of 30-40 training events on a yearly basis, as well as e-Training; the supply of training resources developed through its activities; publication of major outcomes; and the maintenance of an online, growing community of practice - in other words, a network of educational professionals who would have participated in the Pestalozzi Programme at some time and maintained online contact to share ideas, experiences and updates (Pestalozzi Programme, n.d.).

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[1]The research-based definition of sustained professional development calls for a minimum engagement of 12 weeks (Cordingley et al., 2004, as cited in, Wang et al., 2014). PDGCHSS' think-tankers engagement within PDGCHSS exceeds this minimum as it started in October 2013 and is on-going at the time of writing of this paper (September, 2014).

[2] The Pestalozzi Programme considers education professionals as "all those who have an active part to play in the day-to-day practice of education" (Pestalozzi Programme, n.d., p. 2).

One project within this framework is the Pestalozzi Programme Action Research Group 2013-4, an online community of educators from various signatory states of the Council of Europe engaged with action research projects in their respective schools and educational contexts. By means of collaboration between these educators, the project seeks improvement of individual practices through the process of action research as well as to monitor actions, reflect on them and share experiences (Council of Europe, 2014).

The Maltese contribution to the Pestalozzi Programme Action Research Group 2013-4 is an action research project titled *A policy of professional development for teachers at Giovanni Curmi Higher Secondary School (Malta): Contributions from a stake holding think-tank* (Project acronym: PDGCHSS). PDGCHSS's rationale is based on the rejection of "teacher bashing" and politically-driven top-down school "reforms" that ignore the views of those who usually know most about teaching, namely, teachers. We believe in joining *with* (italics in the source) teachers, supporting and facilitating ongoing growth of a kind needed in any profession" (Beck & Kosnik, 2014, p. xxvi). PDGCHSS involves a think-tank of five educators from GCHSS set up to discuss and engage with various facets of professional development deemed relevant by think-tank members, who are also beneficiaries of professional development (Brown, 2013, p. 1). As to date, PDGCHSS members deployed "(c)ollaborative and participatory action research" (p. 1) to reflexively engage with a discussion of "professional development as a concept and a practice" (p.1); critically and qualitatively reported the main outcomes of such discussions and other PD-related activities using a jointly formulated and reviewed online group reflective journal; collaboratively carried out a quantitative study on staff development at GCHSS; sought and addressed opportunities of paper publication and of informing GCHSS' senior management team (SMT) and DQSE on recommendations for the way forward in professional development for teachers / educators on the basis of PDGCHSS' research outcomes (Brown, 2013).

The school community and values contextualizing PDGCHSS

GCHSS caters for post-secondary education, hence for students wishing to sit or re-sit Matriculation Certificate examinations at Intermediate and Advanced Level required to enter University; as well as for students who need to re-sit examinations at Ordinary Level to proceed to post-secondary education. The school is committed to formal as well as to informal and non-formal education[3]. It is the only state post-secondary educational institution that provides such varied programmes of study[4].

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[3] This is manifested through the informal delivery of enrichment credits that expose students to a wide variety of non-formal areas of knowledge such as photography, drama, music and activism in the area of environmental sustainability (Attard &

The motto of GCHSS is "Given Another chance" (Attard & Casha, 2013, p.1). Its objectives are to provide "students with an opportunity to better their academic qualifications" (p. 1); to prepare "students for entry into vocational institutions" (p. 1) and to prepare "students for entry into University" (p. 1). These objectives translate into the provision of a wide variety of combinations of programmes of study. The same student might be studying subjects at secondary and post-secondary level and/or preparing for admission into tertiary level of education at the same time.

Rationale of the Project

Due to the nature of GCHSS' education service provision, the dynamics between administration, staff and students tend to differ from other schools in Malta, particularly state secondary schools. Although the post-secondary education structure is similar to a secondary school, the schooling experience differs for a number of reasons. The size of GCHSS is double that of any other state secondary school in Malta (Attard, 2013). It is also difficult for teachers, teaching different subjects, to meet up during school hours. At this level, teachers encourage students to take ownership of their learning process. Students are expected to be self-motivated and higher academic expectations exist in preparation for tertiary education (Bonavia & Spiteri, 2009). Other differences include changes in the school day structure. For instance, timetables at GCHSS are not fixed in the same way they are in secondary schools. Students and teachers alike may have a number of free lessons between one class and another. There is a greater degree of independence, which in turn affects the school climate.

As researchers we felt the need to understand how this context impinges on GCHSS' teachers' perceptions and engagement with PD, as well as further understand their experience, needs and expectations with respect to SDDs. The aim of this research was to better grasp teachers' understanding of PD, their satisfaction with past PD, as well as summarize main points that need to be taken into consideration when planning PD sessions at GCHSS.

Casha, 2013). The school's calendar is enriched by many other formal, informal and non-formal educational and leisure activities such as the annual Human Library Day; the Careers Week and project participation, such as Comenius and other overseas opportunities (Attard & Casha, 2013).

[4] While there are other Church, independent and parastatal institutions that offer similar programmes of study, these do not operate through the state nor through the centralized education system underpinning operations at GCHSS.

The telling of and listening to personal narratives
GCHSS Human Library Day 2013
(Source: GCHSS, Malta)

Fund-raising through selling of artefacts made from recycled materials
GCHSS Human Library Day 2013
(Source: GCHSS, Malta)

GCHSS Students and Teachers participating at the ESCOT European Schools Gala Montecatini (Italy)
(Source: GCHSS, Malta)

GCHSS students and teachers during a school trip to Florence (Italy)
(Source: GCHSS, Malta)

Literature Review

Theoretical Influences

Teaching as a recognised profession implies autonomy (Larson, 1977); maintaining high standards of practice in relation to teaching and learning; keeping professional knowledge and skills updated throughout the teaching career; and reflecting upon and evaluating the practice of teaching as part of continuous professional development (CPD) (L.N. 414, 2012). Consequently, teachers as professionals are, by definition, lifelong learners. In order to serve stakeholders effectively, professional educators must draw upon best knowledge at any given time and for schools to deliver what is required, effective and appropriate career-long professional development for the teaching workforce is essential.

Extensive critique is addressed at sporadic one-day 'courses' for teachers, disconnected from previous professional learning; delivered out of the school context and failing to have measurable impact on teachers' practices (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Day & Sachs, 2004; Elmore, 2002; Fishman, Marx, Best, & Tal, 2003; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; Loucks-Horsley, Love, Stiles, Mundry, & Hewson, 2003; Stein, Smith, & Silver,1999, as cited in, Armour & Makopoulou, 2012). Conversely, "continuous and progressive professional development will have more lasting value" (McCormick & Black, 2007, p.63); since CPD built around "disconnected topics" (Elmore, 2002, p.10) is likely to result in limited learning (Ball & Cohen, 1999).

Current trends in PD in Europe and in Malta

Approaching teachers as learners is sustained by contemporary EU policy on education and teacher education underpinned by visions of a "knowledge driven" society in which lifelong learning is a key feature (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training Cedefop, 2014). PD that is more school-centred is mirrored in current trends in Europe whereby PD "moved away from the one-shot workshops and trainings to sustained professional development" (Wang et al., 2014, p.13). Sustained professional development supports teachers in "transferring new approaches into classroom practices from short-term trainings, such as workshops and professional courses" (p 13).

Engagement with CPD opportunities is one of the main obligations of teachers in Malta[5]. Traditionally, provision of CPD for local teachers consists mainly of attendance to three-day in-service courses carried out towards the end or at the very beginning of the scholastic year[6]. Although in general, Maltese teachers value ongoing training, the majority does not consider taking more PD courses besides the compulsory ones, mainly due to school workload. Some teachers find INSET irrelevant (Sammut, 2013) whilst "time frames…(and) nepotism practiced by state school teachers when it comes to the choice of in-service courses and financial resources" (Borg Castillo & Calleja, 2008, p.83) hinder local school personnel training and management.

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[5] Article 28 (5), (6), (7), (8) of the Education Act (1991, pp. 15-16) asserts that the Council for the Teaching Profession in Malta shall draw the attention of registered teachers to their obligation of periodically investing in their continuous professional development.

[6] "In accordance with the agreement signed between the Government and the Malta Union of Teachers, in-service courses are normally of three days' duration and all teachers may be requested to attend on an annual basis. Assistant Heads of School and Heads of School are not obliged to attend" (Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education (DQSE) - Department of Curriculum Management, 2015, p. 3).

Many teachers consider INSET a helpful aid in their PD and most teachers depend on it for their PD (Sammut, 2013). Recommendations include smaller numbers for INSET courses to help teachers connect to others in the group and to share ideas; and more in-school training (Sammut, 2013). In a context where many teachers are not familiar with other PD opportunities that are available (Sammut, 2013), Directorates need to promote further PD opportunities and create more incentives to foster in teachers a positive attitude towards more training (Sammut, 2013).

At the level of national policy, Malta's framework for the *Education Strategy for Malta 2014-2024* (Ministry for Education and Employment, n.d.) advocates quality of education provision, including quality assurance of education programs and quality through people programmes, and continuous development of education providers; an international dimension which includes international mobility of students and staff, international openness to new systems and processes, harmonisation of assessment and examination methods and international recognition of local qualifications; as well as strategic innovation through the training for educators on new teaching and learning methods, feedback programs for students, educators and stakeholders. The proposed Strategy promises to "enhance the teaching profession by providing teachers with the relevant continuous professional development, the right support and conditions to maximize their teaching skills" (Ministry for Education and Employment, n.d., p.6). It also seeks to build on the educational resources in Malta and those at European level:

> While we seek home-grown [sic] solutions to address our challenges we are ready to learn from others in Europe…but knowing full well that we cannot simply import solutions from abroad without adapting and adopting them to our reality (p.7).

In this paper it is being argued that the Framework's emphasis on targeting an "increase participation in lifelong learning and adult learning" (p.3) calls for serious reflection on the extent to which teachers are capable to engage pupils as lifelong learners if they, themselves, are not similarly engaged.

Increasingly state authorities are delegating more responsibility for teachers and their professional development to schools through the School / Staff Development Day (SDD). Leaving training activities entirely in the hands of the schools however creates concerns that CPD will be a low-funded priority amongst their various expenses. Also, not all schools have the capacity or expertise to become the kind of learning organization that can support progressive teacher learning (Pedder, James & Macbeth, 2005, as cited in, Armour & Makopoulou, 2012).

Synthesis of PDGCHSS objectives

The participatory action research project PDGCHSS draws on the immediate implications of the reviewed literature by targeting grassroots' school-based and sustained engagement with CPD that supports teachers as active, lifelong learners.

PDGCHSS drew upon research-based evidence that points at higher efficacy of PD when it takes place within the school context (Wang et al., 2014). Informality of context was also sought since "while formal professional development has some impact, much teacher learning is the result of *informal* (italics in the source) experience, reflection, reading, and discussion with colleagues" (Beck & Kosnik, 2014, p.xxvii). When the school context features an epistemic community, the epistemic community's members take responsibility for the school's community learning by means of the negotiation of ideas and the constant pursuit of knowledge (Scardamalia, 2002). Thus, PDGCHSS also sought think-tankers' personal growth since the "growth required is not just professional. Teachers also need to develop *personally* (italics in the source), honing their own life skills and seeing connections between the subject(s) they teach and everyday reality" (Beck & Kosnik, 2014, p. xxvi).

The project also sought to address a broader implication[7]: If schools are to take an increasing lead in professional development, further consideration will be needed about the ways in which teachers are conceptualized as lead professional learners in the school setting (Armour & Makopoulou, 2012). Thus, another objective that goes beyond GCHSS' school walls is to raise national awareness in this regard through dissemination of its experience – as is the purpose of this paper and PDGCHSS' contribution to the national consultation exercise concerning the Education Reform Act[8]. Moreover, the research process and experience enabled PDGCHSS' participants to develop research-based recommendations that feed into the framework of a potential policy on professional development for teachers at GCHSS. These will be discussed in the final stages of this paper.

This theoretical synthesis framed PDGCHSS' engagement with PD using the methodology and research design discussed in the next section.

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[7]Although by and large this goes beyond the remit of PDGCHSS.

[8] A discussion of PDGCHSS' contribution to the national consultation exercise on the Education Reform Act is found further on in this paper.

Methodology
The Nature of the Study: Participatory Action Case Study Research[9]

As opposed to traditional research, in action research, the researcher "intentionally sets out to *change the situation being studied*" (italics in the source) (Lomax, 2002, p. 123). In the case of PDGCHSS, a central challenge comprised the researchers'-authors' participation in this change, also to rule-out, or at least, minimize, 'banking'-style cultural imperialism. This implied "taking charge of action to change situations" (Coleman & Lumby, 1999, p. 13). When action research is also participatory it becomes endowed with liberatory and emancipatory potential (Brinton Lykes & Mallona, 2008). The research design also involved practitioners' collaborative research yet elements of action research are more prevalent since it exposed think-tank members to non-routine educational and professional experiences such as reviewing the Education Act; taking care of an evaluative survey of the SDD (survey design, administration, research ethics, analysis, reporting) and writing an academic paper for publication [10]. These actions involved "public debates and making the results of research public" (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006, pp. 7-8) and in their journal entries, participants associate them with "improvement of one's practise" (McNiff & Whitehead, 2009, p. 11).

As a case study, the research project targets an intensive research of one school "conducted within a localised boundary of space and time (i.e., a singularity)" (Bassey, 2002, p.109). The single-case analysis values "…in-depth knowledge of an individual example…(as) more helpful than fleeting knowledge about a larger number of examples...(to) gain better understanding of the whole by focusing on a key part" (Gerring, 2007, p.1). Thus, this single case study targeted a holistic, thick, comprehensive understanding (p.17) of the phenomena under study. More so, since many of these phenomena developed throughout the process of research due to the participatory nature of action research discussed earlier in this section.

The Research Tools

The research design is mainly qualitative, although a quantitative questionnaire was used to support qualitative analysis. The qualitative data-generation tools used were:

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[9] Daniel Selener (1997, as cited in Reason, 2001, p. 182) locates the theoretical roots of participatory action research to what Peter Reason (2001) refers to as "liberationist writers" (p. 182) such as Karl Marx, Fredrick Engels, Antonio Gramsci and Paulo Freire. Reason (2001) enhances Selener's analysis by highlighting influences "from liberationist movements particularly among underprivileged people of the South where approaches to research, evaluation and education have been used as tools for social change" (p.182).

[10] These activities and projects will be analytically discussed further on in this paper.

- Focus Groups (PDGCHSS-FGs) with PDGCHSS' think-tank participants to share, compare and contrast experiences; explore issues of shared importance; develop and generate ideas (Breen, 2006) collaboratively and democratically, particularly with regard to the progress of the research study. FGs were also open to investigate experiences of individuals that have been exposed to the same stimuli (Breen, 2006), as in the case of PDGCHSS' think-tank participants.
- An online reflective journal[11](PDGCHSS-RJ) co-authored by the think-tankers to express, record and reflect upon the project experience and related insights; and to inform retrospective analysis of experiences of participant-researchers individuals and as a cohort (Brown, 2014a).
- A quantitative questionnaire was collaboratively formulated and administered by the think-tank to GCHSS' staff participating in the Staff Development Day (SDD) of the scholastic year 2013-2014[12].
- Secondary data were also retrieved from a reflective journal authored by PDGCHSS' project co-ordinator (PP-RJ) and reviewed by members of the broader Pestalozzi Programme Action Research Group 2013-4; as well as third party reports compiled by PDGCHSS' think-tankers further to their engagement with PD-related activities[13].

Ethical Considerations

The research project prioritised probity (Bassey, 2002) and commitment to honesty (Sammons, 1989, as cited in, Busher, 2002); avoidance of plagiarism (Berger & Patchner, 1988, as cited in, Busher, 2002); the pursuit of truth (Pring, 2000, as cited in, Busher, 2002); informed consent (Burton& Bartlett, 2009) and authorisation to carry out research from DQSE. Confidentiality and anonymity were addressed within the project's limitations and further to

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[11] Access restricted to PDGCHSS think-tankers.

[12] The objectives of the questionnaire were to **"(u)nderstand GCHSS' teachers' general perceptions on SDD sessions** held at GCHSS in the … (previous) five years (i.e between 2010-2014)" (PDGCHSS, 2014, p. 1); "**(g)ain an evaluation** of the May 2014 SDD session" (p. 1); **(u)nderstand SDD participants'** needs, desires and expectations in relation to professional development" (p.1); "**(f)eed into recommendations** concerning **the way forward** in PD at GCHSS (e.g. ideas, suggestions on how future PD sessions may be developed)" (p. 1); and to "render a service to… (the) school and the main organizer of 2010-2014 SDD sessions" (i.e. the head of school) (p. 1) (all emphases in the source).

[13] As will be seen in later sections, names of such reports are detailed with the data retrieved and referenced in the Reference List.

thorough and critical discussion between think-tankers and with the concerned authorities[14].

The values of reliability and validity of research findings were targeted through mixed methods and piloting of research tools.

Potential shortcomings and mitigating measures
With respect to research with teachers and in educational settings, it is argued that

> …teachers are often intimidated and confused by terms such as "inquiry" and "research." Many have studied research methodology in undergrad and see it in largely quantitative terms. Teachers in fact constantly conduct cycles of research in their classroom: noting problems, trying out solutions, observing outcomes, reaching conclusions, adjusting their teaching accordingly, and often sharing their findings with others (Beck & Kosnik, 2014, p.xxvi).

Indeed, GCHSS' teacher-participants' familiarity with research based on their educational background simultaneously facilitated and challenged the researchers. Thus, although many teacher-participants were helpful, sympathetic and collaborative; others were sceptic, suspicious and reluctant to share information. Moreover, researchers were also participants themselves. Thus, the element of reflexivity and bias was considered. In response to these potential shortcomings, researchers triangulated and piloted qualitative and quantitative methods - also in a reflexive, self-addressed manner – so as to maximise self and others' involvement; as well as the study's practicality, reliability, internal, external, ecological and measurement validity.

The Project

Group origins
Melanie[15] introduced the project to the school. She approached three members of staff personally and another staff member responded to the

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[14] As regards confidentiality and anonymity, the nature of some research studies is bound to make research sites and research participants recognizable (Burton & Bartlett, 2009), as is the case of this study. Thus, it would have been futile not to identify GCHSS as the school featuring in a study about PD in state post-secondary school since GCHSS is the only state post-secondary school in Malta offering the academic (as opposed to vocational) programme discussed in the Introduction. Apart from this, withdrawal of the name of the school would have also implied the unethical withdrawal of acknowledgment. Similarly, the identity of think-tankers is implied in acknowledging the authorship of this paper and the project. Pseudonyms and codes are being used in the presentation of data to maximize anonymity and confidentiality when appropriate and possible.

expression of interest emailed by the school (Melanie, personal communication, October 2013). Her enthusiasm for the project was infectious. Melanie adopted the role of co-ordinator in view of her role within the broader Pestalozzi Programme Action Research Group 2013-4. The other four members are: a Sociology teacher who is passionate about Human Rights; a teacher of Italian who is also a researcher with a passion for Second Language Acquisition; a Mathematics teacher who is also a Guidance teacher; and an Assistant Head of school who coordinates the Staff Development Day (PDGCHSS-IQ[16], January 2014).

Group dynamics
Regular meetings, though not easy to set up, were held within the school premises during the time when all teachers were not lecturing. Email communication was crucial and Google Drive made for easy access to documents.

The group immediately found it easy to work together despite barely knowing each other. Melanie was directive without being oppressive. A sense of trust and belonging established early in the project made it possible for the group to get involved and feel part of its development. Think-tankers readily shared opinions, concerns and practices. Melanie provided guidance on issues which needed clarification, such as with using SPSS for data analysis. Communication was also maintained via e-mail when meeting at school was not possible such as during the Easter recess. It also made it possible to take decisions collectively. Collaboration ensued even to the inputting of data, and in the writing of this paper.

Online Group Reflective Journal
Soon after the group was set up, it was decided that a group online[17]journal should be kept (PDGCHSS-RJ). Each member was free to contribute to the journal, whenever the want or need arose. The journal addressed two main aspects, the practical aspect of group interaction and the conceptual development of the group's focus.

The journal facilitated group interaction. It could be accessed any time of the day, thus effectively minimised the constraints imposed by school timetables, personal commitments and time limitations. The group members could interact dynamically by writing comments on other members' contributions; in effect, typical of the process of journal keeping, this group journal also

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[15] Pseudonyms and codes are being used in the presentation of data to maximize anonymity and confidentiality when appropriate and possible.

[16] PDGCHSS-IQ stands for data source of data generated through inital questions that PDGCHSS think-tank members responded too as part of their intorduction to the action research project (Figure 3).

[17]With access restricted to think-tankers.

provided a 'collaborative research context' (Borg, 2001, p. 165). In addition, the journal enabled positive interpersonal development between the members of the group.

The very act of keeping a journal helped the group's members become reflective practitioners; this is a common advantage of journal keeping (Alirio & Zambrano Castillo, 2010). In fact, as members exchanged views, cross-fertilisation of ideas occurred and this lead to an on-going discussion on the research being undertaken by the group. In the process of keeping the journal, the conceptual development of the project was consciously and unconsciously being weaved by the individual members. As noted by Farrell (2013)

> The very act of writing has a built-in mechanism that facilitates reflection by allowing time for teachers to organise their thoughts so that they can consciously explore and analyse their practice in a more organised fashion than they would normally do (p. 472).

By reflecting on their individual ideas and on the ideas put forward by others, a shared understanding of the proposed action research was achieved. This happened first on a conceptual and then, on a practical level (PDGCHSS-IQ, January 2014). Conceptually, this was attained when the group agreed on the meaning of the term 'professional development' which encompassed the diverse ideas of the different members (PDGCHSS-IQ, January 2014). On a practical level, this shared understanding reflected itself in the design of the main research tool: the questionnaire.

Collaborative Projects

Consultation on Education Act Reform
In March 2014 members of the PDGCHSS project responded to the call that the Ministry for Education and Employment (Malta) launched with regard to the consultation document on the Education Act Reform (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014) by providing feedback on Part III of the Education Act (1991), namely the part regulating the teacher's profession (pp. 14-26).

Amongst the main recommendations that resulted from the think-tank's reflections is that PD should feed into a more comprehensive understanding of the notions of 'teacher' and 'education'. Project participants also advocated in favour of enhanced clarity in the assessment of qualifications required to obtain a teacher's warrant as well as for enhanced representation and public

relations of the Council for the Teaching Profession in Malta (PGGCHSS-CEAR[18], March 2014).

SDD Questionnaire
The aim of the questionnaire was to gather feedback from teachers on their perspective on PD. Heeding the advice that a questionnaire should have an easy layout (Anderson, 1990) and that it should be short (Thomas, 2009), we collaboratively developed a questionnaire with a format of a concise SWOT analysis exercise on professional development at GCHSS.

Participants' individual projects
The Staff Development Day (SDD) - As an Assistant Head in charge of the SDD, Anna's planning for the SDD starts early in the scholastic year. The theme is based on data gathered from the teachers' feedback during the previous scholastic year, and on the immediate needs of the school and the staff. Contact is then made with agencies that can manage and facilitate training[19]. Anna's list of other tasks includes: the logistics for the day: the workshop groups; selecting the workshop rapporteurs and making venue arrangements. Of particular importance to the success of the SDD was the composition of the workshop groups. Teachers, subject co-ordinators and heads of departments from different Subject Departments and backgrounds, were purposely selected for each workshop, to tap the full potential of what Diaz-Maggioli (2004) refers to 'natural heterogeneity' (p. 26).

On the day of the SDD, Anna's role was to ensure the smooth running of the various activities. With a staff of over 200, and an intensive programme for the day, this task requires effective problem-solving skills and patience. After the SDD, Anna's role was to collate feedback from the different workshops and compile a report[20].

Euroscola[21] - For Catherine, who was an accompanying teacher to Euroscola, the experience highlighted the responsibility teachers take when they seek to

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[18] PDGCHSS-CEAR stands for data retrieved fromt the recommendations' document that PDGCHSS forwarded to the Ministry for Education and Employment as part of the public consultation exercise.

[19] For the scholastic year when this study was carried out, SEDQA was chosen after a number of meetings with organizers from SEDQA is a national agency and forms part of the Foundation for Social Welfare Services. It provides prevention and care services in the areas of substance abuse, compulsive gambling and other dependencies, and also promotes a healthy lifestyle (Government of Malta, 2012).

[20] For the scholastic year when this study was carried out, findings of SEDQA agency's evaluative exercises were included in the final report together with the evaluation from PDGCHSS's questionnaire findings.

[21] Euroscola is a yearly event organised by the European Union Parliament in Strasbourg, to give the opportunity to young people from Europe to experience first-hand how the EU parliament works (European Parliament, n.d.). For the last

engage with students outside the school and outside the country. When a group of people come together, especially outside their usual environment, the group dynamic takes a life of its own. Without detracting from the fact that the students and teachers are on a school outing that has its written (The Council for the Teaching Profession in Malta, 2012) and unwritten rules (for example are students allowed to address accompanying teachers with their first names?), during a trip outside the school's confines, the teachers' role, needs to be different to when we engage with our students within the classroom set-up. More than in a classroom, where relations are bound by a syllabus and a time frame, such a trip offers the teacher scores of different types of interactions on numerous and mostly unplanned issues. This is the reason why Catherine believes that projects such as Euroscola need to be considered as more than ends in themselves. This is where we see the need to seek to promote the idea that those teachers who would like to engage with students in non-formal set ups are offered training if they do not already possess the required skills.

European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training) Study Visits (CEDEFOP) –Elaine and Melanie had the opportunity to participate in the CEDEFOP study-visits *Marketable skills through teaching languages for specific purposes*[22] and *Well-being in the 21st century School*[23] (respectively). The study-visits generated an exchange of experience and good practice between the host country and the participants' countries (Brown, 2014b; Gauci, 2014). Participants included teachers and teacher trainers coming from different European countries such as the Czech Republic, Finland, France, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain and of course Malta (Brown, 2014b; Gauci, 2014).

During the study-visits participants engaged with plans and policies at several levels (institutional, regional, national) through the dissemination of best practices observed during the study-visits (Brown, 2014b; Gauci, 2014). A number of presentations helped participants in familiarising with different policy approaches in the countries involved (Brown, 2014b; Gauci, 2014). The study-visits comprised of a mixture of site visits, presentations, discussions as well as cultural activities. Participants had the opportunity to meet heads of departments and faculties; meet teachers, students and ex-students; observe skill development in practice; participate in discussions on skill needs and

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nine years, GCHSS has sent a group of around twenty-four students accompanied by two/three teachers (Catherine, personal communication, November 2014).

[22] The CEDEFOP study-visit *Marketable skills through teaching languages for specific purposes* was held between the 31st of March 2014 and the 4th of April 2014 at The Budapest Business School in Hungary (Gauci, 2014).

[23] The CEDEFOP study-visit *Well-being in the 21st century school* was held between the 3rd of March 2014 and the 7th of March 2014 at The Civic Centre of the London Borough of Richmond-upon-Thames (London, United Kingdom) (Brown, 2014b).

innovative methods (Brown, 2014b; Gauci, 2014). The study-visits opened avenues for long-term networking and created the possibility for bilateral cooperation between the participating countries on the level of staff and students exchange; developing joint programmes; and the effective creation of a virtual space for exchanging adequate knowledge, materials and information (Brown, 2014b; Gauci, 2014).

Participants during theCEDEFOP study-visit
Marketable skills through teaching languages for specific purposes- Hungary (Gauci, 2014).

Team-building during the CEDEFOP study-visit
Well-being in the 21st century School –United Kingdom (Brown, 2014b).

Human Library- Rosalie first heard of a Human Library during a Council of Europe Workshop, held in Malta in 2008[24]. GCHSS has a very diverse school population and it is committed to working towards a safe environment at school as shown through its Diversity and Equality Policy (Attard, M. & Casha, A., 2014). The Human Library contributes to this policy in a practical way. The Human Library aims to further raise "awareness about human rights issues" and give "visibility to groups in our society, who are marginalised and often targets for hate crimes, violence and human rights violations"[25]. Students learn from real life stories, which in turn help to combat prejudice regarding issues identified by students themselves. All participants in the Human Library at GCHSS were involved on a voluntary basis. Internet proved to be an important resource tool in the effective organisation of the Human Library[26]. Meetings with potential "books" were held prior to the event in order to explain their role in the Human Library.

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[24]Creating Opportunities for Developing Intercultural Dialogue was held between the 15th of April and the 18th of April 2008 in Valletta, Malta.
[25]Information Sheet: Human Library GCHSS 2012.
[26] Human Library. Retrieved December 17, 2014, from http://humanlibrary.org/

Students worked on marketing the event by creating posters and a banner to announce the event and were actively involved throughout the whole process. During the Human Library activity, students engaged with various "books" by asking questions and listening to their experiences. Students highlighted the importance of learning about other people by listening to their stories and how in turn this helped them to challenge misconceptions (Scerri, 2012). The Human Library proved to be a cross-curricular activity, involving various teachers as well as members of the Administration. Organising the Human Library proved to be a learning opportunity on a personal and organisational level. It equipped organisers with the necessary communication skills as well as opened up opportunities to network with NGO's and other subject departments in developing joint projects.

Discussion of Findings on Project Experience

The discussion in this section engages with how PDGCHSS' findings feed into immediate implications synthesized from the literature review exercise. The findings concern grassroots, school-based and sustained examples of engagement with CPD that supports GCHSS teachers as active, lifelong learners[27].

Grassroots, school-based and sustained engagement with CPD

Findings show that PDGCHSS think-tankers are very interested in PD that is grounded in the school-context:

> *I crave more teamwork at the place of work and seek to engage in any type that I'm offered…(Catherine, PDGCHSS-IQ, January 2014).*

Questionnaire findings sustain both this interest as well as literature critical of disconnected PD (Armour & Makopoulou, 2012) since respondents identified SDD topics as the major weakness of GCHSS' SDDs 2010-2014 (Figure 1 – 25.32%); shortly followed[28] by an arguably-related lack of consultation with teachers (Figure 1 – 13.92%).

Indeed, throughout the PDGCHSS research process, it became evident that, on a regular basis, think-tankers deploy their grassroots' agency when engaging with PD by dwelling on their personality and personal interests:

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[27] A discussion of how PDGCHSS data feeds into the broader objective retrieved from the literature review exercise - namely, how PDGCHSS contributes with research-based recommendations that feed into the framework of a potential policy on professional development for teachers at GCHSS - is found in the next section.

[28] When omitting the percentage of blank data (Figure 1).

I currently serve my school as a teacher of Mathematics and Guidance Teacher. These two roles summarise me to a t. I love my subject. It finds solutions to all problems, solutions generally accepted as correct by most, if not all (Catherine, PDGCHSS-IQ, January 2014).

I have always had a passion for...foreign languages...I have a job which I love doing and which allows me to follow my passions (Elaine, PDGCHSS-IQ, January 2014).

I am passionate about Human Rights education and often try to find ways and means to create activities, either class based or school based to raise further awareness about human rights locally. I regularly visit detention centres for asylum seekers as a volunteer with a non-governmental organisation (Rosalie, PDGCHSS-IQ, January 2014).

Figure 1
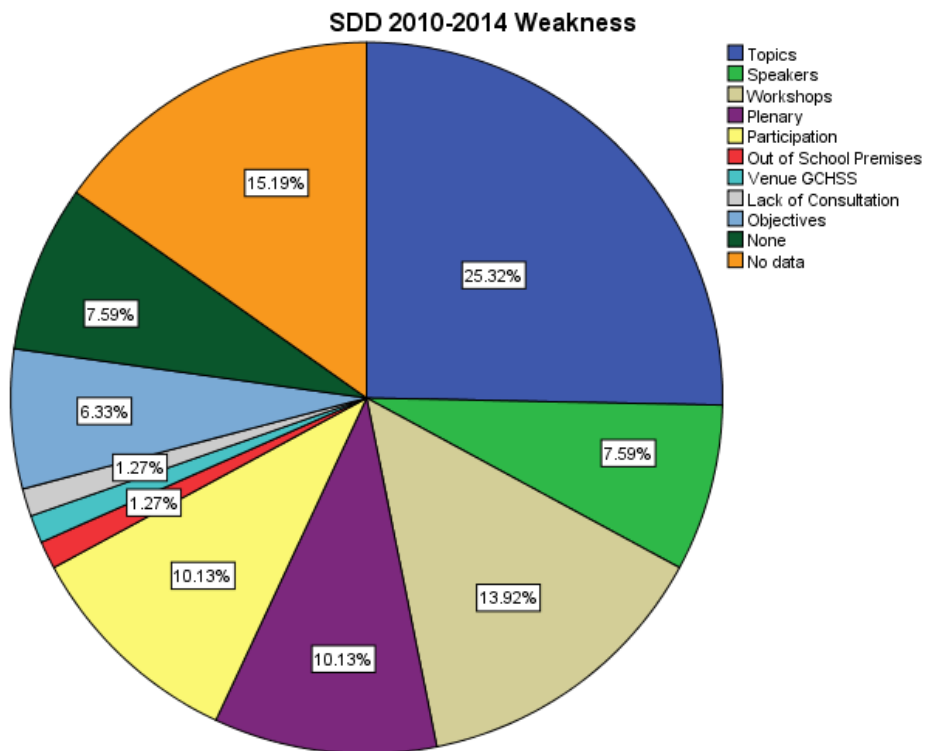
Therefore, identification with the subject/s taught and role/s fulfilled at school feed into the teacher's professional self-perception. PDGCHSS engaged with PD that makes "direct connections to teachers' everyday teaching" (Wang et al., 2014); as well as connections to think-tankers' personality and biographical narratives.

Nonetheless, in actual fact, GCHSS' teachers' opportunity to engage with grassroots' PD is hindered by a highly bureaucratized system, irrespective of whether PD is school-based or not:

> *In an institutional context like school it is important to get necessary permission from a head teacher to start with action research. Sometimes it requires certain level of diplomatic skills… (Bernard[29], PP-RJ, November 20 2013).*

> *From my end there is the desire of wanting to rule out the possibility of questioning about bureaucratic issues that I feel make me waste time and might become an obstacle to my research. It makes me feel on edge, to say the least...(Melanie, PP-RJ, November 20 2013).*

Whilst a certain value is attributed to formal bureaucratic procedures, most evidence is underpinned by negative criticism of bureaucratic procedures that hinder motivation for PD:

> *Reducing red tape when it comes to applying for opportunities (local and/or abroad) which would enhance professional development (Melanie, PDGCHSS-IQ, January 2014).*

> *Less bureaucracy in applying for professional opportunities (Catherine, PDGCHSS-IQ, January 2014).*

> *When we need to attend...a seminar or workshop, alone or with our students, we have to provide many justifications and wait until the very last minute to know whether permission to attend will be granted. This is very counterproductive and takes away the motivation of many teachers, so we need a structure, which is more supportive and less bureaucratic (Elaine, PDGCHSS-IQ, January 2014).*

> *Many teachers willingly invest time, energy and money in seeking to develop professionally. However they need a supportive institution that allows them to do this (Elaine, PDGCHSS-IQ, January 2014).*

Bureaucratic constraints acquire an added negative value when they intersect with other resource-deficiencies, such as lack of money, time and collaboration from colleagues:

> *(With reference to the Human Library Day) Of course we had no funding so it had to be totally on a voluntary basis (Rosalie, PDGCHSS-RJ, March 12 2014).*

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[29] Pseudonym for co-ordinator of the braoder Council of Europe's Pestalozzi Programme Action ResearchGroup 2013-4.

Financial support should be provided for books and research material (Elaine, PDGCHSS-IQ, January 2014).

When speaking to my colleagues at Giovanni Curmi Higher Secondary School (GCHSS) I understand they are very passionate about what we do in our school yet there are points when the frustration of knowing our recruitment conditions are less than those of other professionals teaching the same syllabi or less in other institutions in Malta is felt (Melanie, PP-RJ, November 18 2013).

One single overarching factor that needs to permeate this analysis is the time factor…The seven, fifty-five minute lessons, split into two parts by a mere 25 minute break, are the main challenge to anyone who tries to schedule slots for ad hoc meetings (Catherine, PDGCHSS, April 13 2014).

...it was quite difficult as regards finding a common slot to meet and discuss. Most of the times it was done during breaks. However, breaks are not long enough to discuss and come up with new ideas...(Rosalie, PDGCHSS-RJ, March 2014).

...we're often too busy from one lesson to another that we hardly ever meet. When we do meet, we rarely ever go beyond the superficial chit chat, given the short period of time (Rosalie, PDGCHSS-IQ, January 2014).

Moreover the lack of cooperation from particular colleagues, year in year out, finally got the better of me. I must say that it's probably the same situation in all the departments. Some people work hard, some just don't (Rosalie, PDGCHSS-RJ, March 2014).

In the last instance, the value and consideration that GCHSS' staff attributes to collegiality is also evident from questionnaire responses since collegiality was indicated as the major strength across GCHSS' SDD 2010-2014 (Figure 2 – 29.11%).

GCHSS teachers who are motivated to engage in PD-related activities beyond the mandatory requirement (DQSE-Department of Curriculum Management, 2015)[30] subject themselves to strain on their will power, energy levels and work-life balance:

...it is always the same group of teachers who engage with projects such as Comenius, Erasmus and so forth (Melanie, PP-RJ, November 18 2013).

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[30] "In accordance with the agreement signed between the Government and the Malta Union of Teachers, in-service courses are normally of three days' duration and all teachers may be requested to attend on an annual basis. Assistant Heads of School and Heads of School are not obliged to attend" (DQSE - Department of Curriculum Management, 2015, p. 3).

This year, it was the third year that we organised it (referring to the Human Library Day)...I must say my energy levels were much lower than in previous years...and perhaps it's only natural (Rosalie, PDGCHSS-RJ, March 12 2014).

On a personal note...I wish I had the energy (for PD) DAILY! (capitalized in the source) (Melanie, PDGCHSS-IQ, January 2014).

With major changes going on in my personal life, the human library took second place (Rosalie, PDGCHSS-RJ, March 2014).

Like many others, I juggle and struggle on a daily basis with personal and professional commitments and expectations such as being loving and useful to my family and others I care about; and seeking a good balance between physical, mental, intellectual and emotional health, excellence and stability (Melanie, PDGCHSS-IQ, January 2014).

On a more personal level I've recently moved into a new place with my partner, so right now I'm still settling in and trying to organise the place as much as possible. It's been hectic but fun at the same time ☺ (Rosalie, PDGCHSS-IQ, March 2014).

It is within these constraints that the dedication of the teachers involved in the preparation and the coordination shines through (Catherine, PDGCHSS, April 13 2014).

Figure 2

SDD 2010-2014 Strength
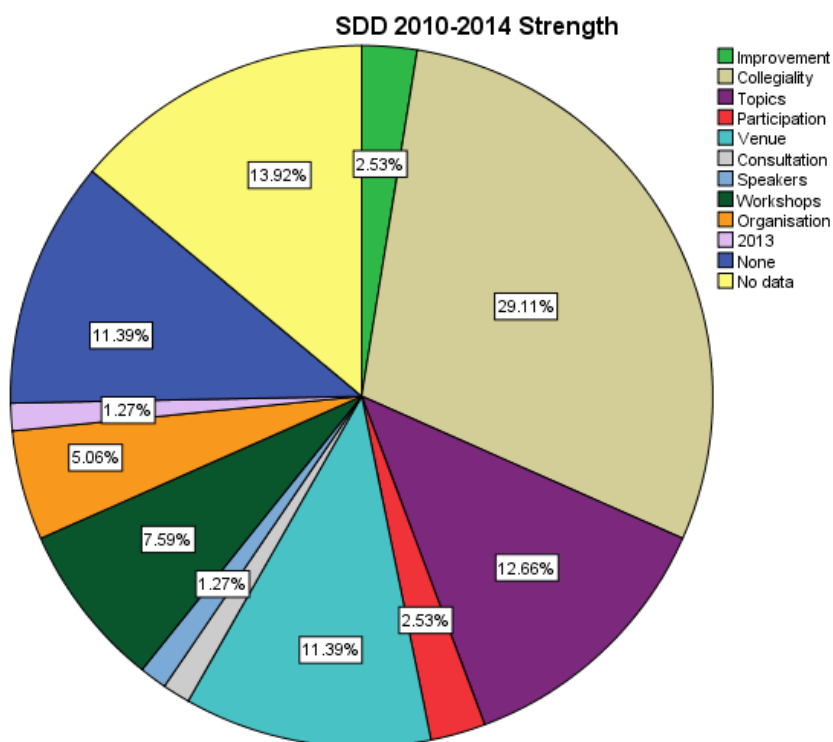
When it comes to sustained PD (Wang et al., 2014), GCHSS staff are interested in the transferability of knowledge gained from PD training to their everyday practice; irrespective of whether such CPD is school-based or not:

> *The first time I heard of a human library was in a Council of Europe workshop. I have always been fascinated with libraries and the idea of actually creating one, with humans, well that surely sounded enticing (Rosalie, PDGCHSS-RJ, March 12 2014).*

> *(With reference to exposure gained from UK Cedefop workshop)…peer mentoring…is definitely transferable to my home institution. Personally I already engage with it on an informal and basic level, yet it would be interesting to engage with it as an official school strategy (Melanie, PDGCHSS-RJ, April 12 2014).*

> *(With reference to exposure gained from UK Cedefop workshop) I reported outcomes of the study visit to…an organisation that is currently implementing a campaign in local primary schools about health…I am contributing to this organisation through the design and delivery of workshops for parents and guardians and will thus use knowledge, skills and materials gained from the study visit (Melanie, PDGCHSS-RJ, April 12 2014).*

Findings from the questionnaire carried out to gauge GCHSS' staff experience of the school-based SDD 2014 show positive results. Participants were asked to rate from 0 to 4 the relevance of knowledge gained from the SDD and the extent of which they will apply such knowledge (amongst other statements). Both statements were given positive mean ratings of 2.07 and 2.03 (respectively) (Table 1).

Nonetheless, there is no evidence of formally organized post-CPD initiatives to sustain the transferability of knowledge gained:

> *(With reference to the idea of organising a Human Library Day gained from exposure during a PD course)...I had no clue what needed to be done. No clue about the hours I had to put into it. To be quite honest I had no clue from where to begin (Rosalie, PDGCHSS-RJ, March 12 2014).*

This confirms findings of local and international studies reviewed earlier in this paper pointing at shortcomings associated with sporadic and disconnected engagement with CPD (Sammut, 2013; Armour & Makopoulou, 2012; Borg Castillo & Calleja, 2008).

Table 1[31]

Statements to rate from 0 to 4	N	Mean Ratings
Overall, my expectations from this year's SDD have been met	76	1.80
The knowledge gained from this year's SDD is relevant to me	76	2.07
I will apply the knowledge gained from this year's SDD	76	2.03
My expectations from GCHSS SDDs of previous years ranging between 2010-2014 have been met	76	2.03

GCHSS teachers as active, lifelong learners

Research evidence highlights an active approach among PDGCHSS' think-tankers and GCHSS' teachers to engage with activities that feed into their PD and go beyond the mandatory PD requirements:

> *(With reference to PDGCHSS) I was excited about embarking on this new project (Rosalie, PDGCHSS-RJ, March 12 2014).*

> *(With reference to Euroscola) This trip highlighted the massive responsibility, we as teachers take, year in year out, multiple times every year, with this trip and with other extra-curricular activities involving informal learning, when we seek to engage with our students, particularly outside the school and outside the country. This reflection is intended to shed light on the high level of commitment shown by teachers in this school who engage in numerous activities outside the strict parameters of the classroom. In particular this report aims to understand the process, the parties involved and the resulting Euroscola 2014 project (Catherine, PDGCHSS-RJ, April 13 2014).*

Research evidence shows that an active approach to lifelong PD calls for pro-active resourcefulness coupled with technological skills and/or motivation to venture with information and communication technology (ICT):

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[31] N = number of respondents rating the particular statement.

Mean = Mean rating given to each statement on a scale from 0 to 4 where 0 = strongly disagree; 4 = strongly agree (hence ratings 0 – 1.99 strongly disagree/disagree; 2 neither agree/disagree; 2.01 - 4 agree / strongly agree).

…it was agreed I would upload literature related to action research and professional development... (Melanie, PDGCHSS-RJ, January 23 2014).

I downloaded heaps of information, and guidelines to help me out (Rosalie, PDGCHSS-RJ, March 2014).

Other evidence highlights the importance of stepping-out of one's immediate context in order to actively engage with lifelong PD. This may be done in various ways and/or through the deployment of various tools, such as online research; virtual and real networking and attending out-of-school training events:

(With reference to PDGCHSS)…may include researching professional development in different countries all around the world. This could imply reading literature, but also finding resources at the [sic] internet and personal contacts with colleagues from abroad…We could organise forum discussion or/and Skype conference about this topic...(Bernard, PP-RJ, November 20 2013).

Participants had the opportunity to meet heads of departments and faculties; meet teachers, students and ex-students at Budapest Business School; observe skill development in practice; participate in round table discussion on skill needs and innovative methods of teaching languages for specific purposes; and visit the school's language examination centre (Elaine, PDGCHSS-RJ, September 2014).

(With reference to participation in Cedefop study-visit) My participation has networked me with a number of dedicated professionals operating in European educational settings willing to collaborate in future projects (e.g. through Erasmus+) related to well-being such as health, sexual education and teachers' professional development (Melanie, PDGCHSS-RJ, April 12 2014).

Research evidence shows that stepping-out of one's immediate context calls for skills that are seldom required in the traditional class and school context. The implication is that teachers embarking in such ventures have to deploy skills for which little training and practice (if at all) is provided through official teacher training programmes. In this case, when possible, teachers may draw on skills gained from non-formal and/or extra-curricular exposure and/or experience. This is particularly the case when the situation features a teacher-student relationship:

(With reference to teacher-student relationships during non-formal educational activities) Without detracting from the fact that...students and teachers are on a school outing that has its written (see Teachers' Code of Ethics) and unwritten rules (do I allow students to address me with my first name?) and modes of conduct, a five day trip in a foreign country, the teachers' role, in our opinion, is and needs to be, somehow different...such a trip offers scores of

different types of interactions on numerous and mostly unplanned issues (Catherine, PDGCHSS-RJ, April 13 2014).

Those teachers who are able to take extra-curricular activities onto a different level get this expertise from engaging with young people outside a school set up such as at youth clubs and centres. Managing a group and its dynamics, facilitating the passage of a group of people through different experiences, helping them appreciate what they mean to them, working through situations of bullying that might arise, seeking to keep the group's rules for the benefit of the well-being of all the group require an understanding of what helps a group gel together or simply get a job done (Catherine, PDGCHSS-RJ, April 13 2014).

These are the reasons why we, the accompanying teachers, believe that projects such as Euroscola need to be considered as more than the ends in themselves. This is where we see the need to seek to promote the idea that teachers who would like to engage with students in non-formal set ups are offered training in such set-ups if they do not already possess these skills (Catherine, PDGCHSS-RJ, April 13 2014).

A significant indicator of active, lifelong learning in the context of GCHSS is teachers' engagement in reflective practice as an outcome of their participation in PD-related activities (Hilton, Assunção Flores& Niklasson, 2013; Ryder 2012). PDGCHSS data confirm findings of related studies (Hilton, Assunção Flores& Niklasson, 2013; Ryder 2012; Schaub-de Jong, Schönrock-Adema, Dekker, Verkerk, & Cohen-Schotanus, 2011) when comprising reflections of various types such as learning outcomes and holistic progress experienced by students as well as teachers themselves:

I think the reason why I'm so attached to the Human Library is precisely because they're really learning by doing. They discussed the posters, worked on the banner, suggested books, took photos and worked really hard for it to happen (Rosalie, PDGCHSS-RJ, March 12 2014).

Organising such an activity teaches you to listen to everyone, appreciate the constructive comments and let the destructive ones slide (Rosalie, PDGCHSS-RJ, March 12 2014).

Like everything else in life, it (referring to the Human Library Day concept) needs to evolve and ultimately adapt to the needs of our students (Rosalie, PDGCHSS-RJ, March 12 2014).

The Marketing Syllabus includes a topic about Non-Profit Organisations. We invite NGO's for the HL. Thus they assigned some questions and linked it to the Human Library. It was a positive experience which was noted also by our "Books", in that the students were not just listening but asked questions. This practice could be easily be linked to Languages for instance. Students can be

asked to visit the Human Library, choose a "book" then follow it up by writing an essay. Thus linking the activity to the syllabus, if they like. The aim of the Human Library is not to assign more homeowrk in reality. I believe it is a learning experience in itself. However, some teachers may be more inclined to visit perhaps, if they see that such an activity can contribute to the syllabus (Rosalie, PDGCHSS-RJ, March 2014).

To my knowledge, other teachers who accompanied Euroscola groups in previous years also banked on their previous experiences to accomplish this (Catherine, PDGCHSS-RJ, April 13 2014).

Figure 3
Pestalozzi Programme Action Research Group 2013-4

*A policy of professional development for teachers at
Giovanni Curmi Higher Secondary School (Malta):
Contributions from a stake holding think-tank*

Project Overview

This is an action research project endorsed by the Council of Europe's Pestalozzi Programme's Action Research Group 2013 – 2014 and approved by the Directorate of Quality and Standards in Education (Malta). Our project concerns professional development for teachers at Giovanni Curmi Higher Secondary School (henceforth, GCHSS): as a concept and a practice. It entails an opportunity for us to operate and participate in a research think-tank comprising teaching staff and senior management team (henceforth, SMT) of GCHSS. The think-tank will hold five (5) meetings between January 2014 and March 2014 (approximately). Meetings will last around forty-five (45) minutes and will be held at GCHSS, during school hours, at a time that does not interfere with other duties and commitments and that is convenient for think-tank members. The whole research process complies with national ethical and research requirements.

Think-Tank Sessions

SESSION 1
This is the suggested agenda of discussion for our first meeting (date, time and location at GCHSS to be confirmed through email communication):

- Brief self-presentations

- Brief overview of the Pestalozzi Programme Action Research Project 2013-4

- Professional Development
  - a) *What is it to us?*
  - b) *What are the issues that interest us?*

- Our research
  - a) *Scope*
  - a) *Participatory action research methodology: overview and implications*
  - b) *Possibilities for documenting and publishing our research outcomes*

- Would you agree that we compile brief write-ups about?
  - a) *Who we are (personally and professionally);*
  - b) *Our understanding of professional development;*
  - c) *An experience of good practice of professional development (self or other's);*
  - d) *An experience of bad practice of professional development (self or other's);*
  - e) *Our aspirations in terms of professional development (self and/or in the context of GCHSS and/or in general);*
  - f) *Our aspirations with regard to this particular project;*
  - g) *Anything else we'd like to mention.*

- Questions and Feedback (throughout!)

As confirmed by related studies (Harrison, 2004; Sheridan-Carson & Carson, 1999), reflective practice among PDGCHSS think-tankers also resulted in further engagement with the methodology deployed for PDGCHSS. This is particularly evident when think-tankers engaged with brief write-ups (Figure 3) about themselves, their initial thoughts and expectations about PD and PDGCHSS; as well as when they engaged with reviewing one another's entries in the reflective journal:

> PD "is seeking to do well what one's job entails. It is reflection and action. It is looking for ways, within and outside oneself through which one can meet the challenges change brings with it. It is being humble enough to admit that 'there is room for improvement' in what we do, and is insightful enough to be able to choose the ways best suited to one's needs to meet these needs" (Catherine, PDGCHSS-IQ, January 2014).

> (In response to Rosalie's journal entry about her interest in human rights) Human Rights is a central topic of SoK Module 1 Democracy and Citizenship…an interesting idea could be interdisciplinary fusion for this topic…e.g. co-delivery of lessons/activities related to human rights lessons for students taking SoK and sociology. This might pave the way to exploring interdisciplinary teaching and learning at GCHSS as there are many subjects with overlapping topics, e.g. industrial revolution, internet revolution, the enlightenment etc…(Melanie, PDGCHSS-IQ, January 2014).

The unfinished collective dimension of lifelong PD

> Daily seeking to improve, to get better in what you do, because you love what you do is what really matters. That way, even the little failures become opportunities to discover something, to learn more... and slowly but surely you become successful in what you love doing (Elaine, PDGCHSS-IQ, January 2014).

> The constant search to improve one's understanding and practice in one's profession in a wide variety of ways yet always through openness to engagement with others and otherness (what/who is different from me, what/who 'shocks'/challenges me and my ways of being). It follows that to me professional development is bound to remain an unfinished project that can only take place in the collective (Melanie, PDGCHSS-IQ, January 2014).

Linking aims of the teaching profession to the broader global context

> Employers seek fluency and professional language use and the curriculum has to reflect the market needs and be flexible and adaptable to each context. This information is very relevant for course designers and policy makers in the area of education as well as for teachers and head teachers. There is an urgent need

to introduce new, more effective ways of language skill evaluation in line with the needs of potential employers. Certification of skills by language providers must respond to common standards that are universally accepted (Elaine, PDGCHSS-RJ, September 2014).

The next section delves the broader relevance of PDGCHSS' findings in providing research-based recommendations that frame a potential policy on professional development for teachers at GCHSS.

Recommendations that feed into a policy on professional development for teachers at GCHSS

The following recommendations were drawn from the research conducted in this study:

Strengthening collegiality
According to the data gathered, the main strength of the SDD sessions held from 2010 to 2014 was collegiality that ensued from these sessions. This is in accordance with an observation made by Adey (2004) who notes that during professional development sessions for teachers, teachers learn most, not from the experts who are conducting the sessions, but from each other. With a student population of approximately 2000, and a staff of over 200 (Anna, personal communication, January 2015), the issue of collegiality is particularly important, since for some teachers, the first time they physically interact with each other would be during a professional development session. It is easy for members to feel isolated and detached. During informal conversations with SMT members, teachers regularly refer to the challenge of becoming acquainted with all the members of staff in our school (Anna, personal communication, January 2015). The fact that physically the school is spread over five blocks, combined with the fact that teachers are segregated into staffrooms which are distant from one another, makes this challenge all the more difficult (Anna, personal communication, January 2015). Professional development sessions could provide an opportunity to foster new relationships with existing, and with new members of staff on both a personal and professional level. This is evidenced by the informal feedback given by teachers after every professional development session organised by the school (Anna, personal communication, January 2015). Hence the first recommendation is that professional development sessions are designed in a way to further strengthen collegiality between members of staff.

Choice of topics
One fourth of the respondents said that the choice of topics for SDD sessions is a weakness. This weakness needs immediate attention, and depicts a worrying situation. This weakness could easily be addressed by asking members of staff to recommend the topics themselves and to disseminate the

results obtained in the form of a frequency table. The organisers of the professional development sessions would then know exactly what the staff is demanding from these sessions. In an informal way, this was already being carried out in our school (Anna, personal communication, January 2015), but the data shows the dire need for a more systematic way of carrying out the consultative process.

Team-building

In the suggestions for topics for future SDDs, 11.4% of the teachers said that they would like the theme of team-building to form part of the sessions. Hence a recommendation that emerges from this research is that future SDD sessions should address this need being highlighted by the respondents. Team-building is the most popular organisational development technique used to improve effectiveness (Lussier, 2003). This means that in a school environment, team-building amongst members of staff augers well for more healthy interpersonal relationships that in turn, lay the foundation for more productive professional relationships.

Resources

The collected data show that teachers at our school expect to be provided with resources. A high percentage of teachers stated that they expected to be provided with educational resources (24.1%), followed by human resources (20.3%), technological resources (12.7%) and infrastructural resources (6.3%). It is very interesting to note that a good 63.3% of all respondents claimed that they could improve their performance at GCHSS if provided with adequate resources:

> *This year's SDD included important topics, however teachers should also highlight the needs of their school (both educational and the infrastructural) and the needs for the respective departments (Questionnaire respondent 38).*

Resources are therefore crucial, and these must not only be provided for teachers to be used within their school. They must also be readily available for teachers who seek their PD outside the school premises. While 34.2% of all respondents argued that they could improve their performance if they had more contact time with those they work with, 19% of all respondents stated that they could improve their performance if they collaborated with other non-GCHSS parties. Teachers who show an interest and are motivated to attend PD training sessions that are voluntary or held outside the school premises should therefore be encouraged to do so. Financial resources must be provided for this aim and the large amount of bureaucracy - which is currently putting teachers' motivation at risk - should be eliminated or decreased.

Conclusion

The discussion in this paper engaged with a works-in-progress analysis of professional development sought in the process of participatory action research by a think-tank of educators fulfilling duties in a state post-secondary school in Malta. Participants of the participatory action research project PDGCHSS engaged with professional development that takes place in "full partnership with teachers, so that…their extensive expertise is respected and utilized, and…their learning is pursued at a pace and in a manner that enables them to survive and thrive…professionally and personally, and so "be there" for their students" (Beck & Kosnik, 2014, p. xxviii) – and, we also wish to add – to "be there" also for themselves, fellow-educators and broader stakeholders of the educational context in which they operate.

Traditionally staff development has been considered as transfer of knowledge given to teachers in large groups and venues. According to Lieberman (1995), this often leads to teachers being treated as passive recipients, rather than active learners. But as educators we have been repeatedly told that teaching should not just be a transfer of knowledge and that learners need to be active constructors throughout the process (Armour & Makopoulou, 2012). As a participatory action research project, PDGCHSS called for all participants to be insiders and outsiders to the research. This implied engaging with related implications, problems and possibilities so as to give, as much as possible, an honest account of experiences as participants and researchers within PDGCHSS. PDGCHSS has indeed been an exercise in professional development and active learning for us as a group and individually.

In terms of main findings, research for PDGCHSS shows that PD should be grounded in and not disconnected from the school-context. It must be relevant to the teacher's everyday teaching. Knowledge gained from PD training must not be sporadic or disconnected, but transferable to everyday practice. A highly bureaucratized system serves as a detriment and hinders the teacher's motivation for PD. So do lack of resources such as time, financial resources and technological skills. Teachers must be given the opportunity to attend national and international out-of-school training events, related to their personality and personal interests. Networking with other professionals broadens the teacher's perspective and provides a possibility for sharing of good practice.

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