CONTEXTUALISING LEADERSHIP IN MULTIETHNIC SCHOOLS: PERCEPTIONS, ROLES AND WAY FORWARD

Brian Vassallo
Mariam Albatool School, Malta Europe
brianvassallo7671@gmail.com

Abstract: Leadership processes in Multiethnic schools provide particular challenge for school leaders. The paper discusses the perceptions and roles of school leaders in the light of literature review on multiethnic school leadership. The Maltese context is given particular focus due to a number of factors which together form an intriguing but challenging venture into what constitutes the roles which school leaders need to fulfil for the efficiency of their school. The paper also delves into these roles are transformed into actions which promote multicultural education. These are analysed in the light of different forms of multiculturalism. The paper concludes that leadership in multiethnic Maltese school centred on issues of equity and social justice which however lacked the necessary critical lens to spur ways forward. The paper concludes with a number of recommendations which will bring about improvement.

INTRODUCTION

The education of students from different cultural backgrounds has been the subject of debate on a plethora of agendas around the world (Banks & McGee Banks, 2004). The provision of Educational services that meet the needs of minority ethnic students has been a challenge to which many school leaders has contended with for a number of years. Increased globalisation, forced migration, mixed marriages and increased social and economic mobility have resulted in classroom compositions which are increasingly multiethnic and dynamic in nature. Though concerns about the extent to which our schools are prepared to embrace this phenomenon have been surfacing in educational literature, (Eg: Murphy, Steele, & Gross, 2007; Murphy & Steele, 2008; Zirkel, 2004; Zirkel, 2007), few have focused on the role of school leaders as catalysts for change and even less have focused on contextualised leadership processes. The paper contextualizes the leadership enterprise as it occurs within the context of Maltese schools. It adds to the existing body of research by providing insights into how Maltese school leaders perceive their vision as promoters of Multiethnic education   and what principles and values underpin their leadership. The study also delves deeply into their role by examining it in the light of literature on multicultural education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the 1970's the Council of Europe stressed the importance of intercultural competence within educational establishments as the cradle for the development of human rights and democracy. Since then, developing intercultural competencies has been suggested as an essential strategy aimed at addressing recurrent and impending problems of today's societies due to differences in cultural disposition and behaviours. Developing competence across cultures is fast emerging as a tool to help address cultural, ethnic discrimination, racism, hate speech and so on. There is an urgent need for education which aids citizens to live together in an increasingly diverse society. Various scholars (eg: Huber 2012) places emphasis on the improvement of school leadership practices as important step for such aims to take stride.

The Maltese context of the study is of particular relevance since Multicultural and Diversity Education is still in its inception and comes out mostly as a response to a number of factors amongst which is the increased globalisation, returned migrants, regular and irregular

immigration, studentships and mixed marriages. Maltese school leaders are hence facing new challenges of working with children of multicultural origin. With increasing diversity in our classrooms, new challenges but also opportunities are now having an impact both on teachers and students but also, perhaps to a larger extent, on school's senior management team. This is supported by current literature (Eg: Dimmock and Walker, 2005; Marshall, 2004; Coleman and Cardo, 2006, Goddard, 2007) who stress the importance of contextual leadership as a new but challenging venture due to its increasing complexity.

Research in the past 25 years has served as a platform for the evolving debate on the role of society in diversity and inclusive education. Though evolving and informative, the discourse on multiculturalism 'has been mobilised and operationalised in educational policy and proactive within market and managerialist frames that tend to limit the possibilities of delivering its promise of more inclusive and equitable schooling' (Blackmore 2006, p.182). Cray, Alston and Beachum (2006) examined school leaders' perception of multicultural education and school climate and found that when Heads of Schools (hence forward (HoSs) promote multicultural principles in their schools, there exists a general positive atmosphere in the school cultivating the ideals of respect, trust and self worth in their students.

The growing privatization of education, socio-economic disparities, race and colour issues, reduction of the achievement gap between races, elimination of racial and ethnic prejudices and an overarching sense of social justice have been the lynchpins connecting leadership with multicultural education. In Malta, the teaching of English as a foreign language forms an additional but vital factor in this regard. Being able to communicate effectively using the English Language is becoming increasingly important for both Maltese and foreign parents who regard it as an effective vehicle for effective functioning of their children in classroom and in the facilitating intercultural communication between parents, teachers and students. In fact, the Maltese government is currently displaying a number of initiatives aimed at improving the communicative aspect of English language across all schools. These initiatives also have a impact on the leadership and management aspects within schools.

The discourse on the relationship between leadership and multiculturalism is two-pronged. On one side there is the prevailing discourse on *managing* multiculturalism and diversity, pushing a line of thought which exalts individual achievement while integrating practices where each individual's/ group's contribution is celebrated. According to Gewirtz and Ball (2000), however, such discourse does not provide scholarship into how societal structures pave the way for inequalities and disparities. On the other side of the discourse lies the foundation of social justice with emphasis being positioned on critical transformative pedagogies placed at the very heart of educational leadership processes (Hodgkinson, 1991; Greenfield and Ribbons, 1993; Gewirtz 2002, Bogotch, 2002).

According to Gewirtz and Ball (2000), the neoliberal discourse of the 1990's has mainly served to shift the multicultural discourse from a managerialistic and socio-economic point of view rather than as a vehicle for the proliferation of social justice and reduction of inequalities. Larson and Murtadha (2002), in their study on the relationship between educational leadership and social justice, urge school leaders to place the value of social justice at the very heart of their educational strategies. They insist that school leaders give particular attention to issues of race, class, gender, disabilities and sexual orientation. From this point of view, HoSs tend to achieve more equitable outcomes for all students (Blackmore, 2006). Schools are therefore seen as grounds where social, economic, cultural and political differences are in contention. As opposed to the assimilationist view (Gewirtz and Ball, 2000)

the critical multiculturalist perspective 'recognize(s) and respect(s) difference rather than assimilating it and struggles for more equitable redistribution of resources (Zembylas and Iasonos, 2010).

Drawing from the work of Ladson Billings (1997, 2001, 2005), Theoharis (2007) draws a distinction between a *good leader* and a *social justice leader*. He argues that social justice leadership is a refinement of good leadership. On similar grounds Bogotch (2002), Scheurich and Skrla (2003), and Dimmock and Walker (2005) stress the need to re-examine what has up till now been perceived as good leadership and critically examine how various leadership approaches influence students' performance. This shows that the outlook which school leaders have on equity and distributive education have an impinging effect on the way the school operates.

Research also suggests that school leaders have limited and often insufficient knowledge on Multicultural issues (Mabokela & Madsen, 2003). Evidence also suggests that school administrators do not understand the pervading harm of racism (Young & Laible, 2000) and tend to overlook prejudice issues deeming them as unimportant. Other studies (eg: Walker 2005) have highlighted positive practices which many HoSs have developed over the course of their careers serving as role models and advocates of sound values within their communities. These school leaders were able to make proactive use of their values and mitigate against societal inequalities particularly racism and poverty. School leaders who are committed to highlight *cultural differences* rather than *cultural deficits* concede to the notion that children's failure in schools are a result of the culture in which they grew up (Banks, 1994). Walker (1991) linked the characteristics of these school leaders with those exemplified by the Moral model of leadership. These values form the basis on which all school leadership should be based upon as they connect the school administration, teachers and students. Other authors (eg: Goddard et al., 2006, Theoharis, 2007) studied the relationship between the characteristics of leaders in Multicultural schools and the challenges of decision making within such contexts. They concluded that the HoSs' values of social justice had a positive impact on the inclusive values of the school, the changing of culture, pedagogical preparation and policy setting within the school.

Similarly, research conducted by Leeman (2007) and Mahieu and Clycq (2007) concluded that the majority of the HoSs they studied, focused on the recognition of difference and the provision of equal opportunities for success and were effectively preparing children as citizens and employees in a Multicultural society. However, other studies conducted by Goddard and Hart (2007) showed contrasting evidence and found that a number of HoSs actively defied any attempts to recognize diversity and difference on the grounds that all students need to be treated the same in full respect to school procedures and policies. Such assimilationist approach ignored cultural differences among groups and the diverse needs of the students.

MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION
Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997) conveniently categorise multiculturalism into four broad categories
      a) Conservative Multiculturalism
      b) Liberal Multiculturalism
      c) Pluralist Multiculturalism
      d) Critical Multiculturalism

Conservative Multiculturalism

This approach tends to emphasise the predominance of one culture over another. It is the assimilation of diversified groups into one normative culture (Tiedt & Tiedt, 2002). Nieto (1996, 1999) criticizes this approach stating that it ignores the persistent issues of social justice and the margainalization of small ethnic groups. She states that conservative Multiculturalism is firmly rooted in white middle class culture placing emphasis on a one-size-fits-all approach ushering minor ethnic groups into a conformative state towards the dominant culture. School leaders who adopt this approach perceive 'other' children as being inferior and with an impending need to conform with other students.

Liberal Multiculturalism

Liberal Multiculturalism tends to emphasise commonality between groups rather than highlighting differences. This approach has been criticized by Sleeter and McLaren (1995), and by (Kincheloe and Steinberg, 1997) as leading to 'colour blindness' and 'cultural invisibility' This approach emphasises the importance of liberty and equality. School leaders therefore believe in their ability to create a shared vision within the school and community, whilst maintaining high expectations for student learning, and professional development opportunities for teachers.

Pluralist Multiculturalism

Pluralist Multiculturalism, on the other hand focuses on the celebration of differences rather than similarities. This type of approach places emphasis on traditions, customs, artefacts and rituals which characterises that particular group. School leaders, therefore tend to be values-driven and have a passionate commitment to use education as a means of challenging promoting values of fairness, respect and justice (Dimmock et.al. 2005). HoSs are able to inspire and motivate others through their own practices, thus securing high levels of commitment with school and outside school boundaries. These school leaders are therefore passionate about making connections between the school and the wider community, through constant links with parents, educational authorities, local councils and Non-governmental organisations. Criticisms of this approach (Eg: Nieto, 1996) are directed on the fact that power relations and structural inequalities are not addressed.

Critical Multiculturalism

Critical Multiculturalism challenges social inequalities and advocates for the need to challenge social assumptions and initiate discourses on power relations which exist between groups. Focus is directed at mitigating against structural imbalances present in society. Stress is hereby made on the role of school leaders as the catalysts for equity practices and as 'filters' of dominant values over minority groups. Dimmock and Walker (2005) criticize this approach as being idealistic and as lacking focus on the approach necessary to achieve social change. They also argue that the approach contains a high dose of political overtones which make it prohibitive on school leaders to enact. School leaders who adopt a critical view of Multicultural education are protagonists of organizational and societal change. They promote anti-racist pedagogy within their schools and work towards the promotion of social justice and equity (Tillman, 2008; Jean-Marie, 2008; Murakami-Ramalho, Nuñez, & Cuero, 2010; Horsford, 2011; Santamaría & Santamaría, 2012; Gooden & Dantley, 2012; Khalifa, 2012; Mansfield, 2014; Santamaría et. al., 2014; Santamaría, 2014). These researchers suggest that culturally responsive leadership may result in socially just and equitable outcomes for all learners in contexts where disparities are present.

Multicultural education in Malta.

Malta, like many other countries in the world, is constantly experiencing a surge in social mobility and opportunities arising from the increased interactions of different cultures, languages, races and religions. Malta's long history of colonisations and the effects which these had on Maltese people are a monument of our rich heritage. Statistics show that in 2010 about 8200 people immigrated to Malta, and about 1200 of whom were returning migrants from the European Union (Vassallo, 2012).

The surge of Multicultural realities within the Maltese social context can be viewed as a two pronged conceptualisation. On one hand it has given rise to a sense of uncertainty, fear of the unknown and unwarranted intrusion while on the other hand it has conveyed a sense of reaching out, diverse encounters, challenging opportunities and cultural enrichment.

The largely contested irregular immigration towards Maltese shores has had a depressing impact on the perception of Multicultural diversity in Malta with many Maltese equating Multiculturalism with irregular immigration amidst ambivalent feelings of concern and anxiety. This is further confirmed by research conducted by Vassallo (2012) who concurs that large-scale irregular immigration in the Mediterranean has caused unprecedented alarm among the Maltese population. What, therefore, has been frequently inappropriately laid out is the notion that Multicultural education is synonymous to the education of children coming from African countries.

What must be taken into consideration however, is the fact that the population of non-Maltese students into Maltese classrooms is composed of students coming from a host of both European and non-European countries such Germany, USA, UK, Italy, France and Serbia, Libya, Algeria, Tunisia, Syria, Nigeria, Ethiopia and others. There are also students coming from Central and South America, Oceania and Asia, albeit to small numbers. This amounted for a total number of 1393 students within our local primary and secondary schools in the year 2008 (Educational statistics, 2011).

This multiplicity of multicultural students within Maltese schools populations has stirred up the need for school leaders to incorporate leadership practices aimed at stimulating a healthy environment, characterized by a number of supportive and responsive structures primarily geared at spurring teachers to include all children in their daily curricular planning. Initiatives have been geared at hosting activities aimed at enhancing interactions with teachers and students in an attempt to reconstruct new realities based on mutual respect and tolerance. The Maltese National Curriculum Framework (2011) further supports these initiatives by highlighting the need for student services to be "given in the context of diversity, implying that they address the learner's current/ actual level of competence with a view of subsequent progress and achievement" (Towards a Quality Education for all, 2011, p 20.) This statement further pushes school leaders to unprecedented leadership strategies and skills aimed at reaching the needs of multicultural students in the classrooms.

Furthermore, the increasing convergence of different languages, religions, cultural behaviours and different ways of thinking, has prompted teachers to consider a pedagogy which is inclusive of cultural differences. The education of children from Multicultural backgrounds is thus conceptualised as an opportunity rather than as an obstacle. For these opportunities to be nurtured and developed able leadership needs to be at the very heart of daily scholastic activities. An appropriate style of leadership would promote effective synergy between people from different cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds. Teachers will then have the

possibility of capitalizing on the experiences of their counterparts in Malta and other European countries, study models and stratagems employed and infuse them in their daily interaction with students.

METHODOLOGY

The qualitative means of investigation was deemed appropriate for this study because it gave opportunity to 'delve deeply' (Denzin et.al., 2005) into the perceptions of school leaders and their role in leading their multiethnic school. The interview method was chosen as it allowed the possibility of capturing verbal and non-verbal cues and also allowed probing into emotions and behaviours. Interviewing also provided the advantage of keeping focus on the research question. Confidentiality and anonymity were stressed prior to the interview. The highest of ethical standards were maintained throughout the whole research study.

The interviews consisted of a series of open ended questions lasting around 45 minutes intended to probe into the HoSs' perception of Multicultural diversity within his/her school. Thirteen school leaders from secondary schools in Malta were identified as appropriate candidates for the study, based on the successes of their school leadership, the geographic area and the cultural composition of the school. Out of thirteen, twelve agreed to be interviewed.

The research questions were identified as follows:
      1) What are the *perceptions* of Maltese School leaders on Multicultural Education?
      2) How do these perceptions translate into *roles* in everyday School leadership? and
      3) What *way forward* is advocated for improved multiethnic leadership practice?

Interviews were conducted on strategic periods during the academic year namely:
      a) During the first month of the scholastic year (October) where leadership and organisational skills are
        inevitably put under scrutiny,
      b) Immediately after a School Development Session where there are ample opportunities for the school
        leader to put his/her skills to the test.
      c) After parents' day meeting where the school principal would have had the opportunity to share his
        Multicultural skills with parents, teachers and students.

This retrospect method of interviewing was most effective since it tapped HoSs' perception of Multicultural Education immediately after an opportunity to test their role in favour (or otherwise) the principles of Multicultural Education. Data analysis was conducted with the assistance of atlas.ti, a qualitative data analysis software which aided the researcher into identifying recurrent themes and patterns which could later be used as a springboard for further analysis. Actions were taken to enhance the internal validity of the study. By comparing and contrasting these views against literature review on Multicultural Education suggestion for improvement of multiethnic school leadership are solicited.

Results

Twelve out of thirteen selected respondents participated in the study. It must be stated that none of the twelve participants placed emphasis on the domination of one culture over another. As one HoS (H2) eloquently put it, "in our eyes all children are the same and are exposed to the same educational opportunities which the school promotes in its various

initiatives and activities." One HoS (H6) started from the notion that Malta is known as *Din l-Art Helwa* (The *land of sweetness*, referring to the first stanza of the Maltese National Anthem) and that this is a characteristic to which we, as Maltese should be proud of. He also emphasised the notion of human rights as the prime factor for their actions and behaviours as school leaders.

However ten out of twelve respondents (H1, H3, H4, H5, H7, H8, H9, H10, H11, H12) showed concern about the difficulty of students from different cultures to integrate within Maltese culture. They expressed strong opinions in favour of students needing to conform to the ideals of Maltese society and to respect the rules and regulations of the school. Two HoSs (H3 and H4) emphasised the principles of social justice as the primary goal in their daily quest for a fair and just education with the range of assertions ranging from "moral beliefs", "social equity", "justice" and "need for more empathy". They claimed that society must act with the principles of justice citing various moral stories as the guiding precepts.

Four HoSs (H2, H4, H8, H12) however demonstrated awareness of the difficulties faced by teachers in including children from Multicultural origin into their classroom. They stated that support is rudimentary and lacks the necessary expertise and the required knowledge, awareness aptitude and skills necessary to deal with different cultures. They also stated that actual resources to deal properly with diversity education are poor insofar as they "unwittingly result in further social injustices because authorities lack the necessary resources to support the integration of immigrants in the society". H2 stated the multiplicity of cultures did not pose a problem to the staff or to the school administration and therefore no further or alternative intervention was needed and that students followed the school curriculum as usual without any difficulty to this HoS a different culture or a different language never posed any problem and therefore no additional adjustments were necessary. On the other hand, the same HoS recounts that he would prefer to lead a school with "not so many cultures around".

H7 held a much different view. She stated that a school hosting children from different cultures needed
more thoughtful considerations

> ... one has to stop and think about ... or rather anticipate ... how can we be a better school for these children and also what baggage do they bring with them... how they can contribute.

This HoS admitted that programs "which reflect their culture need to constructed", and that she herself does not possess the knowledge or the expertise to initiate or push forward such changes. She also stated that to her knowledge little is being done to alter the curriculum of schools to include "other" perspectives. She stated that it is "hard for me to imagine how such programs would work with all the syllabi which need to be covered". She pondered as to how many teachers actually adopt Multicultural methodology in their teaching citing the social studies and environmental studies teachers as possible catalysts for such changes to possibly take flight. She stated that teachers need to be trained and that "differential teaching should also include cultural dispositions and not only learning abilities... at the moment a more mainstream approach seems to be the norm." This signifies that this HoS is advocating her teachers to treat everyone the same. This preferred style of leadership was also adapted by another HoS who stressed the importance sharing the mission of the school with teachers parents and students. According to her, once a "common line of understanding is instilled among all stakeholders, in terms of the prescribed learning outcomes, then there will be few other hurdles."

Six HoS (H1, H2, H4, H5, H7, H9) also expressed that parents of Maltese children might unknowingly transmit on their children negative attitudes and behaviours cultivating "xenophobia and racist attitudes which go contrary to the values being imparted by the school management team and teachers". H2 insisted ... "HoSs besides working wholeheartedly in their attempts to include children from other cultures also need to work against the xenophobic attitudes of some parents" H4 and H5 also insisted that "...a sustained effort needs to be directed at educating parents on racism and racial issues."

H11 stated that "As a school management team we need to get closer to the communities our schools get in touch with". Another HoS stated that "...they [children] are forced to accept the homogenous stance imparted by the Maltese school environments." Also

> children from different backgrounds than ours are constantly forced to follow our educational system... when you really stop and think about it... how just [right] is it to do so? ... are we really catering for their needs?...in order to be accepted these children need to behave like Maltese do... in their appearance, in their behaviour, in their free play, in their religious expression... in everything... how right is it? Is it truly respectful for all?

H12 suggested the formation of an action group composed of educational stakeholders who believe in the benefits of Multicultural education and who are also committed to

> embark on research projects in such important and dynamic area in the education sphere which is difficult to come to grips with as its understand is rather complex and we tend to simplify it by looking through our own minds.

On a similar line of thought H11 also suggested that a group needs to be formed to sustain efforts on "the economic and political level and together they can form policies for the general public aimed at easing out the difficulties and dismantling the barriers which many children face in their quest to live up with others". He also stressed that there needs to be a sense of *compassion* (referring to the education of irregular migrants). He expressed his concern that if proper supporting structures are not in place, students from different cultural backgrounds will remain "detached from mainstream Maltese culture and this might create a *ghetto culture* especially in secondary schools". Another Head of School emphatically stated that

> students from diverse backgrounds other than Maltese are constantly being forced in a culture which is not theirs and we are expecting that they follow the Maltese system of education... in some cultures, for example they sit on the ground to eat or sometimes a family eats from one recipient... something which goes contrary to our culture... If we truly want inclusion of different cultures than we must be also to look from their (referring to irregular immigrants of African origin) perspective.

H10 claimed that her leadership style changed over time in parallel with the change in demographics of the school. She stated that as time went by she became "more interested" in the different cultures residing in her school and started becoming intrigued in the composition, cultures and traditions of her students. She also related that she started to involve teachers in different aspects of teaching children from different cultures, even though she insisted that interest [in teachers] needs to be harnessed effectively and efficiently in the interest of all children. From the interview it resulted that although she initiated her career adopting a liberal view of multiculturalism, her leadership is now focused form of leadership where she is more involved in "keeping up with the daily hassles and problems which come up from time to time". She stated that during everyday activities she is always aiming to "seek

to satisfy both professional and personal needs of the staff...[and] it is only in this way that you earn respect from them (staff)".

H4 stated that his job is to "simply" to integrate children from other cultures into mainstream education. He eloquently stated that as HoS, he does not advocate for diversified techniques (related to cultural differences) in the classroom, but rather focuses on equitable resources for all children irrespective of their cultural provenience.
H12 commented that:

> teaching a whole lot of children coming from different continents is indeed a challenging and healthy experience... it is more fascinating... I think to teach such as variety of students...I myself have sometimes stepped in classroom to observe how are teachers dealing with it all... and have also advised teachers on a number of strategies which they can use to deal with multicultural groups... I have taken the whole responsibility of it all... I know its challenging but we, here, at school, are up to it well.

H2, H5 and H9 expressed the notion that while they serve they try to serve the needs of all children, respecting their culture and diversity but at the same time working towards common educational goals. As H5 put it:

> We learn together, we grow to together... different yet united... if such an attitude is well in place... I believe we can have a better world... celebrating differences but treating each other on equal levels, especially with parents at all times... for us diversity is asset and not a hindrance ... I myself have learnt a lot from families...I' ve been invited in their homes and *that* [emphasis of interviewee] is a real achievement.

He also mentioned that (in his opinion) the Maltese system of education though possessing strong characteristics needs to be more receptive to the varying needs of children from other cultures. He stated that HoSs are finding it difficult to include children of multicultural origin because they feel not proficient in cross-cultural skills and in the education for diversity. He stated, however that he is noticing a shift in a more Multicultural teaching staff and therefore "the future looks bright". Having a more diversified teaching staff will

> help in the design and implementation of programs for Multicultural students. Teachers coming from different countries together with Maltese teachers can work together towards effective programs for children and I strongly believe this will have a positive effect on the whole community at large.

On a similar line of thought another H9 stressed the importance of including everyone as part of a whole democratization involves all multicultural communities in the Maltese Islands. In his own words "Malta has been influenced by other cultures, the French, the British, the Arabs ... our cultural roots are very strong...we can all learn from each other and schools are the cradle in which such process can take place". He ventured even further than this, stating that

> schools can work together with NGOs (Non-Governmental Organisations) to provide support for minor communities. As a school we need to be the link... after all the school is a reflection of society.

Based on the results of the interviews, analysis proceeds by determining prevailing patterns on school leaders' perceptions of Multicultural and Diversity Education and how such views are concretised into behaviours and actions.

ANALYSIS

The fact that twelve of out thirteen HoSs agreed to be interview illustrates that HoS are aware of the impending need to discuss issues on Multicultural and diversity education. The enthusiasm shown prior and during the interviews is an illustration of their willingness garner more knowledge on such a sensitive topic. One HoS opted out of the interviewing process suggesting a certain sense of hesitation in discussing the topic.

None of the twelve participants implied a domination of the Maltese culture over other cultures but ten HoSs expressed concern about the difficulty of students from different cultures to integrate within Maltese culture and expressed strong opinions in favour of students needing to conform to the ideals of Maltese society and to respect the rules and regulations of the school. This clearly points towards attempts to assimilate diversified groups into one normative culture and prompting disregard towards important issues of socialisation and margainalisation of minorities (Nieto, 1996, 1999). According to Nieto (1999) these leaders tend perceive 'other' children as being inferior and with an impending need to conform with other students. A possible interpretation of this could be that HoSs adopt this method as a psychological precept into urging teachers to be loyal to their profession and work parallel with the school's common vision. It must be stated that such analysis needs to be seen in the light of numerous changes aimed at reshaping the current landscape of the Maltese Educational system within a context sustained efforts for wider inclusion.

Findings show that eight out of twelve HoS in the sample interviewed adopt a conservative Multicultural approach and adopt values, norms and behaviours common to many cultures to promote and "conserve" a more assimilationalist view of Multicultural education. These principles did not view Multicultural education from a needs perspective but rather tend to work at establishing homogeneity. According to these HoSs the more diversity is emphasised the more problems it creates. Two of the twelve HoSs interviewed, however, expressed their concern about the lack of success in adopting a conservative approach. This is parallel to research conducted by Goddard and Hart (2007) who claim that HoSs in Canada actively resisted diversity education claiming the emphasis on dissimilarities is the major cause on racism and Xenophobia. Similarly research carried out by Garcia and Lopez (2005, p.437) concluded that diversity is "something to be assimilated and not highlighted.

Three HoSs H2, H5 and H9 adopted a more *liberal* approach to multicultural education prioritising equity education for all students and placed strong emphasis the moral aspect of educating children from different cultures. They stressed that the fact that the school is well known for its diverse population is both challenging and rewarding. They spoke about the need to address inequalities in schools in a proactive and determined manner highlighting social justice and equity teaching as the major focus of their leadership. They insisted in the need to create programs which promote awareness of diversity and also provide mechanisms which provoke healthy debates and discourses which question stereotyping and prevailing myths which imply dominance of one culture over another. According to these school leaders energy needs to be directed at initiating projects which promote student engagement and where each individual is valued for his/ her abilities and contribution. They tend to use the Maltese culture as a springboard to inculcate common values, thus emphasising similarities rather than differences. These three HoSs did not perceive diversity as an issue and dealt with it by not emphasising it, eliciting and highlighting the similarities and working wholeheartedly towards full integration. Such attitude points towards 'colour blindness' (Sleeter and McLaren, 1995) and 'colour invisibility' (Kincheloe and Steinberg, 1997). These

HoS believe that diversity is "a problem" which has to be catered for immediately, overemphasising sameness and completely disregarding differences.

Hence for most HoS the uphold of social justice principles was a priority, mechanisms need to be put in place to support the integration of migrants into society. Hence for such an endeavour to be fulfilled schools together with the Educational Authorities must be able to reach parents of Maltese children in order to dispel myths surrounding education for migrants. Such activities need to be strongly collaborated with local councils and other Non-Governmental organisations, thus nurturing an atmosphere of collaboration, mutual understanding and respect.

For some HoSs, however the principles of social justice are frequently intermixed with "treating everybody the same." But as Johnson and Williams (2015, p. 1) state 'treating all kids the same is the real problem'. According to these authors HoS are missing on the whole scope of educational leadership since in actual fact the playing field on which educational leadership is run is not at all level and that equal treatment is not a guarantee of equitable results. While it is not always easy for HoS, to recognize and affirm the diverse needs of their school population, concrete action must be initiated to view diversity as a resource to be tapped rather than a "problem".

Only one HoSs (out of the twelve interviewed) was able to recount the contributions by various ethnic groups within the school. Most HoSs stated that contributions were given by various "individuals" rather than groups and that school acknowledges each contribution as part of a "whole class work". Most HoSs stressed that overburdened curricula do not allow for specific ethnic contributions to be highlighted. Such views conform to the assimilation patterns (Eg: McNergney and Hebert, 2001, Goddard and Hart, 2007).

None of the HoSs interviewed displayed critical multiculturalist views. The majority of HoSs favoured a conservative view of Multiculturalism which complemented their conservative style of leadership. This could be a reflection of the strong democratic values held within the Maltese political system. Moreover the National Minimum Curriculum Framework (2011) emphasizes that "together, children have to resolve conflicts as a result of their learning to contribute and participate in a democracy" and "children learn about social justice and democracy with an understanding of one's rights and responsibilities as they actively engage in discussions, debates and governance practices". The statements seem to direct educational stakeholders towards assimilationist policies aimed at keeping the "status quo" through the inclusion of everybody within the whole curricular setup. These assimilationist views point towards a philosophy which aims at *managing* diversity rather than *leading* diversity. Various authors (Eg: Solomon, 2011; Riehl, 2000; Ryan, 2003) insist that administrative work is conservative in nature and leaves little space for creativity and innovation. There is the tendency for administrators to work towards "conserving the system" (Ryan, 2003) of the workplace, thus perceive challenges as being insurmountable and unnecessary.

This paper has however also given evidence that Maltese of leaders have a strong sense of social justice but are finding it difficult to embrace the change necessary to promote multicultural education as a critical tool which challenges social assumptions and intitiate discussions on implied and latent power relations existing within society.

DISCUSSION

The School leaders in the multi-ethnic schools need to have a clearly articulated and unwavering commitment to attack ingrained societal inequalities. They need not rest on their

laurels or the rhetoric of their values and beliefs but need to loudly proclaimed them and channel energy toward their realisation, notwithstanding the difficulties which they might encounter. By being reflective on their practice and criticizing their own approach to leadership they become proactive in anticipating future problems, thus becoming agents of social change.

HoSs need to view the education of children from diverse culture as a *challenge* rather than a *problem* and perceive their position as school leaders as a tool for mitigating against inequalities and as an opportunity to nurture a positive atmosphere where everybody can learn from one another. They need to strongly believe in being proactive into cultivating a just and peaceful society. Behaviours and actions need to focused towards critically investigating how their own backgrounds influence their daily decisions in schools. More programs need to be developed to disseminate positive Multicultural practices in schools, which are expedient at dispelling myths and stereotypes. Resources need to be deployed on school projects which promote the engagement of all pupils irrespective of Multicultural origin. Challenging social inequalities, advocating for such need and initiating debates on imbalances in power relations among groups can become fertile ground for the promulgation for the principles of Multicultural Education in schools**.**

CONCLUSIONS
The influx of people from other cultures due to immigration (regular or irregular), mixed marriages, studentships and work-related opportunities have posed new challenges to the Maltese Educational System. Many HoSs, together with teaching staff have voiced their concern on how to adapt to these changing demographics in the school population.

The central issues which prevailed in this research were the social justice and equity aspects. Hence, school leaders need to have opportunities to job shadow successful school leaders where social justice and equity education are the hub of their leadership daily practice. Discourses in school leadership programs need to centre on reflective equity practice across school development planning, individualised educational programs, curriculum development sessions and so on. Moreover it is imperative that school leaders are critical on the impact which their leadership has on staff, parents and students. Such processes will eventually spur new transformative approaches to leadership which are truly representative of inclusive cultures present in the community. Culturally sensitive research frameworks need to be constructed to suite the particular Maltese context. Similarly concepts such as cultural dominance and oppression, culturally sensitive research methods, cross-cultural pedagogical methods need to form an integral part of leadership preparation programs.

Findings in this study have generated more questions than answers. What emerged from interviews is the impending need to move away from conservative positions and venture to more critical approaches. The impending need for more training in issues surrounding leadership in multiethnic schools needs to communicated more effectively to educational authorities. For school leaders to be adequately prepared to embrace multicultural students within the Maltese educational system, programs need to be set up to challenge underlying assumptions on equity education. School leaders need to enhance their cultural knowledge, attitudes, awareness, skills and dispositions in order to attain the level of competency necessary to effectively lead multiethnic schools. need to be provided with opportunities to reflect on their practices and the impact. They would also need to examine the impact of these practices in the wider context.

While the interview method had its own advantages it is constrained by the fact that respondents often tend to answer according to what the researcher is hoping to achieve in the study. Given that interviews require detailed analytical processes, sample size is limited to a minimum due to the large quantity of data being analysed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The particular Maltese context in which Multicultural Education operates needs to be further studied. The study would need to be replicated, perhaps using quantitative means of investigation. Quantitative measures such as questionnaires could provide further insight into tracking changes in leadership styles, as demographics of schools change over time. This would give Educational stakeholders (authorities, boards of trustees, Non-Governmental organisations, local councils, parents and others) a wider approach and multiple viewpoints of such complex issues. By developing a research database on leadership in multicultural school leaders could tap new avenues for research.

Notes:

1) In this study, the terms *school leaders*, and *Heads of Schools* are used interchangeably.
2) Similarly the terms multicultural and multiethnic are interchangeably used.
3) HoS and HoSs are used to denote Head of School and Head of Schools respectively.

REFERENCES

Banks, J. A. (1994). *An Introduction to Multicultural Education*, Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Banks, J.A. & McGee Banks C.A. (2004). *Handbook of Research on Multicultural Education* 2nd Edition,

Jossey-Bass, A Wiley Imprint, ISBN-13: 978-0787959159

Blackmore, J. (2006). Deconstructing diversity discourses in the field of educational management and

leadership. Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 34, 181–199.

Bogotch, I. (2002). Educational leadership and social justice: practice into theory. Journal of School Leadership,

12, 138–156.

Coleman, M. and Cardno, C. (2006) Editorial: educational leadership and diversity. Educational Management

Administration & Leadership, 34(2), 147–149.

Cray, C.R. Aston, J.A. and Beacum F.D. (2006) Principles perception of Multicultural Education and school

climate. V1 N1, ISSN, (Online, 2161-2162, DOI 102202/216-2142

Denzin, N.K., Lincoln, and Yvonna S. (eds), (2005). *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* (3rd ed.).

Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. ISBN 0-7619-2757-3.

Dimmock, C. and Walker, A. (2005). *Educational Leadership: Culture and Diversity* (London: Sage).

Dimmock, C., Stevenson, H., Bignold, B., Shah, S. and Middlewood, D. (2005). School community

perspectives and their leadership implications. NCSL. Available online on www.ncsl.org.uk/publications

Gewirtz, S. (2002). *The Managerial School: Post-welfarism and Social Justice in Education* (London:
Routledge).

Gewirtz, S. and Ball, S. (2000). From 'welfarism' to 'new managerialism': shifting discourses of school
headship in the education marketplace. Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of
    Education, 21, 253–268.

Goddard, T. (2007) Editorial: school leadership and equity—results from an international
    comparative study.

School Leadership and Management, 27(1), 1–5.

Goddard, T. J., Billot, J. and Cranston, N. (2006). Decision-making by school principals: the
impact of ethnocultural diversity, paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the
    Commonwealth Council for Educational Administration & Management (CCEAM),
    Nicosia, Cyprus, 12–17 October.

Goddard, T. J. and Hart, A. C. (2007). School leadership and equity: Canadian elements.
    School Leadership &
Management, 27(1), 7–20.

Gooden, M. A., & Dantley, M. (2012). Centering race in a framework for leadership
    preparation. Journal of
Research on Leadership Education, 7(2), 237-253.

Greenfield, T. and Ribbins, P. (1993). *Greenfield on Educational Administration*, (London:
    Routledge).

Hodgkinson, C. (1991). *Educational Leadership: The Moral Art*, Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Horsford, S. D. (2011). *Learning in a burning house: Educational inequality, ideology, and
    (dis)integration*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Huber, J. (2012). Intercultural competence for all Preparation for living in a heterogeneous
    world, Pestalozzi
Series, No 2. Council of Europe Publishing. ISBN 978-92-871-7356-0

Jean-Marie, G. (2008). Leadership for social justice: An agenda for 21st century schools. The
    Educational
Forum, 72(4), 340-54.

Johnson & Williams (2015). *When treating all the Kids the SAME is the real problem*,
    Corwin: A Sage
Company, ISBN: 9781452286969

Khalifa, M. (2012). A re-new-ed paradigm in successful urban school leadership principal as
    community leader.

Educational Administration Quarterly (EAQ), 48(3), 424-467.

Kincheloe, J. L. and Steinberg, S. R. (1997). *Changing Multiculturalism*, Buckingham: Open
    University Press.

Ladson-Billings, G.J. (2005). *Beyond the big house: African American educators on teacher
education*. New York, NY: Teacher College Press. ISBN 0-8077-4581-2

Ladson-Billings, G.J. (2001). *Crossing over to Canaan: The journey of new teachers in
    diverse classrooms*. San
Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. ISBN 0-7879-5001-7

Ladson-Billings, G.J. (1997). *The dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African-American
    children*. San
Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. ISBN 0-7879-0338-8

Larson, C. and Murtadha, K. (2002*). Leadership for social justice*, in: J. Murphy (ed.) The
    Educational

Leadership Challenge: Redefining Leadership for the 21st Century, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, pp. 134–161.

Leeman, Y. (2007). School leadership and equity: Dutch experiences. School Leadership & Management, 27(1),

51–63.

Mabokela, R. and Madsen, J. (2003). 'Colour-blind' leadership and intergroup conflict.

Journal of School Leadership, 13(2), 130–158.

Mahieu, P. and Clycq, N. (2007) School leadership and equity: the case of Antwerp—a report on good practices

in three primary schools. School Leadership & Management, 27(1), 35–49.

Mansfield, K. C. (2014). *Creating smooth spaces in striated places: Toward a global theory for examining*

social justice leadership in schools. In I. Bogotch & C. M. Shields (Eds.) International Handbook of Educational Leadership and Social (In) Justice (pp. 37-50). Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer.

Marshall, C. (2004). Social justice challenges to educational administration: introduction to a special issue.

Educational Administration Quarterly, 40(1), 3–13.

McNergney, R.F., & Hebert, J.M. (2001). *Foundations of education: The challenge of professional practice*.

Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Ministry of Education Employment and the Family (MEDEF, 2011). *Towards a quality education for all: the*

national framework 2011. (Consultation Document 3: The early years, the primary years, the secondary years), Malta: author

Ministry of Education. (1999). Creating the Future Together: National Minimum Curriculum. Malta: Ministry of

Education. Available in http: //curriculum.gov.mt/docs/nmc_english.pdf.

Murakami-Ramalho, E., Nuñez, A. M., & Cuero, K. K. (2010). Latin@ advocacy in the hyphen: Faculty identity

and commitment in a Hispanic-serving institution. International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 23(6), 699-717.

Murphy, M. C., Steele, C. M., & Gross, J. J. (2007). Signaling threat: How situational cues affect women in

math, science, and engineering settings. Psychological Science, 18, 879-885.

Nieto, S. (1996) Affirming Diversity: The Sociopolitical Context of Multicultural Education, New York:

Longman. Leadership and Multiculturalism, 183.

Riehl, C. J. (2000). The principal's role in creating inclusive schools for diverse students: A review of

normative, empirical literature on the practice of educational administration. Review of Educational Research, 70(1), 55-81. EJ615876.

Ryan, J. (2003). Educational administrators' perceptions of racism in diverse school contexts. Race, Ethnicity

and Education, 6(2), 145–164.

Santamaría, L. J. (2014). Critical change for the greater good: Multicultural dimensions of educational

leadership toward social justice and educational equity. Education Administration Quarterly (EAQ), 50(3), 347- 391.

Santamaría, L. J., & Santamaría, A. P. (2012). Applied critical leadership in education: Choosing change. New

York, NY: Routledge Books.

Santamaría, L. J., Santamaría, A. P., Webber, M., & Pearson, H. (2014). Indigenous urban school leadership

(IUSL): A critical cross-cultural comparative analysis of educational leaders in New Zealand and the United States. Canadian and International Education, 43(1), 1-21.

Scheurich, J. and Skrla, L. (2003). *Leadership for Equity and Excellence*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Skrla, L. and Scheurich, J. (2001). Displacing deficit thinking in school district leadership. Education and Urban

Society, 33(3), 235–259.

Sleeter, C. and McLaren, P. (1995*). Multicultural Education, Critical Pedagogy, and the Politics of Difference*.

Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Solomon, N (2011). Understanding and managing generational differences in the workplace, Worldwide

Hospitality and Tourism Themes, 3(4),308 – 318.

Statistical Services of the Republic of Cyprus (2006). Demographic Report, Nicosia: Cyprus Statistical Services.

Theoharis, G. (2007). Social justice educational leaders and resistance: toward a theory of social justice

leadership. Educational Administration Quarterly, 43(2), 221–258.

Tiedt, P. L. and Tiedt, I. M. (2002). *Multicultural Teaching: A Handbok of Activities, Information and*

Resources, 6th edn, Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Tillman, L. C. (2008). The scholarship of Dr. Asa G. Hilliard, III: Implications for Black principal leadership.

Review of Educational Research, 78(3), 589- 607.

Vassallo (2012). Am I Culturally Competent? A study on Multicultural Teaching Competencies among School

Teachers in Malta, The Journal of Multiculturalism in Education, 8 (1)

Walker, A. (2005). Priorities, strategies and challenges, in: A. Walker, C. Dimmock, H. Stevenson, B. Bignold

and D. Middlewood (eds) Effective Leadership in Multi-Ethnic Schools (Nottingham: National College for School Leadership), pp. 5–25.

Young, M. and Laible, J. (2000). White racism, antiracism and school leadership preparation. Journal of School

Leadership, 10, 374–415.

Zembylas, M and Iasonos, S. (2010). Leadership and Multicultural Education approaches: an exploration of

their relationship. *Leadership in Education* 13(2), 163-183.

Zirkel, S. (2004). What will you think of me? Social integration and educational achievement among white

students and students of color in elementary and junior high school. Journal of Social Issues, 60, 57-74.

Zirkel, S. (2007). Feelings of belonging and school achievement among students of color.

Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association Meetings, Chicago, IL.