

# Dissertations

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## Curriculum

### An Analysis of the implementation of ESD within the Geography Syllabi and Classroom at Sixth Form level

Rebecca Cassar

May 2021

#### Abstract

This study explores how Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is integrated into the present geography syllabi and teaching strategies at sixth form level. It seeks to understand how geography educators at this level view and incorporate ESD and its teaching strategies into their classroom. It also makes a primary contribution to research in ESD in Malta, and how ESD is connected to geography education. The Geography Advanced and Intermediate syllabi are analysed using the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Competences in ESD and are further utilised to understand the sixth form geography educator's experience with ESD. A constructionist and interpretative stance is taken to understand their experiences using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to produce a thick analysis. The method includes a desk study analysis of the syllabi and semi-structured interviews with the geography educators. The data is analysed using both quantitative and qualitative analysis of the featured ESD competences in the syllabi and a thematic analysis of the interview data. The results show that several ESD competences feature in the syllabi confirming the link between ESD and geography education. Furthermore, educators at this level integrate ESD competences and skills using transformative and participative learning methods.

#### Keywords

ESD, ESD competences, geography education, post-secondary education

# Teachers' and Parents' Perceptions of Play-Based Learning in the Early Years of Schooling in Malta

Analise Grech

May 2021

## Abstract

Malta's NCF explains the importance of play-based learning in the Early Years since through this pedagogy, children's educational experiences can be catered for according to their interests and needs (Ministry of Education and Employment 2012). This study aims to identify the perceptions of teachers and parents about play-based learning in the Early Years of schooling in Malta since local research on this topic is very limited. Data collection comprised nine online semi-structured interviews conducted with Early Years teachers from State, Church, and Independent schools in Malta, and two hundred and ninety-seven online questionnaires distributed to those parents whose children were in an Early Years classroom during the data collection period. The multi-method research methodology used in this study proved advantageous since the quantitative method provided data on a considerable number of parents' perceptions, whereas the qualitative method provided in depth data on teachers' perspectives. Results indicate that teachers and parents who participated in this study knew the meaning of 'play-based learning'. All teacher participants were in favour of a play-based pedagogy, and they viewed play as important for children's holistic development. Similarly, parents also considered play-based learning as an important part of their child's education at school. The Early Years teachers in this study, who remarked having a positive experience of using this pedagogy, provided examples of strategies that they use when implementing play-based learning with their students. In this regard, the teacher participants also identified several challenges to play-based learning and also mentioned the types of support needed that would enable them to implement this pedagogy more effectively. This would ensure the proper execution of play-based learning.

## Keywords

play-based learning, Malta, Early Years, teachers, parents

# Mitigation of Classroom Dissonance Through Good Pedagogical Practices: Educator Beliefs, Practices and Motivational Factors at the Institute of Tourism Studies

Joseph George Mallia

May 2021

## Abstract

Pedagogical dissonance in hospitality and tourism vocational learners associated with a deficit in classroom inclusion was explored across three pedagogical aspects: deductive and inductive approaches, affecting the choice of materials and lesson planning; explicit and implicit approaches, describing the educator delivery methods; approaches facilitating field-dependent and field-independent learners, namely student-centred characteristics. A mixed-method approach and triangulation of ensuing results between qualitative analysis based on the general inductive approach and quantitative analysis using the Wilcoxon signed rank test evidenced that educators favoured explicit and deductive approaches as they successfully included a wider range of students at different award-levels in both theoretical and hands-on modules and were also more time-effective. Implicit and inductive approaches were, however, recognized as being critically useful in adding pedagogical diversity, and further mitigating pedagogical dissonance. Field dependency and independency are learner-centred characteristics and required an equal focus. Contextualization-use in the classroom based on familiar cultural elements was identified by educators as having an essential role for learner inclusion: transactional, with a direct pedagogical role, and interpersonal via indirect pedagogical facilitation. Global contextualization use, as a cultural window for learners onto the world and a tool to encourage learner-centred peer inclusion was relatively underutilized. Effective, good practices of pedagogy mitigating classroom exclusion, grounded in behaviourism, cognitivism and constructivism, and elaborated via a primarily bottom-up strategy from educators in the hospitality and tourism vocational sector, should facilitate the implementation of good 3 practices augmenting inclusion, facilitating learners in diverse vocational classrooms in Malta and internationally.

## Keywords

Inclusion and pedagogical dissonance, deductive and inductive, explicit an implicit, field-dependent and field-independent, learning context



# The Challenges Schools Face when Teaching Dance Within a PE Curriculum - A Pedagogical Approach

Ilaria-Cristina Spiteri Axiak

May 2021

## Abstract

The Physical Education curriculum includes a vast range of topics and sports. The one sport that this research study aims to focus on is that of Dance, which is incorporated within the Physical Education curriculum in Malta. Dance may be considered less favourite, when compared to other sport disciplines, within the PE curriculum. It is important to highlight that dance is also one of the four practical assessments held for the SEC exam. Still, students are not always given this option within their PE curriculum, and they are forced to choose the other three options - even in cases when they might be strong in dance, and/or weaker in the other options. For these reasons, it became pertinent for this study to understand the challenges faced when teaching dance within the PE curriculum. This study will also specifically look for the reasons why teachers do not teach dance within the PE curriculum. The research study will include PE teachers in the educational sector to further investigate the issues they face when teaching dance in the Physical Education Curriculum. Data will be collected by means of semi-structured interviews held with six teachers who do not teach dance in the PE curriculum, to find out why and what can facilitate the implementation. The data will then be analysed and discussed in the main findings of this research study. The main discussion of the study aims to learn about the reasons why teachers avoid teaching dance, and what can be done to change this. In conclusion, further suggestions will be put forward to support teachers' perspectives.

## Keywords

Physical Education, Dance, Curriculum

# A Critical Examination of Dr Smith's Storytelling Method in Maltese Schools: Implications for 21st Century Skills

Rodianne Theuma

May 2021

## Abstract

This research study examines Dr Smith's storytelling schools' method in Maltese primary schools in relation to the acquisition of 21st century skills by young students. At the time of this investigation, nine primary schools were fully trained in this strategy by the National Literacy Agency. Permission was granted to conduct research in three of them. This investigation used a mixed-method approach to examine whether Dr Smith's storytelling methodology helps educators equip primary students with the required 21st century skills. An online questionnaire was compiled and distributed to trained educators within these schools, followed by semi-structured interviews with senior leadership members and class teachers, to gain insight into the changes educators observed in primary children learning through this storytelling schools' method. Using purposive sampling, a total of thirty questionnaires and six semi-structured interviews with two heads of school, two assistant heads and two class teachers were gathered, coded, themed and analysed. Results show that Dr Smith's storytelling approach is an easy to integrate strategy within the curriculum, being an effective teaching and learning tool that equips young children with the required 21st century skills to succeed in the ever-changing world they live in. A major concern emerging from the study is that not all educators are aware of or teach 21st century skills. In the final chapter, recommendations are put forward to improve the situation.

## Keywords

storytelling, Storytelling School (DSSSM), primary education, 21st century skills, successful citizens

## The use of portfolios as an assessment tool in food preparation and production subjects

Aldo Vella

May 2021

### Abstract

An assessment is an integral part of the education system and, over the years, the use of portfolios has gained popularity. Portfolios are understood to enhance students' skills and knowledge. Through different sources, this study aimed to explore the use of portfolios as an assessment tool in the food preparation and production subjects. This information was collated and examined, and a guide was developed at the end of the literature review. The data for this study was collected by means of an exploratory mixed method approach through face-to-face interviews and an online-questionnaire. Through the application of these methods, the study examined how lecturers use portfolios in food preparation and production subjects as an assessment tool. For the interpretation of the findings, a thematic analysis was used for the face-to-face interviews. The results revealed that the use of portfolios as a means of communication identify learners' problems and help them learn. The findings point towards the large number of learners who have to present portfolios, the relatively little time for marking and feedback, and the lack of responsibility shown by some learners to be particular issues of concern. It also appears that lecturers are not wellinformed about the use of portfolios. Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made: that lecturers be given adequate training on the use of portfolios; the creation of manuals and guides for standardisation; continuous personal development through communities of practices on the use and development of portfolios; and the longitudinal use of portfolios throughout food production courses.

### Keywords

Portfolio, Assessment

## Group Work Perceptions and Practices in Post-Secondary Hospitality Education: A Case Study at the Institute of Tourism Studies

Lucienne Vella

May 2021

### Abstract

Group work has pedagogical as well as pragmatic benefits and these occur to varying degrees, depending upon the perceptions of educators and students, as well as the type of work undertaken in a group setting. When the notions of cooperation and collaboration are introduced in group work, it becomes a valuable enterprise with distinctive cognitive aims. The aim of this study is to explore group work perceptions and practices in post-secondary, vocational, hospitality education. The participants are lecturers and students at the Institute of Tourism Studies. The lecturers were interviewed, while the students took part in an online survey. Additionally, a group of students were observed while carrying out a group task. Lecturers consider group work to be an efficient teaching and learning tool which enables them to cover more quality content, besides enhancing transversal skills in students. On the other hand, when students are assigned a group task, it does not necessarily mean that they are working together. They usually divide the task among group members who work independently and then convene to assemble the final output, with minimal interaction. The students claim that they are given tight deadlines which rob them of the opportunity to form truly collaborative, long-term groups that support their holistic development. Both lecturers and students have to 'learn by doing' as neither of them receive any training about group work. After gaining an insight into existing practices and causes for apprehension, a 3 model is presented which may be used to enhance the understanding and applicability of group work in post-secondary, vocational education.

### Keywords

Group work, cooperation, collaboration, teamwork skills

## Parents' Perspectives on the Use of the CPA Approach during Maths Lessons in a Maltese non-state Primary School

Natasha Xerri

May 2021

### Abstract

Nowadays, there is a drive towards a constructivist approach to learning which puts learners at the centre of the learning process. In 1966, Bruner came up with an approach to learning that enables learners to explore topics using a combination of resources, pictures, and abstract content, hence its name Concrete Pictorial Abstract approach. By implementing the CPA approach, learning is scaffolded and inclusive as it targets all learners despite their abilities and learning styles. Several studies have been carried out to test this approach's feasibility, claiming that it is effective. This research aims to promote the CPA approach among the parents in the researcher's class and some educators in the same Church School. The reasons for involving parents were many, including promoting parental engagement, which has proved to have a positive impact on the academic performance of learners. A mixed methods approach was adopted in this research. A pre-lessons questionnaire was administered to 15 parents in the researcher's Year 4 class, followed by two lessons to show how the CPA approach can be implemented. A post-lessons questionnaire followed. The parents outlined several recommendations. These recommendations were further discussed with nine educators during two focus groups that were carried out. The educators suggested possible ways how parental involvement and engagement can increase further. Participants saw the approach as beneficial, and many would implement it and recommend it to others.

### Keywords

Mathematics, Concrete Pictorial Abstract (CPA) Approach, Manipulatives, Parental engagement

## Primary Education and 21st -Century Skills: Preparing Primary School Students for the Future of the Job Market

Gabriella Zahra

May 2021

### Abstract

This research project studies the importance of 21st -century skills in today's changing world of employment. Issues related to this topic include how employment skills have changed throughout the years, which skills are most important for today's job markets, how students need to be lifelong learners and whether these skills needed are being implemented in today's primary classrooms or not. A total of 147 questionnaires were carried out. Twelve participants were members of the senior leadership team, while the other 135 were teachers. Quantitative methodology was used for this research. Online questionnaires were distributed online due to the Covid-19 (Corona Virus Disease – 2019) pandemic, making it difficult to conduct face-to-face questionnaires. From the data analysis, it became clear that educators see the importance of 21st -century skills for their students' employment and understand that today's students are 'digital natives', which means that children today are immersed in technology since the day they were born. Thus, it is essential to implement such 21st -century skills with digital tools to keep students engaged. On the other, some educators have no clue what 21st -century skills are and do not practice the 4C's of education: communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creative thinking. The research suggests the need for promoting awareness of these 21st -century skills through CoPE (Community of Professional Educators) sessions organised by the senior leadership team so that school action plans could then be set in place. Those educators who already implement 21st -century skills within their daily lessons must continue their good practice while exploring new teaching strategies with the help of the proper support provided through CoPE sessions.

### Keywords

21st -century skills, job markets, primary education, employability

# The Perceptions of Middle School English Teachers on the Learning Outcomes Framework and Continuous Assessment

Linette Chircop Zahra

May 2022

## Abstract

The Educational system in Malta has seen drastic changes over the years, including the removal of the Junior Lyceum exams in 2011, the introduction of the co-education system in 2014, the introduction of the College Network System in 2005, and the implementation of the Learning Outcomes Framework and a New Assessment System starting from 2018. With the introduction of a new syllabus and a new assessment system, teachers had to go through training sessions to update their pedagogy and reflect new teaching styles in today's modern context including a more student-centred approach focusing on context learning and continuous/ formative assessment. This research aims to identify the perspectives of English teachers who are using the LOF and the New Assessment System in State Middle Schools. It delves into their experiences and identifies any advantages, disadvantages, or challenges, if any, they are facing. The study raised the issue of teachers acknowledging the benefits of the newly implemented systems yet, find some challenges that need to be tackled by policymakers including an overwhelming number of Learning Outcomes, a prescriptive syllabus, and a heavy workload which highly affects the preparation and execution of the lessons. All this confirms that, in this scenario, continuous/formative assessments not feasible and further training and investigation needs to be done.

## Keywords

Education, Qualitative, English, Formative Assessment (FA), Learning Outcomes Framework (LOF)

## The Choice of Hospitality SEC & SEAC as an option at Local Secondary Schools: A comparative, mixed methods approach

Leanne Desira

May 2022

### Abstract

The choice of option subjects in Year 8 is one of the students' most challenging decisions during their adolescence. Whilst making this choice, students are influenced by diverse issues which lead them to their final choice. Such issues may vary; from early childhood years students are unknowingly influenced by their family members, friends, and teachers (Gregorio, 1996). Javed (2018) stated that school environment, information on subjects and job opportunities impact students when making their subject choice. Subject difficulty also affects the students' choice since they tend to choose subjects in which they can do well (Cuff, 2017). Trautwein and Ludtke (2009), agreed that difficulty of subject, students' potential, and the home environment affect students' subject choice. This decision can be taken after consideration of both valid and unfounded reasons. Research in an Australian Secondary school also shows that three of the most significant factors are the students' state of residence, gender, and prior school attainments (Fullarton & Ainley, 2000). Through this study, the focus will be on the choice of hospitality as a VET subject in local Maltese schools. The main aims of this study are to analyse factors which lead Hospitality students to choose the subject, investigate whether the subject is what they expected it to be and if the students plan to further their studies in the Hospitality industry as part of their post-secondary plan.

### Keywords

Hospitality SEC, Hospitality SEAC, Subject choice, Influences



## Diversion or Safety Net? VET Hospitality Education at Secondary School Level in the Maltese Islands: The Educator's Perspective

Leanne Dingli

May 2022

### Abstract

The main aim of this research was to challenge the perception that vocational subjects are designed for students with lower abilities and that they have a subordinate status to other subjects. The researcher sought to learn more on the perspective of VET Hospitality educators, their perspective on the expectations, motivations and other factors which may lead students in state schools to choose to study vocational Hospitality. The study also focuses on the phenomenon of early school leaving in Malta and its relationship with vocational education. To answer the research questions, seven semi structured interviews were carried out with seven VET Hospitality educators. This helped the researcher to acquire the educators' views and perspectives on the matter. The data collected was examined through thematic analysis. Four themes emerged that enabled the researcher to analyse, discuss and present the results accordingly. The results indicate that vocational education in state secondary schools can serve as both a diversion and safety net for the students. VET's are an alternative pathway for those students who are able to reach MQF level 3 but prefer a different path and also a safety net for those students who for various reasons would otherwise drop out from compulsory education.

### Keywords

My Journey, Subject Choice, Vocational Education, Early leaving from education and training, Hospitality

# Educators' Perspectives on Inquiry-Based Learning in Science in Maltese Primary and Church Schools

Rachel Ferriggi Johnson

May 2022

## Abstract

Science education is believed to offer the acquisition of skills necessary for the full participation of citizens and enable individuals to succeed in an ever-evolving society. Inquiry-Based Learning is recommended as one of the pedagogical approaches required to provide students with the scientific knowledge and competencies needed to develop into scientifically literate citizens. Several international studies have highlighted positive outcomes of Inquiry-Based Learning and its ability to provide a meaningful and authentic learning experience for Primary schoolchildren. Recent changes in schools in Malta have seen the introduction of the Learning Outcomes Framework, promoting Inquiry-Based Learning strategies. This research compared teachers' perspectives on Inquiry-Based Learning in Science among Year 4 to Year 6 teachers in six Primary State and Church schools. It aimed to highlight good practices adopted in schools to promote Inquiry-Based Learning further. The research also inquired about teachers' perspectives of students' preferred teaching methods and sought to find out how teachers can be supported in their teaching. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 Class Teachers across both sectors. A Head of School from a Church School and a State School, a Head of Department and the Primary Science Education Officer were also interviewed. Educators agreed that Inquiry-Based Learning increases students' enjoyment and engagement. It also enhances critical thinking skills and collaboration with peers. All the educators acknowledged the challenges faced by teachers in the classroom. The research highlighted the need for further training and adequate support for the effective implementation of Inquiry-Based Learning across both sectors.

## Keywords

Primary Science, Inquiry-Based Learning, Maltese Education, STEM, Student-Centred Learning

# An Investigation on the Use of the Thematic Approach to Enhance Creative Writing Skills in a Maltese Church Primary School

Sharon Galea

May 2022

## Abstract

The National Curriculum Framework (MEDE,2012) promotes a shift away from a purely subject-based approach that supports knowledge fragmentation and segregation in pursuit of a more cross-curricular, thematic, interdisciplinary and collaborative approach. This approach supports the learners' real-life experiences to enhance skill transfer from one learning area to the next. This research study is about the insights of educators in a local primary church school, concerning the use of the thematic approach as a tool to enhance the creative writing skills in primary school learners. This study aimed to identify the benefits and challenges from the teachers' perspectives when using a thematic approach. Individual semi-structured interviews were used to undertake qualitative research based on the experiences of four teachers, from Year 3 to Year 6 and one member of the Senior Leadership Team. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. From the findings, one can understand the benefits of using the Thematic Approach both for teachers and learners. Teachers can link subjects under one common theme, while learners can make connections better when not learning in compartments. The main challenges faced by teachers are the lack of time to create new resources together with having to follow a rigid timetable. The participants have expressed their agreement to let the learners choose the themes but have identified textbooks as one of the main challenges to support learners in choosing the themes. The participants also highlighted the fact that textbooks hinder their creativity and make thematic teaching more difficult to implement. Year 5 and Year 6 teachers mentioned how creative writing takes another route with exams. This study also puts forward recommendations for practitioners and policymakers to support better the teachers in using this approach.

## Keywords

Church Schools, Creative Writing, Primary Education, Maltese Education, Thematic Approach

## Applied Hospitality as a subject and tool for preventing Early Leaving from Education and Training

Mary Ann Gatt

May 2022

### Abstract

The main purpose of this dissertation was to find out whether applied vocational subjects, mainly Applied Hospitality, served as a tool for preventing early leaving from education and training. An investigation amongst Year 11 applied hospitality teachers and students about their perception on the curriculum was carried out. This reflecting whether the curriculum enabled the implementation of learner centred pedagogies together with experiential learning. Three state Year 11 applied hospitality classes and their teachers were chosen as participants. In order to answer the research questions, questionnaires were distributed amongst all participants who were; three hospitality teachers, two Learning Support Educators and 13 students. The results which emerged from the questionnaires served as a foundation for the focus group amongst teachers and the semi-structured interviews carried out with six students. The results show that there needs to be some changes in the applied hospitality curriculum in order for it to be more hands-on and reach the majority of the students that choose it. Moreover, the results also highlighted the fact, that students associated the subject with cooking and that the majority of students chose applied hospitality because they intend to pursue a career in the Culinary Arts or in the Hospitality Industry in general. In reflection of these results proposals for further investigations have been given to enable more curricular adaptations hence preventing students from being ELET.

### Keywords

Applied Hospitality, Early Leaving from Education and Training (ELET), experiential learning, learner-centred pedagogies

# Understanding the Basic Needs for Year 1 Students, and exploring ways of addressing them Through a Learning Outcomes Framework Cross-curricular Approach

Annelise Grech

May 2022

## Abstract

This study is aimed at exploring significant reasons for the lack of motivation for learning experienced by Year 1 students, resulting in challenging behaviours for educators. This investigation applies a qualitative methodological approach to understand some of the basic students' needs and how they can be dealt with and addressed through the right pedagogical techniques and intervention, in a cross-curricular manner. Teachers with years of experience are to be interviewed so that insights would be gained from their accumulated knowledge, observations and assessment of what worked and what did not, in their endeavour to help these children. Furthermore, this study aims at exploring ways to help these students feel more motivated through different cross-curricular pedagogical strategies and techniques that specifically address the students' real needs. There are several factors that lead students to have lack of motivation for learning such as the lack of understanding of children's basic needs from the educators, and so the failure to address them satisfactorily. This research clearly and constantly indicates a significantly strong positive correlation between the satisfaction of physical, social and emotional needs, and educational achievement/academic performance. Thus, this study delves deep into the implications of such a correlation for the professional development and pedagogical practice/s of Primary school teachers, especially those teaching Year 1 students. On the basis of such insights, and of all the research reviewed, I aspire that the curriculum more effectively addresses the students' real needs through the learning outcomes in a cross-curricular approach.

## Keywords

Physical, Social and emotional needs, Cross-curricular strategies, effective curriculum

## Transformative Literacy Practices in a Year 4 Classroom

Ylenia Lapira

May 2022

### Abstract

This action research study was carried out in a year 4 classroom during the scholastic year 2021-2022. In this study, the teacher takes the role of a researcher and embarks on a transformation process with the learners in her classroom. The teacher-researcher has observed the development of literacy skills, throughout the scholastic year, specifically from October 2021 to April 2022, which includes the reading and writing capabilities of the students, while taking into consideration their literacy background at home. The teacher-researcher who carried out this research took stock of the initial literacy skills of learners by making use of the Hedderly Sentence Completion Test as a literacy assessment at the beginning of the scholastic year and again in April 2022 to compare any improvements or challenges faced by the students. This information, together with data collected from observations by a critical friend, self-reflections by the researcher, and responses from parents and guardians about out-of-school literacy practices through semi-structured interviews, informed the planning of transformative strategies to create a positive literacy experience taking into account attitudes, engagement, participation, teacher-student interactions, and classroom dynamics. Taking an Action Research approach, the teacher-researcher explored the inside and outside school literacy practices of children in the Grade 4 classroom and transformed her own classroom practices to address the literacy issues identified. Cyclical planning, implementation, and outcomes observed through the children's work were recorded through the ongoing reflections in the teacher's reflective journal. Findings from this action research show that in terms of writing and reading skills, the students showed improvement throughout the scholastic year. Implications of this research promote the importance of having the ability to perform literacy skills in day-to-day life on the one side and the importance of becoming reflexive practitioners upholding action research practices in the classroom on the other.

### Keywords

Action research, Emergent literacy, Literacy-rich environment, student engagement, transformative practices

# Teachers' Perspectives on Closing the Gaps in Mathematics between the Early and Junior Years in a Maltese Church Primary School

Cynthia Mizzi

May 2022

## Abstract

Mathematics is a fundamental subject that all learners have the right to learn the basics. Moreover, Mathematical competence is one of the eight competencies essential to citizens for lifelong learning, as recommended by the Council of the European Union in May 2018. However, the international studies, Programme for International Student Assessment in 2018 and Trends in Mathematics and Science Study in 2019 show that not all learners attain the basic Mathematics skills needed to live everyday life in Maltese society at the age of 15. In addition, there is a substantial gap between low and high achievers. Therefore, the researcher conducted this study to investigate how a teacher can help to reduce the gap between the low and high achievers in Primary Mathematics. Consequently, the researcher gathered data through qualitative research by interviewing five teachers from a Maltese primary church school. The data was collected through semi-structured interviews by MS Teams® about their perspectives and experiences in the classroom. The teachers discussed the current situation in their school, the difficulties the learners face in acquiring the skills needed to reach their full potential in Mathematics, the difficulties the teachers experienced in teaching Mathematics and how they dealt with these situations. In addition, the participants discussed the teaching strategies and resources they use while teaching Mathematics and their good practices. As a result, the researcher understood the teachers' barriers, strategies and good practices that helped them close the gaps between their learners and reach every learner in their classes. The findings show that the teachers were all concerned about this research topic, and they are exploring new systems collaboratively. Learners may have different barriers, which vary according to the year groups. Most participants tried to incorporate the Maths Mastery approach in their Mathematics lessons using various resources and questioning. Moreover, from the participants' point of view, the Maths Mastery approach is beneficial to all learners, especially to reach both sides of the spectrum, the low and high achievers.

## Keywords

Maltese Schools, Mathematics, Maths Mastery Approach, Primary Education, Student Achievement

# Investigating Levels of Mathematics Anxiety and Resilience: A Case Study of Pupils following a Maths Mastery Programme in a Non-State Primary School in Malta

Caroline Rizzo

May 2022

## Abstract

Math Anxiety can have debilitating effects as it impacts emotions, it causes physical pain and it affects cognition. It can develop in young children and unless it is addressed it will have negative effects on self-confidence, engagement and performance. Maths anxiety is one of the main reasons for low attainment in Mathematics (Hamza & Helal, 2013). Maths resilience is the key to counteract Maths Anxiety. The philosophy and pedagogy behind Maths Mastery is to support pupils and to build Maths Resilience. The purpose of this study was to investigate levels of Maths Anxiety and Maths Resilience in pupils following a Maths Mastery Programme. Pupils currently attending Level 5 (aged 9 and 10) in an independent school were invited to participate in this study as well as teachers. The study was composed of three phases. Phase 1 was the completion of the questionnaire. Phase 2 consisted of small group interviews. Phase 3 comprised of interviews held with teachers. The results of this study indicated that although there was a strong enjoyment of mathematic lessons, due to the structure, support and activities of the Maths Mastery programme, Maths Anxiety was evident in approximately one quarter of the participants. Mathematical resilience was a strong characteristic in the majority of pupils. Teachers used effective strategies to build resilience. However, both pupils and teachers were not aware of the four factors required for the development of full resilience.

## Keywords

Maths Mastery, Maths Anxiety, Maths Resilience, Growth Zone Model



# The Impact of Continuous Assessment: A Study on Teachers' Perspectives and Approaches

Jessica Sacco

May 2022

## Abstract

The Continuous Assessment Reform was established concurrently with the Learning Outcomes Framework in scholastic year 2018/2019. Thus, educators were tasked with conducting several continuous assessment tasks during the year, instead of two formal examinations. Such changes in assessment procedures affect the teaching and learning process, while demanding that teachers adapt their pedagogies to accommodate the new system. This research study investigates teachers' perspectives on the Continuous Assessment Reform and examines their assessment approaches. It explores the challenges experienced by educators following the introduction of the Continuous Assessment Reform. Moreover, this study examines teachers' training with regards to assessment so as to discover whether more training is required. Ultimately, the goal of this study is to provide recommendations aimed at improving the continuous assessment process, thereby lessening the challenges faced by educators. A mixed-method approach was employed for this study. Quantitative data was collected through the distribution of an online questionnaire to teachers teaching upper Junior Years, while qualitative data was simultaneously gathered through three semi-structured interviews with members of the Senior Leadership Team. In conclusion, this study finds that educators lack an adequate level of assessment literacy, thus negatively affecting the continuous assessment process. Importantly, the results of the study led the researcher to conclude that although the reform is welcomed by most teachers, the disproportioned level of added work accompanying such reform ultimately proves to be detrimental to its implementation.

## Keywords

Continuous Assessment, Challenges, Educators' Perspectives, Assessment literacy, Teacher training

## Fieldwork Resource pack as a tool in the teaching of Chemistry in Secondary Schools

Nadine Sciortino

May 2022

### Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the teachers' and students' perceptions on the pedagogical effectiveness of fieldwork in Chemistry at Secondary level and if such an inquiry-based learning activity offers benefits, that cannot be achieved via laboratory experiments. The challenges that teachers face when organizing fieldwork were also investigated. The Fieldwork Pack, compiled as part of this study, was also evaluated by teachers and students. A mixed-methods approach, using questionnaires and group interviews, were used to have a more in-depth analysis of the data. Chemistry teachers, Year 10 and Year 11 Chemistry students from participating schools, were involved in this study. Results indicated that both teachers and students endorsed the idea of fieldwork in Chemistry, however unlike students, the majority of the teachers did not agree that it should become compulsory. Respondents believe that working in-situ during field excursions allows students to achieve transferable skills, which cannot be attained through laboratory experiments. However, the fact that fieldwork is time consuming and difficult to fit in the curriculum, discourages teachers from conducting fieldwork. Other barriers include logistical problems, lack of resources, lack of fieldwork experience and teacher training. Teachers found the Fieldwork Pack to be useful tool in teaching Chemistry. Teachers and students agree that the layout was user-friendly and the resources extensive. The suggested activities were found to be engaging and to enhance student motivation. This introductory study gave an insight into the importance of fieldwork in teaching and learning Chemistry and the resources required by teachers, however more research needs to be carried out before conclusions can be generalised.

### Keywords

Chemistry fieldwork, Deterrents, Benefits, Mixed-methods, Fieldwork Pack

# Taking the Curriculum into Nature: The Dinja Wahda Programme in a Maltese Primary State School

Analise Vella

May 2022

## Abstract

Different studies show that nature-based learning which is a form of outdoor learning has many benefits for the holistic development of children. However, there are many barriers which are limiting children from spending time outdoors to learn and connect with nature. This dissertation explored the Dinja Waħda programme, which is an established programme created by BirdLife Malta as a tool for outdoor learning through nature that promotes nature-based learning with the purpose of increasing children's and educators' connection with nature and increasing children's environmental awareness. Moreover, this study looked at the perceptions of teachers with regards to the programme and its effect on students' learning through curricular subjects. The data was collected through pre-and post-intervention quantitative surveys with year 4 and year 5 educators and students attending Qawra Primary school. The findings reveal that the Dinja Waħda programme is effective in increasing students' and educators' level of connectedness with nature and in teaching other curricular subjects through the activities. The results also indicate that lack of nature on the school grounds remains a challenge to conduct some activities in the Dinja Waħda programme and nature-based learning. Some recommendations were made based on the research findings directed at different stakeholders to increase nature-based learning and eventually to reconnect students with nature.

## Keywords

Nature-based learning, Outdoor learning, Dinja Wahda Programme, Nature connectedness, Curricular subjects

# The Perspectives of Chemistry Educators on the Possible Implementation of a Practical Examination as Part of the Chemistry Secondary Education Certificate

Tiziana Vella

May 2022

## Abstract

Chemistry as a science subject appeals to those students who have an appetite for understanding the core concepts of matter and its interactions. Teaching the subject at Secondary Education Certificate (SEC) and Advanced Matriculation (AM) levels requires educators to provide an understanding of abstract and complex topics. This could prove challenging to even the most dedicated student and educator. Science subjects generally are taught in conjunction with practical approaches to demonstrate the theory in a hands-on manner and make the subjects more approachable. Such a pedagogical approach could be used not only to teach chemistry but to also assess the students in a practical setting. The study aims to gather perspectives of educators currently teaching Chemistry at SEC and AM level in Maltese schools on the hypothetical implementation of an examinable practical session for the Chemistry SEC Examination. The data was gathered using a mixed methodology, wherein responses for a questionnaire were gathered from thirty (30) participants, forming the quantitative aspect of the study, whilst data was collected from six (6) participants who accepted to participate in interviews, forming the subsequent qualitative phase of the study. The majority of the participants in both analyses felt that the course work could be substituted with an examinable practical mode of assessment, which could better assess the level of knowledge and skill acquired by the chemistry students and possibly promote a more effective and fairer assessment.

## Keywords

Chemistry, Practical, Assessment, Coursework, SEC

# Educators' perspectives about the dis/continuity of the implementation of play-based learning from Kindergarten 2 to Year 1

Tiziana Vella

May 2022

## Abstract

The main topic of this study is the implementation of play-based learning (PBL) as a pedagogical tool within Early Childhood Education in Malta. The study analyses the continuation of PBL from the second year of Kindergarten (Kindergarten 2) to the first year of primary schooling (Year 1) in a specific school in Malta. These two particular year groups were selected to identify the similarities and differences in the application of PBL within their contexts. This study also highlights educators' perspectives on the effectiveness of the implementation of PBL and identifies the challenges they encounter during its implementation. Therefore, this study sheds new light on possible areas of improvement in the implementation of PBL in Early Childhood Education. A qualitative research methodology was adopted for this study; thus, the research process entailed conducting one interview with an Early Years Educational Officer, two interviews with two Kindergarten 2 educators, and two interviews with two Year 1 teachers from one state school. Three main themes emerged from the data, namely, educators' understanding of PBL and its benefits, PBL within the local context, and educators' perspectives on the challenges of PBL. The findings indicated that all the educators valued the importance of play in education; however, they noted various challenges that inhibit the implementation of PBL, including the lack of resources, time constraints, and the learners' behaviour. Hence, this study also provides suggestions to the School Leadership Team, Early Years Education Officers, and educators to address these challenges.

## Keywords

Play-based learning, Early Childhood Education, Educators' perspectives, benefits of play, Challenges of play-based learning

# The Perspectives of Year 3 and 4 Teachers on the Use of the Cross-Curricular Approach in Two Maltese State Primary Schools

Charlene Xerri Hili

May 2022

## Abstract

Lately, Maltese education has undergone major educational reforms. The National Curriculum Framework for All policy document has been a paradigm shift from teacher-led education to student-centred practices. The document mentions the need to move from a prescriptive to an outcomes-based curriculum, coined the Learning Outcomes Framework. One of its contentions is moving away from a system where knowledge is fragmented and compartmentalised towards a more cross-curricular approach that better reflects real life and facilitates the transfer of skills from one area to another. Despite this policy, teaching remains predominantly segregated into subjects with little cross-curricular teaching. Local studies show that vast content and an exam-oriented system top the list of barriers to implementing a cross-curricular approach. The researcher wished to investigate whether shifting to the Learning Outcomes Framework has facilitated the teacher's job to become more flexible and autonomous in designing a cross-curricular approach. In this qualitative study, the researcher uses semi-structured interviews to understand what six state Primary school teachers perceive as barriers and what they consider conducive to its implementation when working with the Learning Outcomes Framework. For this reason, the researcher interviews Year 3 or Year 4 teachers who are the only Year groups currently implementing this framework at primary level. Findings in this study reveal that teachers still perceive the curriculum as being demanding and exam-oriented. There is a pronounced need for more guidelines and policies that are clear and practical to implement a cross-curricular approach. Teachers express the need for more training and support on the topic. Participants also complained that too much prescribed material, including textbooks and timetables, compromises teachers' autonomy and flexibility. The conclusions are that the Learning Outcomes Framework's contentions for a more flexible and autonomous teacher system are not valid. The reasons appear to be that curricular reform has been imposed on teachers rather than coming from them. Teachers are tired of changes, and in most cases, teachers view themselves as enactors rather than creators of change.

## Keywords

Curricular reform, Cross-curricular approach, Learning Outcomes Framework, Maltese education, Primary Education

## Inclusion

### Leading the Extremely Challenging: Exploring the Leadership Style of Leaders Supporting Learners Exhibiting with Social, Emotional, and Behavioural Difficulties in Learning Support Centres

Michelle Calleja Gafa'

May 2021

#### Abstract

By adopting the grounded theory approach, which involved using in-depth, semi structured interviews as the main data gathering tool, this study generates a working theory for leaders who lead Learning Support Centres. These centres are frequented by learners whose social, emotional and behavioural difficulties jeopardised their inclusion in mainstream school settings. The Learning Support Centre leaders' quest is to support these learners in thriving and succeeding, despite the challenges. Hence, the aims of this study are twofold: i) to identify the Learning Support Centre leaders' approaches and practices to help these learners thrive and ii) to suggest contributions to bridge the gap between the approaches and practices adopted by Learning Support Centre leaders and those taken up by school leaders. Thus, the principal subject of this study involves leadership processes aimed at helping learners exhibiting with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. The study indicates that Learning Support Centre leaders adopt a serving with care approach to the whole Learning Support Centre community in order to reach out to learners. It also demonstrates that leadership processes can play a major role in creating a cultural change where learners are disciplined in a manner that preserves their dignity. Ultimately, this study aspires to provide an impetus to school leaders to take a paradigmatic shift so that the school community responds effectively to the needs of learners exhibiting with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.

#### Keywords

School culture and climate, democratic model of discipline, school leadership processes, positive behaviour management, grounded theory approach.

# The Perceptions of Educators on the inclusion of children within the Autism Spectrum Disorder in Primary School

Daniel Scicluna

May 2021

## Abstract

The study aimed to investigate the tutors specialised in autism, Learning Support Educators (LSE), Senior Management Team (SMT) and teacher's perception on the inclusion of children with autism. Moreover, it attempts to analyse the perceptions of teachers and LSE on the support and resources they receive and what challenges they face when teaching children with autism. A qualitative approach was adopted. Throughout the study, the researcher sent out online structured questionnaires to the teachers and LSE. Interviews were held with the SMT and in order to gain expert advice, interviews were also held with tutors specialised in autism. Moreover, a focus group was held with the teachers and LSEs with the intention of gaining more insight and understanding. An analysis of the collected data, using a system known as thematic analysis, showed that teachers, LSEs and tutors specialised in autism have a positive perception in teaching children with autism. However, supporting these children imposed a number of challenges for the teachers and LSEs. On the other hand, emerging results showed that the SMT had a negative perception towards the inclusion of children with autism. Findings also indicated that teachers and LSEs are receiving very limited support and resources and that they have very limited knowledge on how to deal with the challenges one faces when teaching children with autism. Recommendations on what can be done to help improve the educator's perceptions, and what can be done to help them deal with challenges together with further implications and further research are included within this work.

## Keywords

ASD, Perceptions, Training, Resources and Support, Challenge



# The Practical Role of Inclusive Education Coordinators and Heads of Department (Inclusion) in Maltese Primary Schools

Cynthia Rizzo

May 2021

## Abstract

This research study explores the role of the Inclusive Education Coordinators (INCOs) and Heads of Department [HoDs] (Inclusion) across the primary schools within the context of the Maltese Education system. It examines the responsibilities and the impact of their role in relation to the philosophy of inclusion in educating all learners. It also takes into consideration the similarities and differences between and within sectors, namely State, Church and Independent schools. Furthermore, it focuses on the factors influencing the ways in which schools across these different contexts lead and manage inclusive education. A mixed-method approach is applied to this study. The emergence of this role is described through a document analysis carried out on 21 ministerial documents, in parallel to a questionnaire that was distributed to all INCOs and HoDs (Inclusion) working in primary schools. The main conclusions from this study imply that the role lacks status in itself and in relation to its leadership role. Participants revealed a range of duties and shared the challenges they encounter within their respective inclusive schools. The findings of this study present an insight about this role and an innovative scenario that requires supplementary research. This is necessary to further develop as well as improve the existing policies and practice to establish a clear status of this profession and reduce the fragmentation in the course of inclusive education. Defining and fulfilling stability and consistency within each school will support all learners and contribute towards inclusive sustainability.

## Keywords

Inclusion, inclusive education, Inclusive Education Coordinator (INCO), Head of Department [HoD] (Inclusion), leadership

# The efficacy of the Maths Mastery approach as a tool for inclusion in a Maltese primary church school

Elaine Zammit

May 2022

## Abstract

Mathematics is an essential tool for problem-solving and helps us construct our understanding of the world. Nonetheless, Maltese learners' mathematical achievement on national and international tests demonstrates that their performance can be improved. Additionally, while Malta has made significant reforms to make schools more accessible and inclusive, adjustments and revisions are needed to improve all learners' numeracy skills. Thus, the Maths Mastery approach, which is influenced by South Asian practices, has been implemented in some schools around Malta to overcome those weaknesses. This research will examine the implementation of the Maths Mastery approach in a mixed-ability, co-ed church school in Malta and whether this approach is an effective tool for inclusion. Eight educators participated in online interviews and focus groups. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data, and three major themes emerged: instructional strategies, students' diversity, and contextual restrictions. The findings of this study demonstrated that the components of a mastery lesson are deliberately intertwined to provide all learners with an appropriate instructional approach. Furthermore, results showed that the various instructional strategies that underpin a mastery approach can be used as differentiating aids. Nevertheless, for learners on the Autism Spectrum, Maths Mastery may be challenging due to difficulties attributed to rigidity and weak central coherence. Relevant to the local context, this study identified considerable challenges related to the implementation of mastery in Maltese schools. However, the effectiveness of training has emerged to support educators in adopting effective tactics to ensure that all learners strive for mastery.

## Keywords

Maths Mastery, Inclusion, Differentiation, Strategies, Numeracy

## A study on how pupils with Specific Learning Difficulties but with no statement of needs are accommodated in the mainstream State school classrooms

Kristina Bowman

May 2022

### Abstract

This study explored the value of Primary school educators identifying and supporting students with specific learning challenges. The aim of this study was to find out what strategies teachers employ to cater for students with dyslexia, and whether they are equipped to help such students without a statement of needs. Data was gathered through interviews with representatives from State and Private schools across Malta. The respondents were questioned about their perspectives and attitudes towards assisting students with specific learning needs, specifically dyslexia. Primary school teachers in Malta are typically aware of various learning challenges, and thus, they voiced concerns about the quality of training they received and their competence in addressing such needs. Despite the fact that there is always room for improvement, the findings show that educators have a positive mindset concerning children with special learning needs, particularly dyslexia, and feel that these pupils may excel academically if their needs are catered for. The results of the study led to various suggestions, including more training for teachers, student-teachers, and parents, as well as policies on SpLD.

### Keywords

Specific Learning Difficulties, Assessment, Identification, Interventions, Qualitative

## The perspective of Maltese parents on the support provided in church schools when young children are diagnosed on the Autism Spectrum

Amanda Pace

May 2022

### Abstract

This study aimed to shed light on the current support and services of primary church schools offered to children with ASD by listening to their parents' experiences. This research raised awareness about autism and provided a better understanding of what parents and students with ASD go through in their primary educational journey. A qualitative approach was chosen to shed light on real-life experiences. These objectives were achieved by interviewing four parents of children in primary education diagnosed with ASD. The participants were asked open-ended questions through semi-structured interviews. Results showed that helpful support was being offered to children at their school. However, the support level provided varied from one primary church school to another since not all schools work collaboratively. In addition, parents emphasised the importance of communication and parental involvement in their child's education. Lastly, it is hoped that more awareness and training would be made about autism to improve the present support in church schools.

### Keywords

Students with ASD, Support services, Primary church schools, Parents' perceived experiences, working collaboratively

# Teachers' Perspectives on Differentiation Approaches to the Teaching of Mathematics in Year 1 and Year 2 in State School in Malta

Jessica Grixti

May 2022

## Abstract

This qualitative research investigated the use of a potential differentiated approach by Year 1 and Year 2 teachers at a primary state school in Malta. They aimed to identify barriers to ensuring an inclusive classroom and determining the most successful strategies to address learners' diversity in Maltese classrooms. Semi-structured interviews aided in analysing four teachers and a member of the Senior Leadership Team's techniques to address diversity. It is widely known that teachers differentiate the content to cater to the learners' requirements since Mathematics is one of the foundational subjects. However, participants felt that teachers must connect their teaching to their learners' learning styles, using a student-centred approach in the classroom and allowing learners to explore their learning through play. Additionally, the participants emphasised the importance of primary teachers in Malta embracing learners' strengths to improve academic performance, implying that a cross-curricular approach improves learners' mathematical language, critical thinking, problem-solving and interpersonal skills. Teachers must be trained and equipped to enhance their pedagogical and differentiated approach to Mathematics, mainly using a Mathematics Toolbox and Mathematics Journal. It was recommended that members of the Senior Leadership Team maintain specific resources to meet the requirements of educators and learners, which are readily accessible to everybody. Additionally, it would be beneficial for primary schools in Malta if their resources were standardised throughout all year groups. Assisting teachers with the transmission of effective classroom practices is critical for guaranteeing a diversified approach to education.

## Keywords

Differentiated Mathematical approach, Cross-curricular approach, Student-centred approach, Learning through play, Inclusive Education

## The influence of a caring teacher upon the educational experience of VET (Vocational and Educational Training) hospitality students with behavioural difficulties.

Natalino Spiteri

May 2022

### Abstract

This research explores the effects related to the correlation of the influence of a caring teacher upon the educational experience of VET (Vocational and Educational Training) Hospitality students with behaviour difficulties. The data was collected from amongst three State schools that offered Vocational Educational Training. A set of Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the Head of School of each school and the Hospitality subject teachers. A focus group from each school was conducted with a small group of students with challenging behaviour in years 9, 10 and 11. Using Thematic Analysis, several different themes were put forward by those involved. These were compared and analysed. This study highlights many interesting aspects and correlations between a positive relationship with students manifesting challenging behaviour, the care given by their subject teachers and the Head of School as well as the benefits of Vocational Educational Training (Hospitality) as a fundamental element of teaching and learning. Furthermore, it also indicates that both students and teachers benefit from a relationship built on care and respect.

### Keywords

Influence of a Caring teacher, Student Teacher relationship, Educational Success, SEBD, Hospitality, VET

## School Community

Parental perceptions on teaching and learning in years 1 and 2, in order to develop recommendations for a parental support programme in the early years

Ruth Vella

May 2022

### Abstract

Our educational institutions aim to provide a holistic educational learning journey that caters for the students' learning outcomes, as well as their well-being. However, educators also require the parents' support. This qualitative case study research, mainly based on semi-structured interviews, was conducted to explore the perceptions of the main stakeholders' inner thoughts and interpretations, namely the parents, including their perceptions of the educators' teaching approaches, and the impact of this in supporting or not their children in the early years. Furthermore, this student explored the complexities of the educators' pedagogy in order to target teacher-parental relationship barriers, and was able to identify a gap in parental skills in the early years' teaching and learning pedagogies. Based on the findings, the teacher's pedagogy is occasionally being misinterpreted and underestimated, and the objectives misread by the parents, due to a lack of specialised knowledge and information, specifically the strategies and goals intended by the educator for the activities carried out in the classroom. As a result, this is having a detrimental influence on the connection between parents and educators, as well as, more significantly, on the children. Conclusively, a parental support pedagogical-educational programme in the early years of primary education will subsequently enhance the support provided by teachers and parents in the initial stages of the students' primary education.

### Keywords

Parental involvement, Parent-teacher relationship, Barriers

## Multiculturalism

### Young international learners in Malta: Educators' perspectives on what language prospects are being offered on arrival at Primary State Schools

Melissa Ann Caruana Simiana

May 2021

#### Abstract

This research study delves into the perspectives of educators on the language programmes being offered to young international learners on their arrival at primary state schools in Malta. The aim is to explore the effects of migration on language learning and what educators believe is the best way forward in order to provide young international learners with the best possible academic success from their arrival. Through the data collected via questionnaires and interviews, the researcher is able to present information on what educators' perspectives on the current language programmes are and possible future suggestions.

#### Keywords

International learners, Migration, Induction/Preparatory Classes, Mainstream Classes, Education hubs



## Connecting the Dots: Effective Leadership to enhance Parental Engagement in a Multicultural Primary School in Malta

Janice Darmanin

May 2021

### Abstract

This dissertation sought to connect the dots between various variables which together form a school community: the educators, the students and their parents. The research was held in a Primary School in Malta, which is also a multicultural school, as it encompasses students of various nationalities. The study examined the present situation in Malta, with regards to parental engagement and the execution of intercultural education. Data was collected from an online survey which was carried out with the school educators and five interviews with key informants from the professional field of education. However, the main part of the study was the implementation of two focus groups comprising of national and non-national parents, who met five times each group, and discussed scheduled themes of interest to them and the school. The results of the research carried out indicated that even though the school is doing its utmost to create a positive multicultural community at school, additional strategies can be implemented to further improve the engagement of parents in their child's education, especially within the context of a multicultural school. In conclusion the study will recommend the formulation of two national policies intended to offer an understanding and structure for the desired efficacy of our students' educational development with their parents engaged in the process, besides offering an intercultural education framework which will go beyond simply coexisting but developing equal educational opportunities for all students in a school environment which respects all cultures.

### Keywords

Education, school leadership, parents, multicultural

## From Floating in Isolation to Dancing for Integration. Dance as a vehicle for Inclusion within the Multicultural Classroom: A Systematic Literature Review

Shanon Deguara

May 2021

### Abstract

The proposed research study aims to examine the impact of dance lessons within the curriculum of classrooms hosting students from distinctive cultural backgrounds. This study is being considered in response to the burgeoning number of international students within the Maltese learning environment. Despite being provided with a considerable level of support prior to embarking on their journey within the mainstream educational system, international students might still encounter challenges as the result of impediments which forestall inclusion within the classroom. This hinders both their academic and holistic growth. Moreover, life within the multicultural classroom might also be somewhat arduous for Maltese students who have not yet been exposed to contrasting cultural traits and behaviours. Prior to being expected to work together on the presented academic content, educational institutions need to ascertain that students are primarily equipped with the tools necessary to facilitate understanding through feasible communication which promotes the creation of a cohesive learning environment. Consequently, the study will seek to analyse whether the incorporation of dance lessons within the curriculum could possibly have an impact on the processes of inclusion and integration, classroom coherence and learning processes in any manner. This will be carried out through a systematic literature review approach. The final review, which will be inscribed following a process comprising of a practical screen of the available literature, justification of the study's comprehensiveness, data appraisal, quality appraisal and synthesis, will seek to elicit acquisitions which the hybrid Maltese educational system could potentially benefit from through the increased incidence of dance and movement activities within the curriculum.

### Keywords

Multicultural education, dance, inclusion, student well-being

## The level of integration of migrant learners during and after their preparatory language courses in Primary State School education

Stephanie Farrugia

May 2021

### Abstract

According to the European Commission's Integrating Students from Migrant Backgrounds into Schools in Europe: National Policies and Measures, Eurydice Report, migrant learners are entitled to a preparatory year of language support before they enter the mainstream classes. Giving these learners the necessary skills to be able to join mainstream classes the following year is vital. These learners are given the language skills needed to be able to understand instructions as well as helping them integrate with their native peers. Some migrant learners are given these preparatory courses in the same school as native learners, while some are separated from native-born learners. This dissertation will look at migrant learners who are attending their induction classes in a hub segregated from native learners and migrant learners who are attending induction classes in the same school as native learners. Furthermore, this paper will build on previous research to compare both experiences and will look at the way preparatory language classes might hinder or aid integration. This dissertation will also refer to international attempts at integrating migrant learners and compare them to the local scenario.

### Keywords

Integration, language support, migrant learners, induction, mainstream

# Education & Migration: A Critical Analysis of Inclusive Practices in Maltese Post-Secondary Education

Francesco Frendo

May 2021

## Abstract

In recent years, Malta has transitioned from a country of emigration to a country of immigration, deeply impacting multifarious segments of society including the educational sector. With the escalation of migration comes the vexing challenges of inclusion within a pre-established social order. In this respect, this dissertation examines a field riddled with palpable and tangible silence: migrant inclusion within the Maltese post-secondary educational system. Employing a qualitative approach, this study interviewed six migrant learners to explore how, if at all, inclusive practices are informing migrant student experiences within Maltese post-secondary education. In particular, this research engages with the theoretical position put forth by the philosopher Hannah Arendt, supplemented with other theorists in the vein of symbolic interactionism and social constructionism. With the increase of migrants and the need to foster for cultural vicissitudes, this study aims to investigate the extent to which a well-grounded conceptual and pragmatic framework could cater for the inclusive and educational needs of migrants. In context, the research illustrates the incessant reluctance towards cultural and educational amendments, thereby reaffirming the status quo of migrant marginalisation. Ultimately, this dissertation argues that without individual care and implementation of inclusive policies, migrant learners are left vulnerable, destitute, individualised, and labelled as markers of difference and otherness. Alternatively, what needs to be reimagined are forms of extra-territoriality, focusing on the needs of an intercultural educational ambient that places the vicissitudes not as a crises but an opportunity for an emergent pedagogy.

# The Challenges of Multiculturalism that School Leadership Teams face in State Primary Schools

Esther Galea

May 2021

## Abstract

Malta's accession to the European Union in 2004, together with an economic boom in the last few years, serve as motivating factors for many foreign nationals to immigrate to Malta. They include EU and third world nationals as well as irregular immigrants or asylum seekers. All of these people come to Malta for different purposes, but the majority come for work. Many bring their families with them, including their children who attend Maltese schools. In fact, over the past 10 years, Maltese state schools have seen a huge influx of international learners. These children have different nationalities and cultures, life experiences, ethnic and religious backgrounds, languages and traditions when compared to the local students. Although this diversity provides an enriching experience, it is challenging for the school officials to ensure inclusivity and make all the students feel at home. This study investigated the challenges presented by international students and their parents or guardians to the state primary schools' system. It also examined how these challenges were addressed by school staff and how school leaders helped overcome these challenges. A qualitative research method was employed, and semi-structured interviews were conducted with different Heads and Assistant Heads. The collected data was analysed using thematic analysis. The findings identified the everyday concerns of heads and assistant heads due to multiculturalism, such as lack of trained staff, resources and funds. Multiculturalism is a continuously developing educational area in the Maltese islands. Research in this area is of paramount importance since it gives different snapshots of what concrete steps could be taken to make the Maltese educational system more inclusive and fruitful.

## Keywords

Heads/Assistant Heads, multiculturalism, challenges, international learners

## Building safe spaces: the role of school leaders in the transition from an Islamic Community school to a Catholic Church school

Natasha Bugeja Radwan

May 2022

### Abstract

The scholastic year 2016/2017 witnessed the closure of the only Muslim secondary school which followed the National Curriculum Framework in Malta. With Muslims being a minority in Maltese society, this school had offered families the possibility of educating their children from their early years up to secondary education, within a closed community, where their religious identity could be formed and strengthened, whilst also prepare them for education and social inclusion in Malta. Following the closure, a number of families opted to send their children to a Catholic Church school to continue their secondary level education. This move is challenging and affects the formation of the child, and thus, requires a lot of preparation. Using qualitative research, this research study endeavoured to determine the expectations of both students and guardians/parents in their chosen school, and also the work that educators and other educational leaders undergo in order to prepare the students for the transition and effectively include them in a multicultural community. It transpired that transition preparation is a long process, and educational leaders are responsible for ensuring that Muslim students are not in any way marginalised because of any attribute including their religious beliefs, in order for them to feel included and part of the community. Although many actions are already being taken, it is vital to provide educators with the necessary training and to continue to accommodate Muslim students.

### Keywords

Multiculturalism, Islamic Education, Catholic Church, Transition, Diversity, School

# The integration of international educators and learners in a Maltese independent school

Julian Fenech

May 2022

## Abstract

Since Europe's accession in 2004 and the subsequent free movement of citizens between countries, Malta has seen an increase in migration. According to Jobsplus (2019), Malta's employment agency, the number of foreigners working in Malta by the end of 2020, was that of 67,500, compared to 9,530 back in 2009. This large influx of people from all over Europe and beyond, as well as the global economic crisis, have caused an increase in the number of international students and educators within the educational institutions around the island (Fenech & Seguna, 2020). This study will explore the different ways in which international teachers and students are integrated within one independent school within the Maltese educational system. It will examine the different strategies and approaches the school adopt and will identify whether and how the general school community creates a culture to render their experience a positive and enriching one. It will look at aspects such as the professional training of teachers and the rightful engagement of the international students. This research will also look into possible educational projects that can help the school community integrate with the international teachers and students. It also seeks to identify strategies for instilling a sense of responsibility in citizens, which may lead to the common good of a multicultural society. Finally, the involvement of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) is to be reviewed as part of this study for triangulation purposes between the SLT, teachers and students to obtain a clearer picture of the present situation in the educational institution. The methodology the researcher intends using is a qualitative one; through focus groups aimed towards the different international students and educators. Interviews with different members of the SLT will also be organised to further investigate the responses from educators and students and identify reasons for discrepancies, should these arise. By the end of this study, practical suggestions would be formulated together with insights on how the integration process within the school community can be improved.

## Keywords

International student, International teacher, Educational institution, Culture, Integration

## The Teaching of Maltese: Perceptions of Teachers in Multicultural Classrooms

Amanda Sacco

May 2022

### Abstract

The increase in global migration has left its impact on many sectors. The Maltese educational sector has not been an exception, as the rise in migration is mirrored by the ever-growing increase of non-national students in schools. This study explores the perceptions held by educators teaching in state primary schools accentuated by a high influx of non-national students in relation to the teaching and learning of the Maltese language. It investigates the challenges educators encounter on a regular basis and the consequences the latter have on the development of the Maltese language of all learners. Furthermore, the research delves into the support developed to help mitigate this situation and whether all stakeholders are being provided with said support. A mixed method approach was applied to this study. Quantitative data was gathered through the dissemination of an online questionnaire amongst educators teaching Junior Years, whilst qualitative data was collected concurrently through seven semi-structured interviews. Findings indicate a number of challenges educators have to face, ranging from the language barrier to lack of proper support and training. Moreover, findings identified a rise in the use of the English language which provides access to the content being taught but, as a result, reduces the exposure and use of the Maltese language, impacting thus on its acquisition and development. Thereby, this research has contributed to the formulation of several recommendations aimed at improving the current circumstances to better cater for this new reality and provide educators and students with the support they truly need and deserve.

### Keywords

Non-national students, Challenges, Educators, Language proficiency, Maltese language



## Promoting multicultural education in the Maltese Primary schools

Rebecca Sciortino Grech

May 2022

### Abstract

With the huge influx of migrants all around the world, Malta has been one of the countries in which one can notice the shift from a monoculture society to a multicultural one. The topic of the research is to identify and analyse the experience of multiculturalism from an educational perspective. The study is about the impact of multicultural education within the Primary state school around Malta and Gozo. The emphasis is on how the Maltese schools are promoting multicultural education. This research also analyses if and how the educational stakeholders that are the heads of school, the assistant heads, the teachers and the LSEs, and the students themselves are accepting other students from a different ethnic and cultural background. The focus is on what is being implemented. In view of the above, it is also analysed and evaluated the importance of having an inclusion policy within the Maltese Primary state schools and how this is being put into practice. Referring to the policy on inclusive education in schools: 'Route to quality inclusion' (2019) will lead to search more on what impacts the experience. The research study is a qualitative one. To gather the data the study was carried out using the semi-structured interviews and focus groups as tools. The semi-structured interviews were used with the heads of school, the assistant heads, the teachers and LSEs while focus groups were conducted amongst the students themselves. This study attempts to define how multicultural education is promoted, how is the relationship amongst the educational stakeholders and in what way is it important to have policies in relation to multiculturalism. It also clarifies the limitations and offers certain recommendations for further discussions.

### Keywords

Multicultural education, Multiculturalism, Social diversity, Migrants, Primary state schools

## Revisoning Pedagogical Praxis in a Migrant Class in Malta. An Action Research

Daniela Spiteri

May 2022

### Abstract

The rise in the number of migrants entering our country has placed increased pressure on the Maltese educational system. Education, and the acquisition of skills, play an important part in the integration of children within their new surroundings. The scarce research available on migrant education in Malta and more so, on pedagogical praxis that respects the background of these learners, prompted the researcher to pursue this study. The study investigated the pedagogical practices currently in use and the extent of which these practices are supporting and meeting the need of these learners. The research study also highlights the changes needed to ameliorate pedagogical practices. The qualitative approach was chosen for this study since it seemed the best fit to answer the research questions. The data for this study was collected through the adoption of an action research comprising of focus-groups and interviews with migrant parents and children, together with observations from two critical friends in the field of inclusive education. The action research adopted a two-cycle approach. The data from both cycles were then compared to investigate how action affected praxis. The research highlighted the important role that critical reflection has towards adopting practices that provide students with the necessary needs. Findings indicated that students perform better when the culturally relevant educational materials were utilised, as they connected students' cultures, languages, and life experiences with what they learn in school. The study concludes with a number of recommendations among which is the construction of professional development courses that target multicultural pedagogical practices and the setup of a research unit within the MLU that studies the social and academic development of students and their families.

## Technology Enhanced Learning

### Assessing Teachers' Perspective Towards the Use of Digital Resources in Maltese Primary Schools

MaryJo Ellul

May 2021

#### Abstract

The use of digital resources is nowadays incorporated in students' learning. Teachers need to be familiar with digital technology and capable of using it in their teaching. It is the teacher's responsibility to develop the right digital competence in the classroom. This research aimed to explore the Maltese Primary teachers' perceptions of using digital resources in their classroom. The research also examined how teachers make effective use of the digital resources provided. This study made use of the SAMR model to gauge the teachers' level of integration of digital resources in their classroom. A mixed method approach was used for data collection. Interviews with thirteen Primary teachers were conducted to obtain in-depth information about their pedagogies when using digital resources. Additionally, 108 questionnaires were submitted by Primary teachers, thus providing insight into how they use digital resources in the classroom. The participants from both data sources were randomly selected from State, Church, and Private schools to gather different perspectives. Results showed that teachers are optimistic about digital resources; however, they still lack competence in knowledge and skills when they use digital resources. The need for more continuous support is highly noted. Based on the SAMR model, results showed that most teachers did not reach the Transformation level, where creative thinking and innovation are the main focus when using digital resources. Furthermore, this study put forward recommendations for policy makers and teaching practitioners for the provision of better technical and pedagogical support for teachers to optimise their technology use in the classroom thereby improving their students' learning ability and engagement in class.

#### Keywords

Digital Resources, Digital Technology, SAMR Model, Teachers' Perceptions, Primary Education

## Techno-fear or Techno-joy? – The views of School Leadership Teams (SLT) in State Secondary Schools in Malta regarding Information Communication Technology (ICT) use, ICT policy and the possible implementation of Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) initiatives

Andrew Stuart Magri

May 2021

### Abstract

Many educationalists discuss the importance of Information Communication Technology (ICT) across the curriculum; some also discuss the benefits of using mobile devices in classrooms. Nevertheless, most state secondary schools in Malta do not have an ICT policy to guide and govern ICT use. In this research, I investigated the views of SLT in state secondary schools regarding the use of ICT across the curriculum, ICT policy, and Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) initiatives. Following an interpretivist and mixed-method approach, I distributed two online questionnaires to teachers and SLT members in state secondary schools in Malta and Gozo, and then conducted two phases of interviews with 2 SLT members, applying a zooming in approach. The SLT viewed ICT across the curriculum positively, but highlighted several issues, such as a lack of pedagogic training and technical support. Most believe that an ICT policy is important, particularly if BYOD is introduced in schools. Opinion about BYOD were mostly positive, though several concerns were raised, such as equity and cyberbullying of both teachers and students. The findings support the view that ICT is an important educational tool which has cross-curricula benefits and highlight the importance of pedagogical training and technical support in schools. An ICT policy would be beneficial, particularly if BYOD was introduced. BYOD has many benefits; however, several concerns would need to be addressed to ensure teachers felt safe and devices are used effectively.

### Keywords

Pedagogy training, technical support, state schools, secondary education, leadership

Dissertation available online at:

<https://andrewmagri.com/mael>

## Planning for Success or Ordered Chaos? Perceptions of middle school teachers vis-à-vis the “One Tablet per Child” initiative

Nicholai Mifsud

May 2021

### Abstract

The study broadly aims to identify the perceptions middle school teachers have in relation to the imminent implementation of an OTPC project in the middle schools of the two Lasallian Colleges in Malta. This study will better equip the SLTs to create the necessary conditions for such an initiative to be supported and adopted by the players themselves, the teachers. A qualitative research was adopted, and data collected via eleven e-interviews conducted with teachers and SLT members employed with the two colleges. The data was analysed and corroborated with the Innovation Diffusion Theory. It was confirmed, that as stated by the theory, adoption of the innovation is very much dependent on the perceptions of compatibility with one’s beliefs and relative advantages.

### Keywords

One Tablet Per Child (OTPC), Innovation Diffusion Theory, Leadership, Predictive Theory, Lasallian Schools, ICT

## An Inquiry into the Use of Mobile Devices in the Junior Primary Years in Schools in Malta

Kylie Spiteri

May 2021

### Abstract

This research sought to investigate the potential benefits of using tablet technology in primary Years 4 to 6 classes in Malta. A mixed method approach, involving both qualitative and quantitative research methods, was adopted. Data from two sets of interviews and questionnaires was triangulated to give credibility to the research. This study found that the tablets paved the way for a better pedagogic experience for teachers and an enriching learning experience for students. Tablets were found to be effective in improving a number of 21st century skills, such as creativity and critical thinking, and digital literacy. This study also showed that personal and professional knowledge and years of teaching experience with Upper Primary classrooms boosted the teachers' confidence in making effective use of tablets. It concluded that students' attitude towards the use of tablet was influenced by the teachers' perceptions of technology. This study has shone a light on the limitations of tablet use in the classroom. These include the paucity of human resources, and shortcomings in software and Information Technology infrastructure in primary classes. Continuous professional development regarding the use of tablets and the installation of the state-of-the-art Information Technology infrastructure are highly recommended.

### Keywords

Tablets, educators, learners, challenges, 21st century skills

## The Use of Digital Resources in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Classroom – A look into the Junior Years within Primary State Schools over Malta and Gozo

Tracey Ann Vella Cumbo

May 2022

### Abstract

This study looks into the use of digital resources amongst state primary teachers teaching the junior years. It evaluates whether teachers are making use of digital resources, the extent by which they are doing so and how this is effecting the acquisition of digital literacy skills. Additionally, it also assesses the impact that the COVID-19 Pandemic had on the teachers' confidence level with regards to the use of digital resources and if there were any positive or negative outcomes. The research methodology applied focused on a mixed-method approach by making use of online surveys and semi-structured interviews. Data was collected from 75 participants of which 64 were from surveys distributed among state primary teachers teaching year 3 to year 6 in the ten state colleges, 7 interviews with state primary teachers from 3 different state colleges and 4 interviews with representatives from the Directorate for Digital Literacy and Transversal Skills. The results obtained demonstrate that teachers are making use of digital resources through the use of videos, quizzes and online worksheets. However, the findings point out that the way teachers are using these digital resources are not fully equipping students with the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills needed in order to become digital citizens and be able to succeed in tomorrow's workforce. Nevertheless, the COVID-19 Pandemic managed to bring about a shift in the way digital literacy is looked upon as it started to be valued and teachers took a more positive approach towards it.

### Keywords

Primary Teachers, 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, Digital literacy, Digital resources

# Evaluating Teaching and Learning: A review of parties' perceptions and expectations towards virtual learning, when compared to face-to-face learning, in primary education in Malta

Loren Mercieca

May 2022

## Abstract

The aim of this study is to identify key issues relating to virtual learning compared to face-to-face learning in the context of Primary Education in Malta. The situation arising out of the pandemic caused by COVID-19 has seen a diversion from face-to-face teaching to virtual teaching and blended learning. I believe that this diversion has had an impact on educators, parents and students. The 'new normal' approach to teaching and learning has led many educators to move out of their comfort zone, with parents and students finding ways on how to cope with innovative learning methods. In this research, I aim to investigate what were the expectations of the parties involved and the extent to which their perceptions varied from their experience. I shall be focusing on The Power of Family Engagement. As a parent and educator, I am in favour of an educational partnership, between schools and parents. However, one must keep in mind that parents may carry a baggage that we are not aware of, and schools may be faced with challenges arising out of differences in cultures or beliefs. This research will provide a clearer identification of the priorities, barriers and strategies used, in relation to family engagement, during remote teaching and learning and thus be able to put Malta's online learning on the map.

## Keywords

Primary education, Family engagement, Virtual learning, Blended learning, Face-to-face learning



# The use of Visual Media in English Teaching and Learning: A multi-methods study conducted amongst Middle School Classes in Malta

Ruth Sant

May 2022

## Abstract

Nowadays, students are spending a lot of time in front of their technological devices, constantly using social media applications that contain an abundance of visuals. This research explores findings related to the importance of using such visuals to enhance English teaching and learning. As exposure to the visual medium of communication grows, so does the need for students to finish their compulsory educational programme as visually literate individuals. Due to this fact, the educational system is adapting its methods of teaching to include more visual aids and visual modes of communication. This study uses a variety of qualitative research methods to ascertain middle school students' and teachers' opinions about the use of visuals in English language learning. This research investigates whether visuals have an impact on English language learning. It also analyses how this medium can be incorporated in English language lessons. A multimodal approach to teaching, with the inclusion of both audio and visuals, along with other visual aids were noticed to be of value to a number of participants. The findings from this research also suggest that there is a correlation between the use of visuals and the enhancement in both the quality of English Language teaching and the motivation levels for English language learners.

## Keywords

English Language Learning, Qualitative, Visuals, Students, Teachers

## An inquiry into the use of technology-mediated teaching and learning in Geography in Maltese secondary schools

Jodie Farrugia

May 2022

### Abstract

The twenty-first century's digital revolution ushered in hopes for a transformation in our classrooms. This change would see students take charge of their learning whilst the teacher's position would shift from a holder of knowledge to a facilitator. The objective of this paper is to determine the extent to which this change has transpired and explore how Geography teachers in the Maltese islands are using technology in the classroom. There is abundant literature relating to how digital technologies are introduced into the Geography curriculum and their influence on student learning and pedagogy. This research study looks at these issues in terms of the current reality for teachers and aims to investigate the association between technology-assisted education and student performance and discover technological challenges. This study employs a mixed research method from the quantitative and qualitative perspectives. The quantitative method uses online questionnaires whilst the qualitative aspect incorporates two semi-structured interviews. Statistics from the survey questionnaire were analysed using descriptive statistics to refer to socio-demographic data as well as compliance with an investigation into the use of technology in teaching Geography. Findings from the interviews were analysed through a thematic approach. Outcomes showed that advanced technology use in Geography lessons is crucial. Students' understanding of the natural world, is quicker and easier, and lessons become animated creating a positive environment within the class. Although beneficial aspects of integrating digital technology are recorded, teachers still insist on having control of the classroom. Concerns were raised over lack of accessibility and under utility of devices. Teachers shall be trained continuously in utilizing digital tools and instructional software for a rewarding teaching experience.

### Keywords

Digital technology, Education, Geography

## Leadership

### Teacher Leadership: A Bottom Up Approach to School Leadership

Saviour Agius

May 2021

#### Abstract

This dissertation studies how school leadership can be enhanced through the teacher leaders' participation. A case-study approach was adopted in order to examine and analyse teacher leadership in one of the Maltese state colleges. The case-study research involved two phases. The initial phase consisted of 10 semi-structured interviews with teacher leaders from the primary and secondary sectors of the College, which were subsequently analysed by means of thematic analysis. This permitted the main themes of the study to be elicited and enabled the construction of the online questionnaire which was created by focusing on the key issues that were identified. Subsequently, during the second phase, the online questionnaire was distributed to all the teaching staff within the College under investigation. The findings of the study highlight the positive effects that are enjoyed through the involvement of teacher leaders in school leadership, which also benefit teacher and school effectiveness and school improvement. The study unfolds the barriers that restrain teachers from taking leadership positions and identifies the lack of time in which teacher leaders can perform their duties as one of the teachers' major concerns. Ways in which teacher leadership is and can be encouraged are also uncovered. These emphasise the importance of empowerment and collaboration in advocating for teacher leadership. The study also offers practical suggestions on how teacher leadership can be encouraged in our schools, which in return will contribute towards making school leadership more effective and to making teacher leadership a bottom up approach to school leadership.

#### Keywords

Teacher leadership, collaboration, empowerment, barriers, Malta

## Leadership support to VET teachers through the initial stages of VET Subjects in Maltese Secondary Schools

Clint Gerald Attard

May 2021

### Abstract

In 2015, five Vocational Education and Training (VET) subjects namely Hospitality, Engineering, Health and Social Care, Agribusiness, and Information Technology, were introduced in several state and non-state secondary schools in Malta. The first influx of one hundred and sixty-five teachers were educators coming from academic subjects, and B.Ed. 4th final year/PGCE students from the University of Malta (Bartolo, 2015). All VET teachers to date underwent a teacher's training programme on the content, pedagogy, and assessment of the vocational subjects. It is necessary to point out that Malta's Ministry for Education and Employment is also investing significant financial resources including time towards VET subjects in order to reduce significantly early school leavers and to put the VET subjects in parity with other mainstream subjects. VET subjects are still in their initial stages in Malta since their introduction five years ago and this research study aims to investigate the updates of the first five VET subjects throughout these last five years. This research study also seeks to investigate how leadership is supporting VET teachers during the initial stages of these subjects. Noting a gap in the literature on Vocational Education in Malta, this mixed-method research study aims to inform all relevant stakeholders on the leadership support towards VET teachers in Malta. Data will be collected through questionnaires amongst all eighty VET teachers and eight Heads of Department across all ten colleges in Malta and Gozo and by conducting semi-structured interviews with three members of the senior leadership team whose responsibility includes VET subjects, and three VET Educational Officers.

# Leadership at a Crossroads: Exploring Pathways Leading to Positive Leadership in Maltese State Secondary Schools

Margaret Attard Mintoff

May 2021

## Abstract

This study aimed at exploring the benefits of positive leadership in order to yield information and provide tools for school leaders to incorporate performance-driven methodologies into their own. It also aimed to present and provide state-of-the-art methods which are being employed to ultimately help and guide other school leaders to lead through positive leadership and hence improve and sustain performance across their schools. The PERMA model has been applied as a guiding framework for this exploratory mixed method research. The researcher conducted ten qualitative semi-structured interviews with heads of secondary schools to gain a general understanding of this relatively new area of research. These were followed by a quantitative questionnaire to corroborate findings gathered from the preceding phase of the research and to obtain data that could be generalised. Results revealed the importance of creating positive working settings and cultures as the main benefits of positive leadership in secondary schools. Nevertheless, the significance of generating connected relationships, establishing determination and enforcing positive communications surfaced in all interviews and can be considered as the fulcrum of positive leadership in state secondary schools. Overall, this study exposes that truly, Maltese secondary school leaders promote positive leadership through their personal character traits and by executing intentional behaviours. This leads to the engagement, uplifting and elevating of all team members' potential and confidence, which in turn results in more outcomes that are successful for the school community. Based on these results, a pictorial representation of the main tenets of positive leadership has been produced. It is recommended that central authorities aspire to equip leaders with the necessary tools to enable them to incorporate the four main tenets of positive performance-driven strategies into their own practices thus providing improved leadership across their schools.

## Keywords

Positive leadership; positive psychology; school leadership; mixed methods

# What characterises successful Professional Development in Maltese Primary Schools? A comparative study of professional learning in a State, Church and Independent School in Malta

Stefano Farrugia

May 2021

## Abstract

This study aims to define how school leadership team members and teachers in the Primary sector, in the Maltese education system, characterise the extent, nature and impact of professional development. Since Malta's educational system is tripartite, obtaining the views in each of the three sectors helps to better reflect and answer the research question. Therefore, this study takes place in three local primary schools: a state school, a church school and an independent school. This research adopts a qualitative case study approach and is built around four different sources of data: a literature review of policies and scholarship, semi-structured interviews with school leaders and teachers, analysis of School Development Plan documents and the observation of PD. Overall the data presented will reinforce existing scholarship that PD is essential for increased teacher effectiveness and that teacher focused, informal and active learning are key in this process. Furthermore, this study argues that successful PD, when collaborative, strengthens teacher self-confidence and increases collegiality, as long as ongoing support is integrated and is championed by strong school leadership. This research was conducted during the Covid-19 global pandemic which resulted in multiple challenges that needed to be addressed.

## Keywords

Professional Development, Effective Professional Development

# The Perception of Senior Leadership Teams in Maltese State Schools on the Induction Programme for Newly Qualified Teachers

Horace Gauci

May 2021

## Abstract

Worldwide research demonstrates that teacher induction programmes are developed to assist newly qualified teachers during their transition years into class teaching. School leaders play an essential role during this phase. This study aims to acquire the school leaders' perception of the induction for newly qualified teachers in Maltese State Schools. Moreover, this study explored the school leaders' awareness of induction, their role during an NQTs' induction phase, their view of this phase, and their identification of the current programme's strengths and weaknesses. The study adopted a mixed methods approach, comprising an online semi-structured questionnaire with 72 senior leadership team members and structured interviews with 10 other senior leadership team members. Quantitative and qualitative data were analysed thematically, whereby codes were developed to identify the emergent themes. Through a mixed methods approach, data is presented according to the research questions. Then, the study elicits its limitations and proposes recommendations that could be implemented to enhance the current induction programme for newly qualified teachers. The gathered data reaffirms the importance of teacher induction and its support in bridging theory with practice, along with the mentoring process. The study further notes that school leaders' experience is prevalent over their training, which is lacking. School leaders stress that they need more time to implement induction for newly qualified teachers and appeal for less bureaucratic processes and greater flexibility. Ultimately, recommendations and future research ideas are suggested.

## Keywords

Teacher induction, newly qualified teachers (NQTs), senior leadership team (SLT), Maltese state schools, mixed methods research (MMR)

## Perceptions of stakeholders about the impact of child care centres on the holistic development of children

Tami Mac an Bhaird

May 2021

### Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore the holistic educational experience children are receiving in child care settings. The author aims to investigate the most suitable leadership style in child care settings. All stakeholders' views are to be examined by discussing the key points concerning the literature surrounding this subject. The intention is to gather opinions from child carers, child care managers and parents. A mixed-method approach is used, namely through focus group interviews for parents and carers and a one-to-one interview with administration staff. The participants in the study are the stakeholders, namely parents, staff and management. The research questions will focus on the holistic care a child is receiving at a childcare centre. All methods of data gathering were held online due to the current pandemic. Thematic analysis was used for the focus group interviews, whilst the questionnaires distributed to the childcare managers were coded and transcribed. The data collected suggested that not enough focus is being given to early childhood education and care qualifications. It was also evident that leadership in this domain is ambiguous and does not have autonomy. Currently, locally, the requirements necessary for the highest administration in this sector, is a management course rather than a leadership qualification, as is deemed necessary in other sections in education.



# The Impact of Leadership on Parental Involvement in Low Socioeconomic Primary State Schools

Marlene Spiteri

May 2021

## Abstract

A National Inclusive Education Framework (2019), consistent with the Framework for the Education Strategy for Malta 2014-2024, has been recently designed to promote an inclusive learning environment, where diversity is celebrated and used as a learning opportunity. Furthermore, this framework underpins the NCF's (2012) responsibility "that all learners should experience success by being given the necessary support to sustain their effort" (MEDE, 2019 p.11). However, despite these endless efforts, student success remains predominantly low in marginalized schools. Educators in these schools claim that the problem with low student success lies in endless struggles with parental involvement (Auerbach, S., 2009) where parents show little interest in their children's educational journey. Educators additionally construct a logic which attributes low parental engagement to socioeconomic factors, thus perceiving differences as barriers rather than opportunities (Hall, 2014). This logic is in direct contrast to what is being proposed by National documents whereby the Government calls on schools to embark on efforts that identify solutions, thus placing the onus on school leaders to generate productive partnerships with parents thus targeting student success. It is in the light of this scenario, that this research conducts a study in four schools from marginalized backgrounds. The researcher explores the conception of leadership in these schools, identifies whether this leadership is conducive to robust parental engagement and finally discovers whether and how the nature of parental involvement practised in these schools, is impacting students' success.

## Keywords

Transformative Leadership, Parental Involvement, Student Success, Deficit Mentality

## Educational Leadership and Curricular Autonomy as Perceived by Maltese Primary State School Educational Leaders

Marco Vella

May 2021

### Abstract

This study explored local primary state school educational leaders' (LPSSSEL) perceptions of leadership and curricular autonomy compared to what is stated in Malta's Education Act and the National Curriculum Framework (NCF). A qualitative data collection method; semi-structured interviews were conducted with four LPSSSEs from four different college networks and different years of experience in their position, namely two LPSSSEs with more than fifteen years and another two with up to fifteen years' experience. A Head of Department Assessment for learning (HOD, AfL) and an Education Officer Curriculum (EO Curriculum) were also interviewed and were chosen according to the colleges they support. They are stakeholders in educational leadership and curricular implementation who have a view as outsiders and experience how LPSSSEs perceive and act to the leadership and curricular autonomy. Two policymakers were interviewed. Their views helped to contrast the intended outcome of the Education Act and the NCF with the actual one. Findings indicate that a number of factors hinder LPSSSEs from possessing the level of leadership and curricular autonomy suggested in the NCF and the Education Act. The analyses revealed that these hindrances derive from internal and external factors. The study concluded that the LPSSSEs' perceptions of leadership and curricular autonomy are not coherent with the vision of leadership and curricular autonomy in the NCF and Education Act. It suggested that LPSSSEs' leadership and curricular autonomy could be improved with a change in the Education Department's mindset towards educational leaders, a shift towards a more formative assessment mentality, adequate training for LPSSSEs in curricular leadership and adequate support for struggling LPSSSEs.

### Keywords

Educational leadership, curricular leadership, autonomy, perception

# The Role of the Assistant Head of School as the Literacy Link Person in Maltese Primary State Schools

Erika Borg Medati

May 2022

## Abstract

The aim of this study is to critically analyse, an under explored field, which is the role of the Assistant Head of School as the Literacy Link person in Maltese State primary schools. This study is framed within a grounded theory approach. The Assistant Head of School in state schools, through a distributed leadership approach, is assigned the role of the Literacy Link person. The latter's remit is to co-ordinate, manage, organise and promote literacy related activities as an integral part of a literacy leadership approach. As an instructional leader and a transformational leader, practising Leadership for Learning, the Literacy Link person seeks to promote effective literacy practices to ascertain an effective literacy pedagogy for the benefit of all learners in the school. The person in this role is the mediator between the state primary school, the Head of Department (Literacy) who represents the Head of College Network, the National Literacy Agency and the parents/caregivers. The Literacy Link person must be knowledgeable about the various literacy practices to ascertain that the appropriate literacy strategies are implemented in the primary classroom. This study provides a meaningful insight in defining this role, discussing the functions and the challenges faced, followed by recommendations for the improvements needed to enhance the effectiveness of this role.

## Keywords

Assistant heads, Literacy leadership, Leadership skills, Literacy strategies, the Literacy link person, Primary school

## The role of Heads of Departments in the success of the Humanities subjects

Mark Cachia

May 2022

### Abstract

The research inquiries into the role of Heads of Departments in the Humanities in promoting effective teaching and departmental involvement. Prompted by my involvement in the subject as a teacher and by local educational developments, this study sought to understand how Heads of Departments, effectively lead and manage a subject department within the humanities area and discuss the perceptions, attitudes and ideas of different stakeholders with regards to the role of Heads of Departments. In this study the Humanities are comprised the subjects of history, geography, social studies and European studies. The research employed mainly a qualitative approach. Data sources included questionnaires administered by humanities subject teachers in state schools and semi-structured interviews with humanities Heads of Departments, Heads of Schools, and Educational Officers. The findings revealed that the function of Heads of Departments in the humanities is multidimensional and crucial to the success of a subject department. Heads of Departments have a significant impact on the quality of teaching and student learning. It is recommended that Heads of Departments should have a vision that is communicated at both the departmental and school levels, improve communication among subject teachers, create and share resources to strengthen teacher collaboration, and provide support to educators and students on both subject and school-related issues. Subject EOs are said to benefit from the knowledge of Heads of Departments in establishing curriculum and curriculum-related topics such as assessment and professional development sessions for educators.

### Keywords

Heads of Departments, Humanities, Departmental involvement, Teaching, Departmental leadership

# The Perception of School Leaders on Physical Education in the Maltese Primary State Schools

Ennio Desira

May 2022

## Abstract

International and local literature, and studies in the field of Physical Education have increasingly emphasised the fundamental role of the subject in enhancing learners' health and lifelong participation in physical activity, especially, due to the alarming obese figures, according to the World Health Organization (2019). However, according to different studies, children are not getting enough physical activity, and this is one of the contributions towards an increase in obesity figures. Children spend half of their waking hours at school, and consequently schools should contribute significantly towards daily Physical Activity. In this study the perceptions, attitudes, and the physical activity background of school leaders on Physical Education in Maltese primary state schools were investigated. To gather a more detailed overview of the research questions a mixed research method approach was used. Semi-structured interviews with Heads of Schools and semi-structured focus groups with Primary Class teachers and Peripatetic PE teachers were carried out.

PE is deemed to be a subject to be taught in all schools at compulsory level and a consensus about the subject's role in the importance of holistic education and in promoting lifelong engagement in physical activity. However, this study identified several barriers which fall either within the schools' remit or are imposed from without. Although there are multiple realms that need to be addressed, such as facilities, syllabi, and teacher training, the researcher believes that the converging forces of head of schools, teachers, responsible education authorities, and policy-makers, can lead change to ensure an increase in the delivery of quality Primary Physical Education.

## Keywords

Head of School; Primary Physical Education; Primary Class Teachers; Physical Activity; Primary Curriculum

# The Effects of the Delegation Processes used by Heads of Secondary Schools with Assistant Heads

George Galea

May 2022

## Abstract

Heads of Schools need to fulfil several functions, roles, and responsibilities. Assisting the Head of School are the Assistant Heads who undertake professional and administrative duties as delegated by the Head of School. Delegation and the process of how it is executed are important skills that should be mastered effectively and efficiently by a Head of School. This research study aims to explore the effects of the delegation processes used by Heads of Secondary Schools with Assistant Heads of Schools. It aims to shed light on which tasks Heads of Schools delegate to Assistant Heads and which processes they use to delegate such tasks. It also aims to shed light on Assistant Heads of Schools' attitudes toward the tasks delegated to them and how the delegation processes can be improved so that the performance of the Senior Leadership Team is improved. The chosen methodology for this research study is Mixed Method Research which includes semi-structured interviews with all Heads of State Secondary Schools and with 12 Assistant Heads of Schools and a questionnaire in which 31 Assistant Heads took part. This study manages to explore the virgin grounds of delegation processes as practised by Heads of Schools. The findings of this study shed light on important aspects of the delegation processes used by Heads of Schools and how they can be improved for the benefit of the whole school community.

## Keywords

Delegation process, Heads of Schools, Assistant Heads of Schools

# The Role of the Senior Leadership Team in Promoting Class Teachers' Wellbeing in Primary Schools

Deborah Ann Montebello

May 2022

## Abstract

This research study examines the present situation of class teachers in primary schools and how it affects their health and wellbeing. Through literature review and the views of class teachers and the senior leadership team, this research analyses the possible strategies and practices that school leaders can employ to support and guide their teachers and encourage a positive school culture that enhances wellbeing. This study uses an explanatory sequential mixed methods research design to understand the concerns and preferences of class teachers and school leaders. The first phase of this research involves the distribution of two questionnaires, one for class teachers and one for the senior leadership team members. The data from the two questionnaires are integrated and analysed to formulate the questions for the second phase, which includes six interviews with heads of primary schools. The research findings conclude that the support of the senior leaders in a school is essential to enhance teachers' welfare and that specific strategies and practices help sustain a whole-school approach toward teachers' wellbeing. The last section of the dissertation concludes the study by tying it to practice and presenting an action plan that school leaders can use to promote the health and wellbeing of their educators. This research also presents the strategies and ideas of this action plan in a user-friendly website that is aimed at giving the right tools to school leaders to bring about the change needed in the lives of educators.

## Keywords

Wellbeing, Class teachers, Senior leadership team, Primary schools, Strategies, Action plan

# The Role of Educational Leaders in Initiating Early Intervention to Support Learners with Dyslexia

Marisa Pace

May 2022

## Abstract

Learners with dyslexia manifest difficulties in language learning, particularly in reading and writing. Dyslexia is a specific learning difficulty which is generally diagnosed when children start attending school. Given that access to most academic material requires fluency in literacy, learners with dyslexia lag behind in these subjects. In addressing this issue, the Ministry for Education (2021), published an update of the pre-existing official strategy to address literacy issues in the Maltese Islands: A National Literacy Strategy for All in Malta and Gozo 2021-2030. Empirical research shows that early intervention yields positive results. This qualitative research provides new data regarding the procedures being executed by educational leaders in supporting learners with dyslexia, especially through intervention programmes provided by the National Literacy Agency, giving insight into the difficulties encountered in the process. It also provides evidence of the support being provided to learners manifesting symptoms of anxiety. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with primary school leaders, educational psychologists, counsellors and leading educational experts. The gathered data sheds light on the barriers encountered by school leaders in providing learners with dyslexia with additional support. Recommendations for policymakers and future research are put forth. It emerged from the study that many learners with dyslexia are left unattended, relying on the support provided by their class teacher. Indeed, these learners are bound to experience academic failure which in turn translates into symptoms of low self-esteem, anxiety and behavioural issues.

## Keywords

Dyslexia, early intervention, educational leadership, intervention programmes, Maltese state primary schools



## Examining how Heads of Schools can influence retention: A qualitative analysis of Maltese state secondary school teachers' perception

Graziella Pullicino

May 2022

### Abstract

Over the past five years, the voluntary resignation rate of state school teachers within the Maltese educational sector has seen an average of 81 teachers resigning from their post each year. Within this timeframe, recent figures also show that the annual deployment exercise in secondary schools accounts for about 13% of teacher turnover. While specific causes of teacher turnover rates brought about by deployments remain limited, studies have drawn upon the critical role of school leaders in influencing retention. By analysing state secondary school teachers' perceptions, this study aimed to investigate the role of Heads of Schools in relation to teacher turnover and retention decisions within the local context. Six state secondary school teachers who experienced voluntary deployment were recruited using a purposive sampling strategy. Primary data was collected through semi-structured interviews. Following semi-structured interviews, a thematic analysis of participants' responses was analysed to determine the underlying causes of teacher turnover and retention in relation to preferred leadership styles and attributes. Support from school leaders, staff relations, school environments, student cohorts, and personal characteristics were cited as factors influencing teacher turnover and job satisfaction. Positive leadership practices influencing retention were shown to rely on humane and empathic leadership based on support, guidance, and communication. Based on the research findings, a set of positive leadership practices and strategies was developed with the aim of guiding Heads of Schools towards promoting teacher retention in Maltese schools.

### Keywords

Heads of Schools, Teacher retention, Teachers' perceptions, Positive practices, Leadership strategies

# The role of Secondary School Educational Leaders in identifying and responding to child sexual abuse

Neal Sammut

May 2022

## Abstract

In response to an ever-increasing number of child sexual abuse (CSA) cases in Malta, this study seeks to analyse the way secondary school educational leaders are involved in identifying and responding to CSA. Additionally, it highlights the individual thoughts and feelings of secondary school educational leaders in responding to potential CSA cases. The study, which is based on two research questions, uses a mixed-method research design. The sources of data of this research include: 63 questionnaires completed by secondary school educational leaders occupying the role of Assistant Head of School or Head/Acting Head of School as well as 10 semi-structured interviews conducted with secondary school educational leaders occupying the role of Head/Acting Head of School. All participants were recruited from three different school sectors: State, Church, and Independent. Whilst participants' responses showed a willingness to fulfil mandatory reporting obligations and contained evidence of good practice in dealing with CSA, knowledge pertaining to CSA proved to be somewhat lacking amongst the participating educational leaders. This is likely attributed to the lack of pre-service and CoPE training opportunities on all aspects of CSA available to educational professionals in all school sectors. The study reveals that dealing with CSA poses significant emotional challenges for educational leaders; however, the active involvement of different stakeholders and professionals facilitates the process of CSA referrals.

## Keywords

child sexual abuse, child sexual abuse identification and response, educators' involvement, educators' experiences, educational leadership

## The factors influencing Educators' decision to move between State Secondary Schools

Christine Sillato

May 2022

### Abstract

The movement of educators between schools has a direct impact on the quality of the school performance and excessive movement could be considered indicative of a problem within the school. At an international level, there is extensive literature on the types of schools 'educators generally move out of. In Malta however, such literature is scant. Therefore, this research aims to address this gap in local literature by identifying and understanding the reasons why educators move between Maltese State Secondary Schools. This was done through a qualitative approach involving a number of Educators who had recently moved or attempted to move schools as well as Heads of Schools. The research clearly shows that the working conditions that educators seem to find the most rewarding, and are connected with their satisfaction and retention within the school, are factors that are social in nature. These include the relationship with colleagues, the quality of the Head of School as well as elements of the school culture. When the social working conditions become a problem, the educators start to look at alternative schools. When they do make a decision to move, they factor in the commute, the working hours and their family needs. They also tend to move to schools where they believe teaching will be easier due to a orderly disciplined school environment, a warm school climate and highly motivated students.

### Keywords

Teacher retention, Teacher migration, Secondary school, Malta, Human resources

## A case study of primary school leaders investing in social capital to embrace formative assessment within a state college

Gertrude Tabone

May 2022

### Abstract

Social capital is an existent asset found in organisations amongst the stakeholders. Nevertheless, it needs to be activated and supported to be beneficial and effective for the whole group. This research investigates how primary school leaders, in one state college, are supporting and sustaining the collaborative professional relationships to enhance the quality of teaching and learning through formative assessment. Formative assessment supports learning when actionable, timely feedback is provided to encourage the learner to move one's learning forward. The Maltese policies are instigating social capital and formative assessment as these ensure a better impact on the learners' educational achievements. These policies are challenging the competitive local culture. Notwithstanding, the current assessment and curricular reforms combined by the pandemic crisis beseeched the educators to join forces and take collective actions. This encouraging development is perceived by the school leaders, and they are supporting it to sustain it. To invest in social capital and embrace formative assessment requires a deliberate, regular framework which can be manageable through the commitment of multiple professionals, supporting the college, who believe in collective efficacy. This study unveils that school leaders do promote collaborative actions and formative assessment, but to ingrain them and experience their effectiveness, the educators need simultaneous empowerment and guidance, by trusted knowledgeable others, to impact the daily practices. This research provides a feasible process which materialises both social capital and formative assessment and is enabling promising outcomes.

### Keywords

Social capital, Formative assessment, Distributed leadership, Trust, Collaborative inquiry

## Educational Leaders' Stress: An in-depth analysis of the Maltese context

Elaine Tabone Betts

May 2022

### Abstract

This study aimed to shed light on how Maltese Heads of College Networks, Heads of Schools, Assistant Heads of Schools, and Heads of Departments, collectively referred to as Educational Leaders (ELs), defined stress. The study also aimed to point out what ELs considered stressors in their profession and whether they were aware of the help offered by the Malta Ministry for Education in dealing with stress. Through qualitative one-to-one in-depth interviews with Maltese ELs, I concluded that ELs had a different understanding of distress, which they felt when they could not control a situation, and eustress, which motivated them to work harder. ELs also explained that the stressors they faced came from within and outside the school and from contributing factors like learners, staff members, parents and guardians, unions, curriculum, the Education Departments, and the COVID-19 pandemic. ELs were aware that help was provided to them if they needed it. The outcomes shed light on the fact that ELs need support and training in their profession as well as the opportunity to talk about what they are going through.

### Keywords

Stress, Distress, Eustress, Stressors, Educational Leaders

## Well-being

### Exploring a Pedagogy of Empathy, Care and Sensitivity for the Primary School Years: The Teacher as First Provider and Facilitator of Pastoral Care

Christina Antonia Aquilina

May 2021

#### Abstract

This study investigates the understanding and various perceptions of PC in Maltese primary schools and how it can contribute to the students' holistic well-being. It explores how primary educators, especially teachers, can strengthen pastoral care in various cross-curricular ways, to provide holistic well-being. My research indicates that this is done by understanding students' needs and exploring school climates, curricula, and pedagogies to create classroom climates more conducive to students' holistic development. Moreover, this study delves into the possibility of having a common pastoral approach for all primary schools in Malta. A review of policies and local research portrays the lack of research in this field. The research design is a mixed-methods approach, including quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. An online questionnaire survey amongst teachers is used together with seven SSIs with various Maltese primary educators. My findings revealed that consistency, passion, empathy, and compassion are essential in adopting a PC approach. Knowing the learners and building a good student-teacher relationship resulted in essential qualities to enhance PC. Emotionally supporting the students and modelling good behaviours and acknowledging the effects of well-being amongst students may be part of PC delivery that contributes to holistic well-being. Research participants suggested a reduced workload, teamwork, teacher-training, conducive classrooms, and effective communication can strengthen and enrich holistic development. Lastly, it was concluded that a standard pastoral approach for all primary schools is challenging. However, participants recommended a sample policy to create their own pastoral policy for their respective school.

#### Keywords

Pastoral Care, Primary Schools, Holistic Development, Well-Being, Pastoral Policy

# A Phenomenological Analysis of the Factors influencing the Motivational Climate experienced by a group of Female Educational Leaders

Janice Cachia Schembri

May 2021

## Abstract

This study seeks to explore the experience of six female educational leaders in their executive roles and personal life. It seeks to identify what motivates them in their role as leaders and what influences their performance related goals, wellbeing and work-life balance. Furthermore, it strives to understand the relationships which female educational leaders have with their staff and superiors, and how such relationships influence their behaviour. Six female educational leaders from different institutions participated in one to-one semi-structured interviews. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was the research method adopted for its idiographic nature. Findings from this research revealed that social perceptions on women influenced their leadership role. Personal traits such as communication skills, resilience, level of trust and relationship-building, together with personal goals and ambition all contributed to their motivational drive. Continuous professional development has emerged as a strategic tool to keep up with the educational field dynamics. Coping strategies were adopted to safeguard their wellbeing in stress related situations. Work-life balance and female multifaceted roles impact considerably progression in leadership roles. Lack of motivation, stress and anxiety resulted from lack of support and appreciation from superiors. Intrinsically motivated performance goals were achieved through resilience and adhering to their values when faced with challenges. Furthermore, autonomously driven attitudes and behaviour are interlinked with job engagement. The implications of this research propose an insight into what nurtures and what hinders the motivational climate of female educational leaders, whereby policy-makers can create, facilitate and provide opportunities for those who aspire to pursue a career in leadership positions.

## Keywords

Female educational leaders, motivational climate, work-life balance, wellbeing, work-related relationships

# An Invisible Challenge: The Professional Isolation Experienced by Novice Heads of Primary State Schools During Their Professional and Organisational Socialisation

Nadia Bonnici

May 2021

## Abstract

The purpose of this research was to examine the professional isolation experienced by novice heads of primary state schools during their professional and organisational socialisation. This study looked into the causes of professional isolation and the different coping mechanisms and support structures which help to reduce experiences of loneliness. A mixed-methods approach was employed. Data from an online survey with heads of primary state schools provided an overview into this challenge, whereas interviews with novice school leaders helped the researcher gain a better insight into their experiences. Results show that the socialisation process itself, mainly coping with the initial shock upon taking on the role, and gaining familiarity with the school culture, seem to be major causes of professional isolation for novice heads of school. Other factors causing isolation and loneliness include issues related to the organisational climate of state schools, mainly high expectations, responsibility of decision-making, balancing conflicting demands and time constraints. The level of support newly appointed leaders receive from the Head of College Network (HCN) highly influences the level of isolation experienced. Major coping mechanisms which novice heads of schools believe reduce feelings of professional isolation include seeking support from peers and superiors and making personal and professional efforts. This study highlights the importance of continuous support and professional development in helping novice leaders face the challenge of professional isolation. In the local context this implies enhanced support in terms of mentoring and providing further opportunities for networking and professional development opportunities.

## Keywords

Professional isolation, novice heads of schools, causes, coping mechanisms, support



## The implications of COVID-19 on mental health and well-being in young athletes in Malta

Darren Bezzina

May 2021

### Abstract

This study explores the effects of COVID-19 on the mental health and well-being of Maltese youth athletes. COVID-19 has made an impact on all our lives. Youth athletes, although they are not considered as vulnerable to the virus, are still being greatly affected as many activities, including sports and schools are being stopped. This can increase the risk of stress and mental problems. Athletes had to find different ways to cope with this pandemic. This study attempts to analyse how the mental health and well-being of youth athletes were affected during the COVID-19 pandemic and what positive coping strategies did youth athletes utilise to maintain their self-care during these extraordinary times. A qualitative approach was adopted as data was collected using semi-structured interviews with questions related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Ten athletes aged 14 years of age took part in this study. The interviews were analysed using thematic analysis and four themes emerged: mental health; life, training and school; social interactions; and coping strategies. The findings show that COVID-19 had a deep effect on the mental health of these athletes, especially during the partial lockdown period. Nevertheless, these athletes were able to find different ways to cope during this period such as training at home, finding different ways to communicate with their friends, as well as try new activities. This study hopes that stakeholders use the findings in this study as they develop new return-to-sport policies. The mental health and well-being of these youth athletes should be kept in consideration.

### Keywords

COVID-19, Malta, Mental Health and Wellbeing, Qualitative Methodology, Youth athletes

# The Students' Lifestyle After School Hours and How it Affects their Academic Performance

Kendrick Lee Sultana

May 2021

## Abstract

Academic achievement may be influenced by various factors, and what students do after school hours may determine a high or low academic achievement. Research shows that after school activities and students' lifestyle affect academic achievement. This study aims to determine the link between academic achievement, after school activities and students' lifestyles. Specifically, this study investigates what factors are affecting students' academic achievement, such as sports activities, youth clubs, family background, social media, and video gaming. In this research, academic achievement is defined as traditional achievement, based on the examination marks that students achieve throughout their formal education journey. On the other hand, after school activities are defined as the activities which students attend to or do after school hours. These can be either structured or unstructured activities. To investigate if academic achievement is affected by after school activities and students' lifestyle, a questionnaire was distributed among secondary school students from two different colleges in Malta. Respondents were randomly chosen, although the choice was determined by their academic track. Students were asked questions related to what they do after school hours and the usage time they dedicate to some of these activities. To complement and back up the students' data, 7 semi-structured interviews were conducted with Head of Schools, youth workers and academics. The results show that there is a relationship between academic achievement and after school activities and lifestyle. These results suggest that various factors relate to the students' academic achievement. These factors affect academic achievement in a positive or negative way. Factors which relate to academic achievement vary from structured and unstructured activities, family background, social media and video gaming usage, and the student's will to succeed.

## Keywords

Academic achievement, After school activities, Students' lifestyle, Youth clubs, Family background

## Discourses and Beliefs on Mental Health and Well-Being: Perceptions of Leaders working in Schools in Malta

Maria Pace

May 2021

### Abstract

This study presented insight of education leaders working in primary, middle and secondary state schools in Malta on their on what constitutes positive mental health and also the challenges the participants are faced with in their day to day work with regards to mental health that staff and students experience. This research also addressed support initiatives that education leaders engage in to ensure support for staff and students who might be going through challenges. The study took a qualitative approach through the use of semi-structured interviews with eight education leaders. Through the use of thematic analysis seven themes were elicited: School Philosophy, Ethos and Leadership, Mental Health and Wellbeing in Schools, Mental Health Challenges in Staff and Students, Support Services, the School Environment, Loss and Grief and the Mental Health and Wellbeing in schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. Findings suggest the need further research and enhanced practices on proactive and reactive approaches to address Mental Health and Wellbeing in schools. Also, findings suggest an action plan to address Mental Health and Wellbeing post the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Keywords

Mental Health and Wellbeing, School Leaders, Malta, Qualitative Research, Thematic Analysis

## Leading during a Pandemic: The Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on the wellbeing of Primary Educational Leaders in Malta

Anthony Attard

May 2022

### Abstract

In March 2020, schools in Malta closed as a precautionary exercise in a bid to halt the spread of Covid-19 (Coronavirus Disease). Following a short transitional period, learning resumed online, with school leaders scrambling to guide their teams through this unprecedented situation. School leaders became the pressure point for various stakeholders. This study aims to identify the impact that the Covid-19 pandemic had on the wellbeing of school leaders, with further focus on the aspects of the leader's wellbeing that was affected by Covid-19, how the leaders' role changed during the pandemic, the coping strategies adapted by school leaders during the Covid-19 pandemic and also what assurances could have helped school leaders balance their wellbeing and duties. The Study adopts a qualitative stance with data being collected through semi-structured interviews with six school leaders from three different regions across the Maltese Islands. The study also analyses a number of official documents issued by the health department in Malta, to provide triangulation of data and back up claims by school leaders. Since data collected deals with the lived experiences of school leaders, it was analysed through an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), using thematic analysis and a critical realism theoretical epistemology. Findings from this research reveal that the impact of Covid-19 on the wellbeing of school leaders was mostly negative in nature, with themes such as frustration, loss of control, fear of the unknown and loneliness highlighted through a superordinate theme of negative perceptions. This was mostly due to the change within the role of the head of school, with new pressures and challenging offering a new priority to which the heads of school had to attest. Ultimately through the professional nature, heads of school adopted a number of coping strategies such as professional development, setting limits and personal care in order to counter the pressures stemming from the changes brought about by the pandemic. There is also a call for transparency and better communication, with a general consensus that being pro-active and planning strategically, rather than being reactive, is the way forward.

### Keywords

Covid-19, School Leaders, Wellbeing, Coping Strategies, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

## Transitions between schools: Effects on children's psychosocial wellbeing and academic achievements

Sandra Azzopardi

May 2022

### Abstract

The aim of this study is to identify possible effects that children experience when passing through a transition process from kindergarten to primary school. The author aims to create awareness of these effects and how the children can be provided with the necessary preparation and ongoing support in order to have a smooth and successful transition. The aim is to view different perspectives from all stakeholders, namely, the children, parents/guardians, educators and an educational psychologist. This study will delve into the possible reasons for which the transition was made. The support that the children and their families are given during this move and most importantly, teaching the students the necessary coping skills to deal with and overcome any hurdles they may be faced with. The research method employed is a qualitative one, comprising of interviews with all the participants. Thematic analysis was used for the interpretation of the responses. Themes that were identified from the responses were three, namely being child readiness, support and practices. The information gathered from this study suggests that further research would be beneficial to all parties when dealing with a circumstance of the sort, especially in the local education system.

## A study on the teachers' levels of understanding of mindfulness practice among learners in primary state schools

Cynthia Debono

May 2022

### Abstract

The varied and challenging backgrounds and life experiences children are going through in today's society impact their mental health and wellbeing (O'Sullivan, 2021). Teachers are concerned with this matter as these experiences impact the children's social and cognitive behaviour. A practice that is growing in its popularity and which promotes health and mental wellbeing is mindfulness. As seen in the works of various researchers such as Walsh and Shapiro (2006), mindfulness helps to reduce and improve fear, depression, reactivity, and poor behaviour as well as improves sleep, attention, and self-esteem. According to Khong (2010), mindfulness also seems to bring respect for emotions and bring in the self-knowledge and self-reflection. This study aims to understand the teachers' knowledge and perception of mindfulness practice and will be conducted with state schools' educators in the primary years. The research will determine whether state school educators are aware and confident about the benefits of mindfulness, such as the learners' mental wellbeing, cognitive and social skills, as well as whether they have practised mindfulness with their students. Meiklejohn et al. (2012) imply that personal training in mindfulness skills can improve teachers' sense of self-efficacy, wellbeing, and capacity to control classroom behaviour and create and sustain supportive connections with their students. In the study, a representative sample of educators teaching in primary local state schools were asked to fill in an online questionnaire as part of the quantitative method used for this research to explore the teachers' understanding of mindfulness.

### Keywords

Mindfulness, Focus, Self-regulation, Attention, Stress-reduction

## Schools' closure: The impact of Covid-19 pandemic on the emotional well-being of students in the Junior Years

Roberta Xerri

May 2022

### Abstract

This research explored the impact that the closing of schools, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, has had on the emotional well-being of Junior Year students. It identified how school staff helped to support the emotional well-being of their students during this period. Furthermore, based from what we learnt from the participant's experiences during school closure and COVID-19, it strived to apprehend, from the data collected, what measures can be implemented in schools to support student emotional well-being. Firstly, a sample of eighty Year 6 students from different schools completed an online questionnaire. Then, six students and three Heads of School from different schools participated in one-to-one semi-structured interviews. A mixed-method research approach was adopted. This research revealed that various factors affected students' emotional well-being during school closure due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The home environment, disruption of routine, and lack or the possibility of more communication and physical activities all impacted their emotional well-being. Teacher support, communication between school staff and parents/caregivers, and rules and regulations implemented in schools were the different strategies that emerged as measures to support the emotional well-being of students during school closure due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Data from this research showed that lack of teacher training in supporting student emotional well-being was a common factor felt by the Heads of schools. Thus, schools closing their doors due to the COVID-19 pandemic motivated this research to learn from this experience and find ways whereby schools can support and promote emotional well-being. A whole-school approach to teaching and learning emotional literacy and promoting play and sports in schools resulted as the strategies that participants felt were needed most to support student emotional well-being during COVID-19 and afterward. The implications of this research lead to understanding better what measures schools need to implement to support the emotional well-being of their students. The findings offer insight into what nurtures and hinders student emotional well-being from personal experiences during school closure due to COVID-19.

### Keywords

Emotional well-being, School closure, COVID-19, Emotional literacy, Students, Schools

## Professional Development

### The impact of Erasmus+ mobility on primary school teachers' Intercultural Competences

Mariestelle Spiteri

May 2022

#### Abstract

This study seeks to explore the impact of Erasmus+ mobilities on primary school teachers and how this further developed their intercultural competences. While some teachers are satisfied of their teaching careers, others face constant challenges in today's educational system. Thus, Erasmus+ mobilities encourage participants to take part in numerous programmes in different countries to further develop their intercultural skills, while also providing a new opportunity for their teaching and learning formation. In recent times, it has been widely stressed that being interculturally competent is essential to coexist in a diverse world. Therefore, primary school teachers need to be interculturally competent, in order to promote the attitudes, skills, knowledge and understanding required to live together in this diverse world, while promoting a sense of stability in our democratic societies. This will also support the scholastic community to understand authentic world issues and empathise with learners from diverse cultural backgrounds. A multimethod qualitative research approach was chosen, as it provides an in-depth exploration of the topic under investigation. The data was gathered through a focus group and six semi-structured interviews conducted with a small group of participants from the same primary state school. During the data analysis, it was found that change is complex and, as such, it requires time for the individual to mature and develop. The study showed that progress has eventually occurred because teachers desired to work for change, thus providing a maturity in creating the foundations to acquire such new skills, knowledge and understanding. This reinforces what the data suggested, that these Erasmus+ mobilities do in fact further support teachers' intercultural competences.

#### Keywords

Erasmus+ mobility programmes, Intercultural competences, Teacher training, Personal and professional development, Classroom implications



## The School Development Plan: A comparative analysis of three state secondary schools – The way forward

Jason Florian

May 2022

### Abstract

This research study sets out to investigate the importance and validity of the School Development Plan (SDP) in secondary schools whilst ensuring school improvement and school effectiveness in the 21st Century. School development planning is an ongoing process that helps school communities to meet the binary challenge of enhancing quality and managing change. Thus, the SDP serves to guide school activities and facilitates monitoring and self-evaluation. The formulation of the SDP is a process that follows the school vision and requires stakeholders' ownership. A comparative analysis of three state secondary schools from the three different clusters (North, Centre, and South) will be carried out through semi-structured interviews with Heads of School that share their perspectives about development planning. Teachers in the same schools will be asked to contribute through a short questionnaire regarding the implementation of the SDP in their school. An interview will also be held with an expert from the Quality Assurance Department (QAD) and from the School Internal Review and Support Unit (SIRS) Unit with the purpose of emphasizing on quality education and ensuring that the SDP is being developed by following the main tenets of the National Curriculum Framework (NCF). Moreover, through documentary analysis, the SDPs of the three schools will be deeply analysed, ensuring that good practices are highlighted. Through this research study, conclusions on how to make the SDP more relevant in the 21st Century to enhance school leadership will be outlined, thus serving as a model for all secondary state schools in Malta.

### Keywords

Educational leadership, School development plan, School improvement, School effectiveness

# The Relationship between School Autonomy and School Responsiveness from the Perspective of Heads of Primary Schools in Malta

David Polidano

May 2022

## Abstract

This dissertation studies the perspective of heads of primary schools in Malta on the relationship between school autonomy and school responsiveness. School responsiveness refers to the ability of schools to respond quickly and positively to the needs of students and their families, as well as to the changing conditions in which they operate. School responsiveness is, therefore, crucial to the holistic well-being and education of the students, the continued relevance of the education system, and the good of society in general. Knowing whether, and how, school autonomy is related to school responsiveness can provide a key to action for improvement in the Maltese education system. The research study adopted a mixed methods approach which allowed the collection and analysis of data from a relatively large proportion of the target population and its interpretation through the participation of a sample from the same population. The study found a statistically significant medium correlation between school autonomy and school responsiveness. It showed that most heads believe that greater school autonomy, especially in the curriculum and instruction domain, would help increase responsiveness. Most were also found to be personally in favour of increased autonomy, especially in the mentioned domain. The dissertation emphasises the complexity of the matter under study. It suggests an iterative approach to change that prioritises the professional autonomy of school-based educators as the guiding principle. This approach can serve as an opportunity for central education authorities and educators' unions to work together as social partners to strengthen school autonomy and responsiveness in Malta.

## Keywords

School autonomy, School responsiveness, Professional autonomy, Mixed methods research

## What potential does an Individual Professional Development Plan (IPDP) have in addressing the learning needs of educators in Malta?

Fiona Vassallo Medici

May 2022

### Abstract

Educators in Malta are encouraged to engage in self-sought continuous professional development (CPD) apart from the management-drive professional development (PD) organised at ministry level and school level. The Individual Professional Development Plan (IPDP) is used by human resources management across different industries including education, to assist in the planning of their professional development and career paths. This strategic tool is used to recognise and document skills, knowledge and training options required to achieve short term and long-term goals. The purpose of this qualitative case study is to evaluate the potential of the IPDP, created purposely for this study, to support educators reflect upon their professional practice in order to plan their personalized professional learning. The IPDP was presented to 26 educators occupying different roles in the Maltese education sector. Findings in this study revealed that the potential benefits of using the IPDP to support teacher's learning needs are: improved reflective practice; exposure to strategic planning; motivation to learn; and consideration of students' needs. The potential challenges were recognised as being: teachers' negative attitudes towards PD; lack of experience in self-reflective practices and goal-setting; time restraints; imposing union directives; and teaching conditions during the Covid-19 pandemic. This study also examined the potential use of the IPDP by senior leadership teams. It resulted that the IPDP could potentially promote: community learning; goal-setting alignment with school development plans; alignment with student needs; and different forms of PD.

### Keywords

Individual Professional Development Plan (IPDP), Continuous professional development (CPD), Personalised professional development, Strategic tool, Goals

## An investigation into the development of a Professional Learning Community in a Maltese Primary Church School

Stephanie Zammit Dimech

May 2022

### Abstract

This study sought to explore the collective capacity of teachers to form a Professional Learning Community (PLC) to target professional development in teaching Maltese to primary students at a Church School to increase student achievement. Through a collaborative action research process, this study frames the development of establishing a PLC in a Maltese primary church school with twelve teachers and one Assistant Head. It provides an insider's perspective on the process of teachers' collaboration in inquiring into innovative pedagogical practices and forming an action plan to improve student achievement in Maltese language acquisition at school. This study employed a multimethod qualitative research approach by incorporating participant observations and semi-structured interviews as well as field observations and a reflective journal. The findings from this study revealed that when teachers and SLT members work collaboratively towards a shared vision, they yield positive results. However, their efforts sometimes are weakened due to a rigid system that hinders the change process. Various implications are provided for consideration for educational leaders to encourage effective PLCs. This research aims to contribute to the field of Maltese primary educational research by providing findings-based recommendations for educators and educational leaders who would wish to embark on a journey to develop and nurture a PLC in a primary school to improve student achievement in an area of concern.

### Keywords

Professional learning communities, Professional development, Teacher leadership, Multi-method approach, Collaborative action research, School improvement

## School leaders and their emerging needs, vision and approaches to Continuing Professional Development in a post-COVID context. A comparative study of educational change and professional learning in the Maltese primary educational system

Annalise Psaila

May 2022

### Abstract

This study aims to explore the views and perceptions of educational leaders about professional development in the Maltese educational context. This research will go in-depth in the different types of professional development experiences which were offered before the pandemic, what is happening now at present in schools and also what are the schools' ambitions and vision for the future from the school leaders' point of view. I will further discuss the impact of Covid-19 on professional development. Even though at time the pandemic seems to be on its way out, it is still with us and it left a great impact on all sectors especially education. I will be seeking what and how schools coped with professional development and what were the main differences. The main aim is to find out what schools want in a post Covid-19 context in relation to the context of professional development. With a post-Covid context mean that since at the moment cases of Covid-19 are in decline, vaccinations are ramping up and the social restrictions are all being lifted we can see a ray of light and the Maltese education system is returning slowly back to normality. However, the virus can still remain with us and we need to be prepared, even if this is over and it disappears we as a generation will believing with the consequences for the next couple of years. What are the schools' ambitions and vision on professional development for the future? In this study, school leaders will talk on what they aim for the future by reflecting on what happened in the past two years.

### Keywords

Professional Development, Primary school leaders, Education, Future needs, Post-Covid

## Effective Strategies for the School Leadership to Promote Collaboration Between Educators in Primary Schools

Hannah Micallef

May 2022

### Abstract

Collaboration is acclaimed by many. As research has shown, when motivated and passionate employees join forces, work is facilitated, and a pleasant environment is created. The notion of collaboration is promoted in schools as many educators working in collaborative communities find the experience enriching. The researcher aimed to investigate collaboration in primary schools in Malta. The research question for the study focused on finding what factors influence collaborative processes within primary schools and the barriers that may impede collaboration. The study was conducted in one state college. Teachers' feedback was gathered through questionnaires and focus group interviews. The members of the senior leadership team were also interviewed, thus enabling the researcher to gather different perspectives. Results concluded that most teachers work collaboratively as they share information, resources, and workload. The majority of the teachers agreed with the view that collaboration leads to school improvement and increases students' learning and achievement. It was noted that the greatest barrier that impedes collaboration is lack of time. Teachers expressed their interest in receiving training on peer observation practices as the study highlighted the benefits of such practices but showed that knowledge and opportunities are lacking. It was also concluded that an instructional and/or transformational style of leadership is positively influential as teachers are motivated to work together and feel empowered. It is recommended that leaders allot more time to peer collaborative practices, offer reflective feedback and adopt a servant mindset by providing chances for personal and professional growth.

### Keywords

Collaboration, Educators, Primary, Professional learning, Community, Senior leadership team

# Educational Leadership and Teachers' Well-Being: Strategies and Practices for Supporting the Well-Being of Teachers in Maltese Secondary State Schools

Nigel Farrugia

May 2022

## Abstract

This research investigated the strategies and practices for supporting the well-being of teachers in Maltese secondary state schools. In this dissertation, mixed method research was utilised. Seven interviews with heads of schools and 207 questionnaires were carried out to collect important grounded data. The findings of this study offer a practical understanding and awareness of the current implemented strategies and practices for supporting the well-being of teachers as well as establishing a way forward with innovative or different kinds of strategies and practices to enhance the well-being of teachers. The theoretical framework presented in this study incorporated three major theories and models including the self-determination theory, the PERMA / PERMAH model and the theoretical model of psychological well-being. Results indicated that as it stands, there are already a good number of strategies and practices in place to support and enhance the well-being of teachers in Malta. At the same time, this study highlighted innovative strategies and practices that may be applied to further enhance teachers' well-being. Finally, recommendations to the Ministry for Education, Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation (MEYR), to the colleges, the senior leadership teams (SLTs) as well as the teachers are also presented.

## Keywords

Teachers' Well-Being, Strategies and practices, Self-Determination Theory, PERMA/PERMAH Model, Theoretical Model of Psychological Well-Being